VOLUME 4 NUMBER 1 SUMMER 2017

Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships

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The *Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships* (*JBSR*) is a refereed, interdisciplinary, scholarly inquiry devoted to addressing the epistemological, ontological, and social construction of sexual expression and relationships of persons within the African diaspora. The journal will be used as a medium to capture the functionality and dysfunctionality of individuals, couples, and families as well as the efficacy in which relationships are negotiated. The journal seeks to take into account the transhistorical substrates that subsume behavioral, affective, and cognitive functioning of persons of African descent as well as those who educate or clinically serve this important population. For additional information about the *JBSR*, you can visit TheJBSR.com, follow us on twitter @TheJBSR, like our Facebook page, or review current *JBSR* trends on LinkedIn.

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The *Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships* (ISSN 2334-2668) is published quarterly by the University of Nebraska Press. For current subscription rates please see our website: www.nebraskapress.unl.edu.

If ordering by mail, please make checks payable to the University of Nebraska Press and send to

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1111 Lincoln Mall
Lincoln, NE 68588-0630
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Contents

vii Editor's Note: Toward Critical and Creative Explorations of the t/Terror Narratives of Black and Brown Girls and Women to Inform Social Justice for Emotional Justice through New Literacies Studies
JEANINE M. STAPLES

1 First-Person Prayer for Reclaiming the Body
MARTINA POWELL

3 From Invisible, to Ho, to Magic: A Narrative Examination of the Ways That Literacies Disenfranchise and Empower Black Girls
STEPHANIE ANNE SHELTON

25 Black Feminist Literacies: Ungendering, Flesh, and Post-Spillers Epistemologies of Embodied and Emotional Justice
SAMANTHA PINTO

47 Damn, I Love the Strippers!: A Black Feminist Analysis of Rihanna's "Pour It Up"
HEIDI R. LEWIS

61 Beyond the Side Eye: Black Women's Ancestral Anger as a Liberatory Practice
JULIA S. JORDAN-ZACHERY

83 Beyond Blurred Lines: Black Girls, Urban Teacher Education, and anti-Rape Pedagogy
ASHLEY N. WOODSON AND DORINDA J. CARTER ANDREWS

105 Walking through the Dark Forest: Embodied Literacies for Shadow Work in Higher Education and beyond
KAKALI BHATTACHARYA

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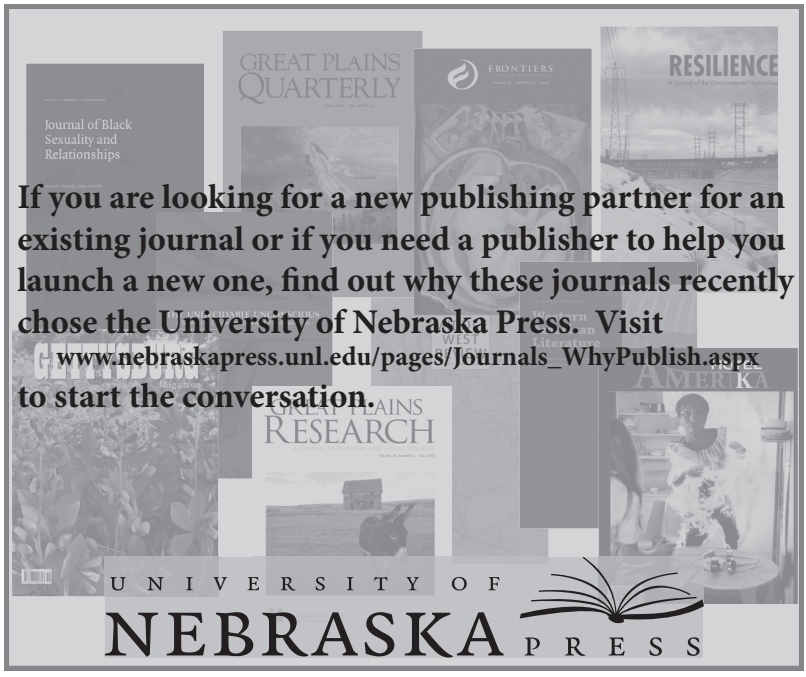

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Editor's Note

Toward Critical and Creative Explorations of the t/Terror Narratives of Black and Brown Girls and Women to Inform Social Justice for Emotional Justice through New Literacies Studies

It is my pleasure to introduce this special issue of the *Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships*, entitled "Love and Literacies: Critical Explorations of Black Women's Race, Gender, and Sexuality Through New Literacy Studies." My idea for this special issue sparked soon after the questionable death of Sandra Bland on July 13, 2015. During that time, I felt myself searching for accounts of how Black girls and women experience relational and social t/Terrors in schools and society (Staples, 2011, 2012, 2015). My own work had shown me how microaggressive terrors accumulate over time in the lives of girls and women of color as meta-level crises—Terrors—that garner the attention of local and national public discourse (Staples, 2016). As a result, I felt a deep desire to map our lived experiences onto the terrain of violences being accounted for in the historical and contemporary contexts of the United States. I initially attempted to do so through the instances of violence highlighted through #BlackLivesMatter movement.

The #BlackLivesMatter movement, founded by straight and queer Black women, had, by July 2015, garnered international acclaim for drawing broad-based attention to the maltreatment of Black boys and men in various contexts. The movement was particularly successful in highlighting state sanctioned violence in schools and society. Prior to Ms. Bland's suspicious death, however, there were few stories of the pain of Black girls and women. The #SayHerName[1] movement followed #BlackLivesMatter and was also founded by a group of Black women. Yet, #SayHerName focuses on drawing attention to the equally (and often more) heinous experiences of Black girls and women in the same contexts (Savali, 2014).

Despite the important role that women of color are playing in initiating

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social change, girls and women who are Black and Brown are still, ironically, rendered less visible and less relevant in the fight for social justice and equity. Such marginalization and erasures compound the sociocultural and socioemotional consequences of prior and existent experiences with gendered and racial aggressions. Understanding the impact that marginalizations, abuses, and erasures have on the abilities of Black and Brown girls and women to develop and construct affirming, actualizing, emotional, psychological, and physical states of well-being is of dire importance. Therefore, it is imperative that the voices and experiences of Black and Brown girls and women be further illuminated.

While the lives and voices of Black and Brown girls and women are concurrently powerful (Jones-DeWeever, 2009) and vulnerable (Staples, 2016), it is precisely this tension that necessitates understanding deeply how they articulate voice and stories of t/Terror in love and life. This can happen through social, cultural, emotional, sexual, and spiritual multimodal interactions and expressions. These interactions, expressions, and subsequent artifacts, act as a means of negotiating and managing the complexities of interior life and adverse exterior circumstances. In other words, we might ask, How do Black and Brown girls manage emotional duress, stress, anxiety, depression, and other destabilizing emotional states in their *interior* lives through everyday literacy-based engagements? How do their literate efforts support healing and generate happiness—as pertaining to optimism, positivity, and hopefulness—and enable the embodiment of well-being? In addition, how do their literacy practices, *their literate lives*, support deep excavation of the soul–where meaning making happens–and deep evolution of the soma–where memory production takes place?

Specifically at issue is the need to grasp seriously the ways our lover identities form infrastructure for our interior and exterior lives—both emotional and material, respectively. Endarkened or Black feminist thought can help to out and complicate the ways Black and Brown girls and women come to know themselves as lovers (see Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991, 2015; hooks, 1993; 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2004; Weheliye, 2014)–lovers of Self, Other, and All. This happens by creating space for an intersection of exploration that includes emotionality, sexuality, spirituality, physicality, and intellectualism–aspects of Self, Other, and All. The authors included in this volume draw upon my concept of lover identity—a person's entire relational ideology and way of being—to guide this collective inquiry and declaration of Self, with extension to Other, and All, in service to a complex justice proj-

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ect (Staples, 2016). Specifically, this special issue seeks to understand ways to further emotional justice for Black and Brown girls and women, to mature, deepen, and advance social justice for All–the whole of humanity. Emotional justice means privileging and finding credible the interior life of a person, as well as creating space for that life and advocating for its acknowledgment, healing, security, and celebration in both personal and public realms (Staples, 2016).

One way to privilege a space for emotional justice is to explore Black and Brown girls' and women's relational and social experiences through their literacy practices. This means understanding better how Black and Brown girls and women use communicative modalities to articulate voice and stories of t/Terror, and triumph, in love and life. Thus, contributors to this issue show how these modalities, and the liberation epistemologies they generate, are reliant on social, cultural, emotional, sexual, and spiritual wisdoms and nuances they inherit and self-generate (Guyton & McGaskey, 2012). In particular, they considered:

How and why we do writing to develop endarkened, feminist epistemologies and ontologies for love and life through, for instance, hard copy journaling, texting, IMing, social network postings, etc., bearing in mind that such writings often include visuals that contain print, images, and hybrids of both;

How and why we do reading to develop endarkened, feminist epistemologies and ontologies for love and life through, for instance, book clubs, blog readings, magazine perusals, and even body politics; and

How and why we do listening and speaking to develop endarkened, feminist epistemologies and ontologies for love and life through, for instance, various types of interpersonal conversations, videos, speeches, spoken word performances, songs, and storytelling.

This is an important field of inquiry since these modalities serve as primary resources with which to constitute epistemologies and ontologies that generate lover identity and thriving in precarious personal and public spaces. Moreover, explorations of narrative, interpersonal work (e.g., various communions and/or individual reading, writing, speaking, and listening experiences) are particularly useful towards revealing degrees of proficiency in emotional, social, and sexual literacies as well as the range of emotional strategies deployed in coping with and managing exterior circumstances

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that may be treacherous as a result of white and black supremacist patriarchal ideologies (see Anzaldúa, 1987; Behar, 1997; Cox, 2015; Fanon, 2008; McKittrick, 2015; Staples, 2012; 2016).

Scholars, educators, and activists were invited to contribute creative pieces, concept- and theory-building essays, and data-driven articles. I asked them to consider certain questions as they prepared their work for the collection:

> How do girls and women who are Black and Brown generate happiness and embody well-being when their emotional state is constantly compromised by systemic structural inequities, the foregrounding of male gendered experiences, physical exoticisms and traumas, verbal abuse, physical assaults, and emotional neglect?
>
> What roles do unpleasant emotions (such as anxiety, shame, and fear) or apparently "mixed" emotions (such as compassion) play in context to well-being, and what kinds of emotional profiles are characteristic, and perhaps diagnostic, of individuals who are thriving versus struggling?
>
> How do girls and women who are Black and Brown develop emotional literacies to access happiness and embody well-being despite the multiple inequities that oppress them?
>
> How do emotional literacies affect girls' and women's relationships with Self, Other, and Community (supporting efforts for meaningful emotional justice for social justice)?
>
> What are some of the social and cultural implications of these relationships and literate movements?
>
> In what ways might emotional justice further the cause of social justice in relation to the happiness and well-being of Black and Brown girls and women?

In the end, this special edition includes creative works that reveal the literacy-based work of actively healing a toxic lover identity to counter and transcend racist, sexist, ableist, ageist, homophobic, transphobic, xenophobic ideologies; poetry expressing the lived experiences of Black girls and women in a white supremacist patriarchal society; critical essays that move us toward theory and concept-building and toward methodological frames

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for data coordination and analysis of the literate lives of Black and Brown girls and women; and data-driven research that reveals enlightening findings about girls' and women's literate lives in digital spaces.

An Overview of the Essays

The essays in this collection examine the ways Black and Brown girls and women generate and use new literacies to foster spaces to express themselves, heal themselves, and bring healing to others in their communities. Scholars travel the depictions of Black girls and women in popular culture, including hip hop music and videos, in school cirricula, and everyday interactions with their immediate communities. These critical and creative works together give voice to the experiences of girls and women who have been silenced and made invisible. They empower scholars, educators, creatives, and activists with necessary insights to craft movements for the true realization of justice for all.

first-person prayer for reclaiming the body

MICK POWELL

In this poem, Powell presents a creative, artistic ode to her process of somatic revernance.

From Invisible, to Ho, to Magic: A Narrative Examination of the Ways that Literacies Disenfranchise and Empower Black Girls

STEPHANIE ANNE SHELTON

Shelton's work clarifies how Black girls are underrepresented in both educational research and classroom curricula, and shows how those erasures carry serious societal consequences. Additionally, she argues that when researchers and educators incorporate topics related to race, gender, and sexuality with the intention of doing social justice work, they often unintentionally reify one-dimensional examinations of identities, such as examining race as separate from gender and sexuality, rather than viewing students and texts as multidimensional. This article, based on a three-year longitudinal study, considers the importance of intersectional approaches to literacy education, and the potential that intersectional New Literacies have for supporting Black girls and all students in more equitable and multifaceted academic and personal experiences.

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Black Feminist Literacies: Ungendering, Flesh, and Post-Spillers Epistemologies of Embodied and Emotional Justice
SAMANTHA PINTO

In this essay, Pinto thinks through the possibilities that Hortense Spillers has engendered in her formulation of the flesh as a modality of Black feminist literacy; she also maps the contours of the current resurgence of her work in Black studies and Black feminist theory. Pinto shows that Spillers' landmark explication of the physical and psychic terrain of Black women's gendering has created a network of post-publication relations that map how critical emphases around Black women's affective and embodied experiences have changed since its publication. The recent cascade of attention to Spillers's work in "Mama's Baby" marks a moment of disenchantment with recognized methodologies of representational politics. Pinto notes that Spillers seems to offer the contemporary moment both a vocabulary and a literacy that appeals to innovative, affective understandings of justice for Black women and girls, one that sees cultural production as a necessary but not totalizing terrain for justice.

Damn, I Love the Strippers!: A Black Feminist Analysis of Rihanna's "Pour It Up"
HEIDI R. LEWIS

This article argues that Rihanna's music video for "Pour It Up" disrupts the grotesque/hypersexual dichotomy regarding Black women's bodies in the popular/mainstream music industry. Lewis argues that this is accomplished by constructing exotic dancers as multi-dimensional artists and athletes, not always already objects lacking autonomy and self-determination or silenced bodies reduced to their appearance. Additionally, she argues that the video subverts the idea that exotic dancing is only significant as a consumer commodity, as well as the idea that constructions of Black exotic dancers must always perpetuate discourses that denigrate Black women.

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Beyond the Side Eye: Black Women's Ancestral Anger as a Liberatory Practice

JULIA S. JORDAN-ZACHERY

This article investigates how hauntology provides an entry into the ways relationships, forged out of trauma and anger, give way to Black women's political actions. Anger, resulting from race-gender trauma, gives voice to the dead allowing them to speak in the here and now. Said anger can provide a vehicle to work through collective trauma and in my case, speak to Black women's experiences with democracy. Jordan-Zachary brings together hauntology, anger, and Black feminist praxis as a way of showing how hauntological relationships allow for an expression of intergenerational narratives of trauma and a critique of the state and state-centered violence, and offer a way for healing and achieving justice.

Beyond Blurred Lines: Black Girls, Urban Teacher Education, and Anti-Rape Pedagogy

CARTER ANDREWS AND ASHLEY N. WOODSON

In this critical essay, the authors confront silences in urban education research on sexual victimization and other forms of gendered violence in the lives of Black girls. The authors ground their discussion in historical, legal, and psychological research on Black girls and sexual victimization, present findings from a thematic review of interdisciplinary literature to suggest essential components of human rights-oriented and culturally relevant sexual and health education for Black girls and young women, and outline compelling professional and moral considerations for urban (teacher) educators and activists committed to anti-rape advocacy and rape awareness.

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Walking Through the Dark Forest: Embodied Literacies for Shadow Work in Higher Education and Beyond

KAKALI BHATTACHARYA

Drawing on Anzaldúan approaches to conducting shadow work, Bhattacharya utilizes an abbreviated form of autohistoria-teoría to demonstrate the various ways in which she has cultivated literacies or modes of intelligibilities for meeting the dark, disowned, scary, and painful parts of our memories and experiences. Such literacies have been especially necessary for her navigation of higher education in the U.S. as a Brown, South Asian woman. Using various shadow work literacies such as ethnodrama, poems, a letter to her child-self, dream work, and contemplative mixed media painting, she highlights how possibilities for healing and well-being can be created while working in higher education and engaging in social justice work.

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Jeanine Staples is associate professor of literacy and language, African American studies, and women's, gender, and sexuality studies at the Pennsylvania State University. She focuses on dismantling supremacist patriarchies through research, teaching, and coaching. As a sociocultural literacist, Dr. Staples works to understand personal and public voices and stories to solve personal and public problems. She does this by researching the evolutionary nature and function of literacies and texts through the discourses of narrative research. Her work exposes impetuses for various personal and social ills such as racism, sexism, and ableism.

Staples earned her bachelor's degree in English literature and Urban Education from Howard University, a Master's degree in Teaching and Curriculum from Harvard University and her Doctorate in Literacy and Language, with distinction, from the University of Pennsylvania. Her research has been peer-reviewed and published internationally. In addition, her teaching has been nationally acclaimed. She is a sought after scholar, educator and coach and has received numerous awards and honors for her talents and professional contributions to the field of literacy studies. These include, but are not limited to, The Ralph C. Preston Award for Scholarship in Teaching and Literacy Research in

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the Service of Social Justice–The University of Pennsylvania (2005), The National Council of Teachers of English Early Career Educator of Color Leadership Award (2008), The Global Awareness in Teacher Education Award–University of Maryland College Park (2008), and Research Fellow for the Stanford Center on Adolescence (2008). Most recently, Staples was named a board member for the Africana Research Center at Penn State (2013) and a Fellow for the Social Science Research Institute/Children, Youth and Family Consortium (SSRI/CYFC, 2014).

Note

1. #SayHerName is a social justice initiative—and now popular Twitter hashtag—founded by Kimberle Crenshaw and the African American Policy Forum. The initiative is designed to make visible the experiences of *Black and Brown girls and women who are subject to police violence in society* and *various violences in schools*. Through #SayHerName, Crenshaw states, "although Black women are routinely killed, raped, and beaten by the police, their experiences are rarely foregrounded in popular understanding of police brutality. Yet, inclusion of Black women's experiences in social movements, media narratives, and policy demands around policing and police brutality is critical to effectively combating racialized state violence for Black communities and other communities of color." She extends this call to examine the particular realms of schooling and society where girls and women experience policing and violence that actively work to diminish their existence and thriving in the educational process from early childhood through higher education. This special issue is a response to her complex, and necessary, call.

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First-Person Prayer for Reclaiming the Body

Martina (Mick) Powell

i have made myself
clean:

in the ocean, i washed my feet
with all the green-blue salt
& i washed my hair with
with body-warmed honey;

i rubbed my legs with rosehip oil,
my teeth with cracked charcoal
& i powdered myself with crushed
buds of rosemary and lavender.

i have made myself
clean and cannibal now

only for how sweet i taste,
only for my black sugar body,

how i lick it from my fingers,
how it makes my mouth

pussy pretty,

how it makes my own name sparkle
in between my teeth

Accompaniment—Part of the function of poetry, I think, is about reclamation: the reclaiming of both our language(s) and our experience(s) as Black women in Black bodies, particularly when those bodies are queered and sexed and sexualized in certain ways. I wrote this poem almost as an ode to self-care with attention to how part of that process for me is being able to recognize my body as clean, as natural, as delicious. I wanted to note how that, in recognizing the beauty of the body,

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our names become our own, linking back to June Jordan's words in her "Poem About My Rights." I wanted the poem to be about the body and its sparkle, the beauty and the sweetness of it all as well as it being about an infinite and intimate connection to the world around us.

Mick Powell (she/her) is a queer, black, fat, femme, feminist poet who likes revolutionary acts of resistance. She is currently an MFA poetry candidate at Southern Connecticut State University. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in Winter Tangerine, Crab Fat Magazine, two anthologies focusing on black feminisms and Beyoncé, and others. Mick enjoys good onion rings, smooth hip hop instrumentals, and loving on her loved ones.

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From Invisible, to Ho, to Magic

A Narrative Examination of the Ways that Literacies Disenfranchise and Empower Black Girls

Stephanie Anne Shelton, *University of Alabama*

ABSTRACT—Black girls are underrepresented in both educational research and classroom curricula, and those erasures carry serious societal consequences. Additionally, when researchers and educators incorporate topics related to race, gender, and sexuality with the intention of doing social justice work, they often unintentionally reify one-dimensional examinations of identities, such as examining race as separate from gender and sexuality, rather than viewing students and texts as multidimensional. This article, based on a three-year longitudinal study, considers the importance of intersectional approaches to literacy education, and the potential that intersectional New Literacies have for supporting Black girls and all students in more equitable and multifaceted academic and personal experiences.

KEYWORDS—Black girls, intersectionality, New Literacies, race, gender, sexuality

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Introduction

This qualitative research project did not begin as a consideration of the ways that Black girls are supported in literacy classrooms, though that emphasis ultimately became an important element. It is my shame to confess that in the beginning, considerations of race were not explicit components at all. My participants and I met to discuss the ways that schools resisted and incorporated topics related to gender and sexuality, and though race is always undeniably linked to both gender and sexuality (e.g., Kumashiro, 2001; Mayo, 2013), I operated in a state of White privilege (McIntosh, 1988; 2009; Scrimgeour & Ovsienko, 2015; Shine, 2011) that permitted me the luxury of ignoring those connections.

I am a White lesbian researcher and educator. At the beginning of the research, I was at a southeastern research-intensive university teaching a secondary English education foundations course in an undergraduate teacher preparation program. My course was designed to encourage social justice-based curricula, and I worked hard not to section off the issues that my students and theirs would face. I actively constructed my syllabus to be intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991; 2004), so that course discussions would center on the ways that various sites of oppression and privilege overlapped to shape both discrimination and agency. However, given that 20 of my 24 students and I were constantly benefitting from our Whiteness, discussions on race and racism in schools were unintentionally but typically brief and superficial. Instead, we tended to emphasize classism, ableism, sexism, and heterosexism—issues that mattered more directly to us. All but one of the students identified as women, and though only two students and I identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ), education's political climate emphasized attention to LGBTQ-based school bullying. Numerous media outlets offered exposés on LGBTQ students' suicides and school districts' ineffective bullying policies, for example. The dominant identities in the class and the discourses from mainstream culture informed what my students and I emphasized, and conversely, what we omitted or glossed over.

Given that context, the research on which this article is based began as an examination of the ways that pre-service teachers incorporated sexuality- and gender-related topics into their classrooms. The guiding research question, explored through focus groups and individual interviews, was, "How do pre-service teachers incorporate and address issues of sexuality and gender in literacy classrooms?" The research took an abrupt shift early

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on, however. Though participants actively examined gender and sexuality, I began to realize that, with the exception of one, they actively avoided and/or rejected discussions that included race as a relevant topic (see Shelton & Barnes, 2016 for additional discussion).

"Andy,"[1] who was the only participant who was both a woman of color and LGBTQ, regularly attempted to discuss the intersections of her race, gender, and sexuality; her peers regularly resisted her efforts and even, at times, were antagonistic towards her. It was after an individual interview with Andy, when she and I discussed the racialized tensions in the group's discussions that I began to fully appreciate the degrees to which Whiteness had erased race as a salient topic. Andy frankly told me, "It's fucked up that they want to present that race isn't a problem, that it's something that used to be an issue. If you're not White, that matters. Always." I regret that it took such obvious tension within the group and Andy's willingness to challenge the others and me before I recognized that I had omitted race as a topic for consideration in my research, but after the first year of the study I intentionally examined the ways that my initial interests in gender and sexuality intersected with race (e.g., Shelton, 2017). In the following two years of this longitudinal study and in this article, a guiding research question was:

> Over the course of this research, how do participants understand and address the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality in their literacy classrooms?

As the study progressed, I refined that research question to:

> Over the course of this research, how do participants understand and address the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality in relation to Black female students in their literacy classrooms?

Literature Review

There is substantial research on the effects of gender in education, and a growing body of research considering the importance of race in schooling. However, in a recent study examining discussions on and representations of Black girls in educational research, Crenshaw and her colleagues (2015) found that "Black and other girls of color rarely receive the full attention of researchers, advocates, policy makers, and funders" (p. 5). Previous to Crenshaw's study, both Henry (1998) and Evans-Winters (2005) asserted that Black girls were invisible in education research. More recently, Mu-

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hammad and Haddix (2016) found in an extensive literature review on literacy education that Black girls were not only invisible in classrooms, but in research on classrooms as well. The paucity of literature reflects not just the lack of true intersectional examinations in educational research but the near-complete erasure of Black girls in education overall.

The consequences of these erasures are serious. Crenshaw, Ocen, and Nanda (2015) pointed out that while race was often omitted from explicit consideration in educational research, literature that examined the implications of students' racial identities typically centered on boys. Girls of color, particularly Black girls, often faced the same consequences as boys of color in schools—punitive disciplinary policies, fewer academic opportunities, underachievement—but despite these shared risks, research literature "excludes girls from analysis," leaving "stakeholders to infer that girls of color are not also at risk . . . in particular, Black girls" (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015, p. 5).

Additionally, Black girls are highly vulnerable to gender- and sexually-based violence and harassment. Given the pervasiveness of sexism in schooling, such as gender-based dress codes designed to hide girls' bodies, it is unsurprising that all girls are at risk for gendered discrimination (Meyer, 2009). However, Black girls are at increased risk due to societal tendencies to hypersexualize Black bodies in general and Black girls and women in particular. In society in general and in schools specifically, the intersectionality of sexuality, gender, and race mean that gender is always sexualized, sexuality is always racialized, and race is always sexualized (Kumashiro, 2001; Mayo, 2013). White sexuality, no matter the sexual group, is normalized (Cohen, 1997), whereas non-White groups often have their sexualities presented in extreme terms. For Black girls, a common example is the oversexualized "Jezebel" who seduces men with her constant and destructive sensuality (Blair, 2014). This historical archetype links to contemporary understandings of Black girls and women, supporting damaging stereotypes such as the "Welfare Queen": a hyper-reproductive Black girl or woman with multiple, neglected children fathered by multiple men (Black & Sprague, 2016). The tendency to separate gender, sexuality, and race means that when the three elements are discussed together, the conversation risks being based on destructive stereotypes and directly impacts the ways that teachers and researchers view, discipline, and teach Black girls.

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Black Girls and Literacy Education

Given my research's emphases on both Black girls' classroom experiences and my participants' classroom literacy practices, I will focus here on the ways that literacy research considers race, gender, and sexuality in relation to Black girls' literacy practices. As already noted, there is limited research in general on Black girls' educational experiences, but the few studies available are noteworthy. First, my understanding of the term "literacies," an understanding that is generally employed across existent literature, aligns with Staples's (2016) definition—a definition which, it should be noted, is in relation to Black women's and girls' experiences and understandings. Staples writes that literacies are "socially situated, culturally informed, politically negotiated, and often emotionally and intellectually sensitive social practice[s]" (p. 43). Staples differentiates between literacy skills, such as decoding signs and reading books, and literacy practices. In short, literacy practices are literacies that are enacted as individuals engage in literacy practices to produce "(in)tangible artifacts," including talk and objects (e.g., blogs, poetry) (Staples, 2016, p. 44). Staples refers to these enactments as New Literacies.

Black Girls and Popular Music Literacies

There is a growing body of literature that examines the value of popular (pop) music in relation to New Literacies. Rose (1991) and Powell (1991) pointed out the ways that rap music was an essential form of literary expression and activism. Powell, for example, noted that hip hop and rap were means by which Black communities might address "sex, sexism, racism, and crime" while simultaneously communicating self- and community-based love (p. 245). Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) focus more specifically on the importance of pop music, including hip hop and rap, to Black youth. They argue that the incorporation of pop music as a critical literacy tool opens the potential for Black students to find a degree of liberation: Pop music is "a serious site for social knowledge to be discussed, interrogated, and critiqued" (p. 89). However, it is noteworthy that most discussions of this form of literacy focus on male musical artists and discuss Black students as a monolithic population (e.g., McNeil, 2016). Female artists are not incorporated and the considerations of the literacy needs and potentials of Black girls are absent.

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However, the release of Beyoncé's visual album *Lemonade* has led to wider academic and mainstream discussions of the importance of including Black female artists in pop music pedagogies and in supporting Black girls' literacy empowerments. Adams (2016) argued that Beyoncé's politically charged work, and the work of other pop musicians such as Alicia Keys, provide models and discussion points for Black women and girls to write in political and powerful ways. King (2016) goes a step further in declaring that in having artists such as Beyoncé at the heart of discussions about pop music, there is an "undeniable . . . tribute to Blackness—particularly Black girl power" (n.p.). Pop music offers a critical form of New Literacy that responds directly and specifically to the interests and needs of Black girls' literacy practices.

Black Girls and Verbalization

As Staples points out (2016), New Literacies are not necessarily visible; the enactments of literacy practices might also include discussions and other forms of verbal expression. Although a number of verbalization studies that consider modes of expression beyond Standard American English examine those forms of verbalization as deficits, as "improper" English, a few studies have emphasized that Black girls' verbalizations in school spaces are literacy practices that assert individualism and reject oppressive power structures. Smitherman (2006) argued for the existence of a Black female discourse that, drawing on historically based "vernacular expressive arts and crafts," such as singing, rhyming, and preaching, permitted Black women and girls "to advance and protect themselves and loved ones in society" (p. 77). Transferred to a school context, Koonce (2012) discussed the ways that two Black girls used "Talking with an Attitude" (TWA) in their English class to both express academic understanding and to push against teachers' disrespect of the girls' literacy knowledges. Their verbal cadences and volume were deemed too loud and disruptive by school officials but, importantly, were interpreted as empowering by the girls. Richardson (2003) pointed out that such behavior intentionally opposes the concept of "proper" English, and "in a racialized, gendered, sexualized, and classed world in which they employ their language [New Literacies]," these practices "advance and protect" these girls (p. 77).

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Black Girls and Book Clubs

A final important form of literacy in scholarship on Black girls' schooling is communal literature discussions. Kooy and Colarusso (2014) found in a longitudinal study that the community aspect of reading and discussing shared texts in a book club validated girls' worldviews and empowered them to share and to support one another far beyond what other literacy events had. Tatum (2009) determined that the social constructedness of book clubs and other literature circles provided a means through which learners with a wide range of life experiences could share a supportive community that was based on literacy practices. Their discussions validated their life experiences, making those personal understandings an important form of shared literacy. Polleck (2010) discovered in her research that book clubs were essential to Black girls' emotional well-being, in that the shared literacy events provided spaces for connecting with literary characters and one another in personally valuable ways. Book clubs provide a shared space where students, in this case Black girls, engage in literary analysis while reflecting on the importance of personal experiences and community understandings in school settings.

Black Girls, New Literacies, and Self-Love

Muhammad and Haddix (2016) asserted that forms of literacy such as digital communities, verbal interactions, and book clubs are essential to Black girls' well-being: "Communal spaces among young Black women create spaces for self-affirmation, growth, and healing" (p. 312). Borrowing from Staples (2016) the concept of "lover identity," Black girls are consistently expected to adopt and enact fragmented selves in society, and in schools specifically. They are expected to be female, or Black, or heterosexual, or any one element that comprises a demographic group; Black girls are rarely permitted to be their multiple, intersecting selves (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015). The aforementioned "lover identity" ties literacy practices with efforts to acknowledge and celebrate whole, complex identities. Literacies provide means by which teachers and scholars might "center Black girls in literacy . . . speaking to the invisibility of girls in schools, classrooms, and research literature (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016, p. 301). It is through the politically and culturally situated productions of literacies that Black girls might find opportunities to discuss and love themselves.

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Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality

My theoretical lens is heavily informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT considers how "racism is often well disguised in the rhetoric of shared 'normative' values and 'neutral' social scientific principles and practices" (Knaus, 2009, p. 74). Race, particularly Whiteness, is rendered invisible (McIntosh, 2009), making it difficult for most to see, much less critique, White privilege and other forms of racism. CRT provides a lens through which such invisibilities become obvious, permitting close examinations of the ways that people of color are silenced through dominant discourses (Knaus, 2009).

Drawing from that foundation, my theoretical perspective is that of feminist intersectionality, specifically informed by Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of a single-axis perspective (1989). Crenshaw points out that a dominant tendency in antidiscrimination research, teaching, and other practices is what she refers to as "a single-axis framework" (p. 139). Crenshaw discussed the ways that many social justice researchers inadvertently have reinscribed oppressive discourses when they have ignored the multifaceted natures of personal identities. An example of this single-axis approach might be that when scholars have examined "race" as a concept, they have typically emphasized the experiences of Black men; the result was that "race" became a category in which factors such as gender and sexuality were presumably irrelevant. Likewise, when studies have considered "gender," White women became representative of all women, thereby suggesting that race and sexuality did not affect gender-based experiences. Studies on sexuality that consider LGBTQ identities most often focus on the experiences of gay White men—a single-axis approach that similarly eliminates gender and race as salient factors.

Crenshaw pointed out that such approaches are heavily problematic. In her legal research (1989), for example, the courtroom experiences of Black women were substantially different from those of both Black men and White women, which suggested that both race and gender were perpetually interlaced and relevant. Crenshaw argued that intersectionality was essential to countering a single-axis framework. Intersectionality, or the acknowledgement and examination of the constant intersections of various identities and systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991), has since been a key component of many feminist researchers' work (e.g., Fisher, 2001; Jagger, 2008). Intersec-

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tionality considers the ways that individuals' and groups' multifaceted and complex identities shape their experiences and the ways that they might be societally oppressed and/or privileged.

Standpoint Epistemology

An adapted form of standpoint epistemology also informs my work theoretically. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) explains standpoint epistemology as a way of knowing that is unique to Black women and girls, whose situatedness is always "both/and"; Black women and girls navigate their lives as always both Black and female. Occupying these two positions while navigating a society that actively works to approach race and gender as separate issues creates specific ways of understanding that inform Black women's and girls' experiences and, in relation to schooling, literacy practices. "A standpoint epistemology, then, becomes a critical stance taken by Black women who have particular ways of knowing and seeing reality from multiple locations" (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016, p. 303). As I am a White researcher, I do not claim to fully apprehend this both/and standpoint. Hence, my application of a standpoint epistemology is adapted to provide a framework that is constantly mindful of the multilayered nature of Black female identities, without subscribing to any monolithic notion of Black girls' and women's experiences.

Methods

Given my theoretical frameworks' emphases on the importance of personal identities and experiences, this study focused on participants' narratives. In the first year, 17 of the 24 members of my course enrolled in this study. Of the 17, 13 self-identified as White heterosexual women, two as Black heterosexual women, one as a Hispanic queer woman, and one as a Chinese American heterosexual man. The research was a series of biweekly focus groups and one individual interview per participant over the course of one academic year. The initial research focus aimed at supporting pre-service teachers' discussions of gender and sexuality in schooling. No interview questions explicitly mentioned race or invited participants to discuss race, though it consistently came up. From the very first focus group, participants compared racial inequalities to those LGBTQ people faced, and Andy, the Hispanic queer woman, often discussed race in relation to her sexuality.

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Therefore, despite my problematic omissions of race, in the study, the participants consistently made it clear that race was salient, too. After the first year, an edited research question guided the study:

> Over the course of this research, how do participants understand and address the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality in relation to Black female students in their literacy classrooms?

Participants no longer shared the university as a central location for meetings. They were, in fact, located in various states. We initially attempted online group meetings, but scheduling and technological difficulties made the effort unrealistic. To make involvement in the research practical and convenient, the remaining two years of the study had participants engage in individual interviews with me, typically conducted via Skype or phone when face-to-face interviews were not possible.

Narrative-based Individual Interviews

Though there were regular focus group interviews in this research, they are not the focus for this paper; instead, I attend to statements made in individual narrative interviews with Lulu, one of the two self-identifying Black heterosexual women in the study. Over the course of the study, I conducted a minimum of one individual narrative interview with each participant, and some—including Lulu—participated in at least six. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The individual interviews permitted me to build rapport with participants and to allow them time to elaborate on points that they had made during focus group meetings. Interview questions were crafted to encourage participants to respond in narratives. For example, rather than asking, "What is an example of a social justice lesson plan that you've implemented?" participants were asked to "Describe in detail a lesson plan emphasizing social justice that you've taught this semester" (see Appendix for interview protocol). This form of questioning "elicit[ed] detailed descriptions of the particular experience being studied" (deMarrais, 2004, p. 57). Interview narratives provided detailed individual accounts that allowed participants to share "how their understandings are related to their social, cultural, and personal circumstances" (Mishler, 1986, p. ix), and in sharing through stories, participants were able to express and to understand their personal experiences within their larger cultural settings (e.g., De Fina, 2009). Narratives allowed the opportunity for participants to describe their own and their understandings of others'

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experiences, and to develop an appreciation for the factors that influenced those experiences.

Data Analysis

I approached the data analysis in a way that allowed me to consider each individual and focus group interview in which race, gender, and sexuality intersected to determine what consistencies and/or shifts I found over the three years of the study. As I read each interview, I considered possible codes based on what issues, terms, and people participants mentioned often or discussed in great detail, in relation to the guiding research question. I was keenly aware of the ways that my identity as a White woman limited my awareness of the ways that multiple identities mattered to participants and to the study as a whole. After all, I had missed race as being salient until an individual interview with Andy. To hold myself accountable and to ensure that I coded and interpreted data as thoughtfully as possible, I engaged in regular member checks with all involved participants, including Lulu. Participants were asked to push my understandings, much as Andy had, and they were invited to challenge my findings. If there were disagreements, we discussed those differences until the participant was satisfied that any analyses fairly represented their understandings and experiences. I also shared my data and preliminary findings with a peer data group, who readily pushed me to examine the range of ways that gender, race, and sexuality mattered throughout the coding process.

I found that nearly all of the participants repeatedly referenced *1)* their Black female students' sense of invisibility, *2)* their efforts as teachers to remedy these erasures, which often resulted in problematic representations, and *3)* their Black female students' successes in finding positive representation and empowerment. For example, following the prompt, "Could you describe how you see gender, race, and sexuality as relevant in your classroom right now?" during an hour long interview, Lulu discussed her students and her lesson plans for over 30 minutes, with minimal need for clarifying or probing questions (e.g., "Which song was the student referring to?"). After I determined through individual analyses of the interviews the ways that all participants engaged with these topics over the three years, I conducted a cross-case analysis (Mason, 2002) and compared and contrasted the repeated concepts that I had identified.

Due to the size of the data corpus, given a three-year study involving 17

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participants, and the space constraints presented here, I will focus on one participant, Lulu. Though her responses were unquestionably unique to her specific contexts, her narratives aligned with the prevailing themes and illustrated similar struggles and success that peers described. Lulu was one of two Black women who participated in the study, and she was determined as both a pre- and in-service teacher to support Black girls in her classroom. Focusing on Lulu, I reexamined the data and created codes to reflect Lulu's contributions to the research. Reinforcing the importance of my participants' narratives and experiences, the edited themes were based directly on Lulu's words. The themes were *1)* "They Just Ain't There," *2)* "They Just See a Ho, I Guess," and *3)* "Black Girl Magic."

Findings

The research available that focuses on Black girls' educational experiences demonstrates the degrees to which they are often erased in schooling and how they might be empowered through intersectional New Literacy practices. Lulu's efforts as an educator were focused both on her experiences as a Black girl student and as a Black woman teacher. During one interview, she described growing up in a school system in which she was one of few Black girls. She said, "I knew I was one of only a few Black folks, period—much less Black girls. And, I mean, I think that's why I want to be a teacher. I want my students to have the role model I never had." She went on to add, "I've already talked to my principal about having an after-school program specifically for Black girls. I needed that, and they needed that. I can help them have it."

White women continue to make up the majority of teachers, but rather than suggesting that Lulu's efforts were somehow exceptional and therefore not useful to White educators, I want to offer her narratives as evidence of the complexities and importance of providing students with thoughtful intersectional literacy opportunities no matter the teacher's identities. Though Lulu had actively contemplated her personal experiences as a student as part of her teacher identity, and though Lulu even went as far as to demand that her school establish a support group for Black girls, she still struggled with single-axis pedagogy. When she was successful, her experiences as a Black woman were unquestionably important, but her investment in hearing her students' voices was a critical component of her success, and one that any quality educator could and should employ.

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"They Just Ain't There"

During my class discussions, Lulu was a vocal advocate for feminist pedagogy. She had completed extensive coursework in both women's studies and African American studies, and she brought those knowledge bases to her lesson planning. Additionally, during fall semester focus group discussions, she often pushed peers to incorporate race studies into their curricula. However, during her individual interview in spring semester, Lulu engaged in a difficult self-critique. She said during her interview:

> You know, I have all these really great ideas. Like, *Beowulf* with "RuPaul's Drag Race" and bell hooks—stuff like that. But, I've realized that those ideas never actually make it into the classroom. I've been gung-ho about race studies being a part of the classroom, but now that I think about it, I'm just doing the same dang thing that all of my teachers did to me. Like, I kept thinking, "Where are the Black folks?" No, no. Not "Black folks." Like, "Aren't there any Black women that we can read?" I remember thinking that stuff as a kid. But I look at my lesson plans, and what are we reading? Chaucer. Shakespeare. A bunch of dead White dudes. And then I'll think, "Dang, we need to have some diversity." So, we'll read Olaudah Equiano if we focus on race, or Virginia Woolf if we talk about gender or women, or if I decide that we're gonna do sexuality, maybe Oscar Wilde. But, listen to that stuff—it's a bunch of men and White women. Like, I kept wondering as a kid where all of the Black women were, right? And, they just ain't there. They just ain't there. I mean, part of the problem is that there aren't that many in the textbook, but I could use outside stuff. I just don't bother. It's easier to coast. To use what's already there. How am I gonna shake the status quo if that's all that I'm teaching? I'm a really mad at me right now.

Lulu's reflection on her teaching is not a fault-finding exercise. Lulu was a strong teacher in many regards, including her determination to incorporate examinations of race, gender, and sexuality. Those efforts were substantially more than what is offered in many classrooms, and I would point out that at this stage she was an inexperienced pre-service teacher. However, it is her honest self-critique that is most powerful; arguably, it was the mark of an exceptional educator. Drawing on Collins' (2000) standpoint epistemology concept, Lulu's personal understandings of what she and her students needed in relation to representations of Black women were a driving force in her planning. Nevertheless, she had fallen into Crenshaw's notion of a

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single-axis framework. She was selecting texts that ignored the intersections of her own, her students', and her authors' identities. In doing so, she unintentionally reinforced race, gender, and sexuality as separate concepts while effectively erasing Black women's texts and experiences from her classroom.

"They Just See a Ho, I Guess"

In her first year as an in-service teacher, Lulu was determined to reject the prescriptive curriculum that had so limited her activism and Black women's curricular representations in the previous year. Moving beyond traditional teaching approaches, Lulu also drew on New Literacies—resolved to incorporate strategies such as digital storytelling and music as text. However, as in the previous year, Lulu's self-reflection noted ways that her efforts had had the opposite effects of what she had intended:

> So, these kids are all into hip hop, and I'm like, "Okay. I see you. We're gonna use these songs to teach literary devices and talk about social justice issues." So, I ask them to give me a list of songs that they love—because, I mean, I gotta make sure there's nothing so risqué that I'll get fired. So, I'm all proud of me. I mean, we're doing Nicki Minaj's "Anaconda" with Shakespearean sonnets, right? And, I'm like, "Yeah! We've got Black women situated with the old White dudes." And then, my students are discussing "Sonnet 130," where Shakespeare's talking about the Dark Lady's brown skin and kinky hair and her breasts and all, and they're just being super explicit about how that lines up with "Anaconda." Like, they are just so proud of these connections they're making. But, I'm horrified. I realize that, yeah, I got Black women in the classroom as a basis of the lesson, but I'm just reinforcing tired stereotypes. Black women became sexual objects. She's not a musical artist or poet's muse; they just see a ho, I guess. I didn't mean to, obviously, but I was like, "Whoa. I'm gonna have to rethink this."

Lulu had thought carefully about the ways that she might incorporate students' interests with mandatory curriculum and her commitment to examine race, gender, and sexuality. Her lesson on poetic forms, which included hip hop artists such as Minaj alongside Shakespearean sonnets had incredible potential. Unfortunately, the introduction of Black female sexuality such as that in Minaj's "Anaconda" video, without critical media literacy skills to help students parse out sexual expression as different from sexual objectification, had only reinstituted problematic norms. Returning to

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Crenshaw (1991), the sexualization of women of color has historically and contemporarily functioned within social and political contexts to advance anti-racism efforts, such as those in Lulu's classroom, while reinstituting damaging stereotypes for Black women. Juxtaposing Shakespeare's Dark Lady in "Sonnet 130," whose body serves as the basis of the sonnet, with Minaj's body in the music video had unintentionally but unquestionably reinforced "patterns of social power" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1293) that continued to limit Black girls' and women's intersectional identities and empowerment, while objectifying them.

"Black Girl Magic"

Lulu entered her second year of in-service teaching and third year in the study with a concentrated determination to provide truly intersectional curriculum. As she said in an early interview that year, "Okay, I see where I've screwed up. Now it's time to get right." Lulu decided that a component that she had missed in the previous years was not explaining her hopes to her students and having them consciously involved in her efforts. Though she had asked for student input in the previous year, it had been a vague request for "music they like to listen to." This time, in a class of almost exclusively Black students, the majority of them girls, she began the course differently.

> I was like, "Okay, y'all. I remember being a student and wondering where the people like me were in what we were reading." And they started about, "Oh, well we can listen to Beyoncé," and "We oughta use 'Empire.'" And, I was like, "Okay, stop. What is it about those people and shows that represent who you are, who we are, aside from them being Black? Yeah, I like Cookie [Lyon, character on the television show 'Empire'], but what is she bringing that stretches our understanding?" I had them all jot down not just suggestions but connections, things that they cared about and the ways that what they were writing helped them to talk about those things. So, after they'd written for a while, we discussed. One student was like, "So, what you're wanting is some Black Girl Magic, huh?" And, I'm like, "Yeah! Exactly!" So, we ended up doing this lesson—the focus was imagery and symbolism, because you can't get away from the required standards—where we watched Beyoncé's "Formation" and talked about the images of water, police cars, bodies, and then we read Maya Angelou's poem "Still I Rise" and thought about the images there. I got a little nervous because where did these crazy fools go first during discussion?

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> The diamonds between her thighs [from Angelou's poem], of course. But, it was totally different from last year. We talked about Black women as artists, and we talked about Black women's sexuality as powerful. Like, students talked about Beyoncé's outfits and body and all, too, but the imagery made it a discussion on strength. Not her as a sexual object. It was pretty awesome.

In this instance, Lulu's dramatically different conclusion was arguably due to her decision to involve students, specifically Black girls, in the intervention (Crenshaw, 2015). By permitting students to define the lesson on their own terms, founded on their own needs and concerns, the discussion permitted the artists to be presented on different terms, too. In this instance, Lulu and her students embraced the political and cultural situatedness of literacies, and their readings and class discussions repurposed Black female sexuality as part of the literary experience and redefined it as personally relevant and empowering.

Discussion

It is undeniable that Black girls are not well represented in educational research. Even in my research. which sought to examine the multifaceted identities of my participants, I found myself omitting race. And, in conducting this analysis found that though Lulu was a minority, both within the research and society, her voice was critical to literacy scholarship. Incorporating her experiences and understandings permitted me to both reflect on my own shortcomings as a researcher and to provide a space in literacy research for Lulu to be heard.

Many researchers and teachers, including me early-on in this research, are guilty of what Crenshaw termed "benign neglect" (2015, p. 32). In short, the omission of Black girls and women from curricular representations and literacy practices is an undeniable form of cultural, political, personal, and intellectual neglect; it is often "benign" in that teachers and researchers perpetuating this neglect are well-meaning but nonetheless guilty. An example is the premise of this very research project. My efforts to examine intersections of gender and sexuality without considering race were certainly committed to social justice but unintentionally reinscribed White identities and experiences as the normative bases of my research.

Arguably, Lulu's pre-service teaching experience was another example of

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this benign neglect, in that Lulu's efforts to provide quality, but safe and easy, lessons to her students omitted Black female representation and experiences from the curriculum. In instances of benign neglect, Crenshaw's notion of the single-axis framework serves as a reminder of the ways that social justice efforts, such as Lulu's and mine, often falter when they do not take into account and provide truly intersectional experiences. Research and teaching that demarcate boundaries between identity elements, such as race, gender, and sexuality, fail to appreciate the degrees to which all individuals are multifaceted, and to acknowledge the ways in which multiple sites of oppression and privilege operate in society.

Shifting from this single-axis mindset, however, is complex. Because myriad identities are interwoven with historical and contemporary archetypes and stereotypes, extricating the ways that, for example, race and gender, contribute to sexualizations is complicated. Especially when working to provide such nuanced understandings to students. Lulu's efforts to incorporate representations of Black women into her curriculum were an important step in rejecting a single-axis mindset, but she realized that intersectional work must be critical and meaningful if it is to be responsible and successful. Literature shows the pervasive degree to which girls are sexually harassed in school settings (Meyer, 2009), but the hypersexualized representations of Black girls and women contribute to Black girls being at even greater risk (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015). These risks play out not only in peer and adult interactions, but also in curricular understandings, such as students' objectifications of Minaj and Shakespeare's Dark Lady in Lulu's lesson; those understandings then transfer to school settings and school-based behaviors. Harris (2015) points out that the readiness to sexualize both Black women and girls simultaneously polices Black female sexuality and reduces Black women and girls to being only sexualized—but never empowered and sexual. Lulu noted this complex but real tension in her classroom discussion.

Fully disrupting the single-axis framework and engaging in true intersectional understandings is challenging, as doing so works counter to all entrenched notions of elements such as race, gender, and sexuality. One of the key components of Lulu's success in countering prevailing notions of Black female identities, and specifically Black female sexuality, was her decision to empower her students by explicitly inviting them into her intervention. Her clear outline of the ways that she had, from the time she was a student herself, longed for thoughtful inclusions of Black women in curricula provided students with a starting point to examine their own understandings of Black

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femininity and the ways that they might collectively intertwine race, gender, and sexuality.

Lulu's efforts drew on New Literacies, in that her students' conversations enacted critical literacy practices that disrupted the status quo and redefined the "Black sexual woman" as powerful and positive. Additionally, this approach redefined literacy practices as her students' critiques dismantled female objectification in favor of self-defined notions of self-love that celebrated Black female identity in school-sanctioned ways. These approaches are critical, as schools and society at large are designed to maintain the status quo. It is only through rejecting the tendency to categorize concepts such as race, gender, and sexuality as singular issues that teachers, students, and researchers might influence new ways of discussing and dismantling discriminations.

As Staples (2016) pointed out, literacy is always culturally and politically situated; it is past time for literacies to work to represent and empower Black girls and other underrepresented student groups. Doing so could literally reshape education and society. In 1989, Crenshaw pointed out that when entities such as legal and educational systems support intersectionality, marginalized groups have greater access to success. As a result, everyone—even those who are already over-privileged—benefits. As she put it, "When they [marginalized groups] enter, we all enter" (p. 167). Similarly, but more specifically, Muhammad and Haddix (2016) assert, "If we respond to the needs of Black women, all of humanity benefits" (p. 301). It is the role of intersectional New Literacies to empower the oppressed and advance true social justice for all.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Guiding interview questions, to be used with probes based on interviewee's responses:

1. Talk about why you wanted to be a part of this study this year.
2. Discuss how last year's study has or hasn't influenced you or your teaching this year.
3. Describe in detail a lesson plan emphasizing social justice that you've taught this semester.
4. Talk about an experience you've had involving gender and/or sexuality in your school or classroom.
5. Tell me about resources available to you that are related to gender and/or sexuality.

Note

1. All names are participant-assigned pseudonyms.

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Black Feminist Literacies

Ungendering, Flesh, and Post-Spillers Epistemologies of Embodied and Emotional Justice

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ABSTRACT—This essay will think through the possibilities that Hortense Spillers has engendered in her formulation of the flesh as a modality of Black feminist literacy, and map the contours of the current resurgence of her work in Black studies and Black feminist theory. Her landmark explication of the physical and psychic terrain of Black women's gendering has created a network of post-publication relations that map how critical emphases around Black women's affective and embodied experiences have changed since its publication. The interpretation of the essay has shifted as Black studies, queer studies, diaspora studies, critical theory, ethnic studies, and women's & gender studies have tackled the nuanced difficulties of pursuing social, political, emotional, and embodied justice for Black women and girls. The recent cascade of attention to Spillers's work in "Mama's Baby" marks, I argue, a moment of disenchantment with recognized methodologies of representational politics; Spillers seems to offer the contemporary moment both a vocabulary and a literacy that appeals to innovative, affective understandings of justice for Black women & girls, one that sees cultural production as a necessary but not totalizing terrain for justice.

KEYWORDS—Spillers, black, feminist, literacy, embodied experiences, new literacies

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As the 2007 *Women's Studies Quarterly* forum on Hortense Spillers's 1987 "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" highlights, her essay is a benchmark that those of us working on Black women's literature and in Black feminist theory assign and write with frequently. Originally written (as was her "Interstices" in Carol Vance's *Pleasure and Danger*) as a response to the Barnard Conference on Sexuality, the infamous historical site of the feminist porn/sex wars, Spillers's piece now undergirds much of what we might think of as the main thread of Black feminist historical and literary/cultural studies practice—that the language of gender, namely the designation "woman," does not necessarily include Black women. This observation, while not newly brought to the written field by Spillers (one could think of the Combahee River Collective Statement (1984), *But Some of Us Are Brave (1982)*, or Alice Walker's "Womanism," (1983) to name just a few), is mined for depth and texture in "Mama's Baby," in ways that have reverberated across years and fields of study. Her focus on Black women's erotic, sexual, embodied, and emotional lives as critical to reading and theorizing race, gender, feminism, and sexuality studies resonates deeply in the call for this special issue, and in very recent scholarship that seeks new literacies to speak of and organize politics around Black feminist thought.

This essay will think through the possibilities that Spillers has engendered in her formulation of the flesh as a modality of Black feminist literacy, and map the contours of the current resurgence of her work in Black studies and Black feminist theory. Her landmark explication of the physical and psychic terrain of Black women's gendering has created a network of post-publication relations that map how critical emphases around Black women's affective and embodied experiences—their "lover identities," in the terms of this special issue—have changed since its publication. The interpretation of the essay has shifted as Black studies, queer studies, diaspora studies, critical theory, ethnic studies, and women's and gender studies have tackled the nuanced difficulties of pursuing social, political, emotional, and embodied justice for Black women and girls. I pay particular attention to the recent uptick in attention to Spillers's conceptualization of "ungendering" and "flesh," trying to read the tension lines between existing grammars of, methodological innovations in, and the articulated and unthought futures of, Black feminist literacies across disciplines and political terrains. The recent cascade of attention to Spillers's work in "Mama's Baby" marks a moment of disenchantment with recognized methodologies of representational politics,

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while Spillers seems to offer the contemporary moment a vocabulary and a literacy that appeals to innovative, affective understandings of justice for Black women and girls, one that sees cultural production as a necessary but not totalizing terrain for justice.

Spillers essay begins, infamously, with a litany of grammars—names that are also not names, but types ("Controlling Images" in Patricia Hill Collins's formulation). *Grammar* connotes organized structures of meaning and sequence, rights and wrongs in a network of verbal-linguistic laws. To insist on these racial grammars as organizing national/linguistic structures is to do two powerful things: One is to argue for the power of psychoanalysis, or the idea of things that unconsciously structure our everyday lives, and speech acts/utterances that misname bodies and their contexts—their sense and sequence—in their repetition. The second is to expose the language of gender, particularly *woman* and *body*, as inadequate grammars that attempt to occlude and discipline Black women's bodies and their particular ontological history. Written through the lens of the law of *partus sequitur ventrem*—the child will follow the condition of the mother—that defined enslavement, the force of the essay lies in Spillers's quest to locate the possibilities of being able to exceed the grammar of *father* in the unique and disturbing experience of being excluded from the emotional or protective qualities of *mothering* as a normative term.

Spillers then shifts both historical context for African American women's gendering and the vocabulary used to mark it, specifically through the terms *ungendering* and *flesh*. Spillers argues for the site of the Middle Passage as a process of ungendering where Black bodies are erased of past gender-social identities and made into flesh. Though of course African women and men are still selected and differentially sexed and sexualized even in the architecture of the slave prison and the slaveship's hold, Spillers's ungendering is perhaps best pressed on as a radical differentiation in America's static but quite specifically formed notion of gendering that denotes Whiteness as the base of a normative process. More than mere refusal, the essay creates a set of terms that can acknowledge the specific, violent circumstances of *Black women*'s subject formation. She introduces *flesh* as a way to merge a contemporary focus on the body as a locus of gendered agency and its horrific commodification under enslavement that lingers in the affective, legal, social, and market systems that define contemporary Black life. Flesh, for Spillers and those who follow her, becomes a way of marking both violence and the conception of a Black feminist methodology from the specific em-

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bodied, emotional, social, and cultural relations that this violence creates—an opening, a break, an interstice that doesn't so much resist as remake what we think we know about the range and pitch of "Black women" and Black feminist political possibility.

Spillers then maps a different structure of feeling for articulating Black women's history and subjectivity, activating a vocabulary that exposes the grammar of gender as inadequate, violent, invisibilizing, and obliterating. In Spillers's case, the vocabulary privileges Black women's ways of knowing and feeling *Black women* as historical, philosophical, material, and political subjects. It is to this epistemological emphasis that I ultimately turn to map and analyze how and why Spillers's vocabulary has recently resurged, even as it never disappeared from Black feminist thought and practice. The renewed attention to Spillers, especially to her terms *ungendering* and *flesh*, rather than *pornotroping*, also marks the continued value and devaluing of Black feminist theory as an object of study mobilized through various disciplinary and institutional sites. Rather than celebrate or critique this resurgence, I will think through how and why it comes at a moment of crisis in theorizing the crucial fight and need for justice for Black women and girls, and also how "Black women" and "Black feminism" are part of epistemological crises in Black studies and women's and gender studies as they struggle to "include" Black women in their institutional practices and visions of justice. Spillers cannot and should not have to solve these crisis points, I argue, but the desire to re-center her work points to both our critical attachments to recognizable systems of analysis for the pursuit of social justice, and our desire to find in Black feminist theoretical history a new roadmap, and new methods, that can point to more just futures for Black women and girls.

"In the *Way* That I Do It"

Haunting two generations of Black feminist scholars after her, what turns of terminology or methodology can account for the desire to bring Spillers to forefront of Black studies in its formulations of Afro-pessimism and Black queer sexuality studies, for instance, as well as her continued presence in Black feminist historiography?[1] As debates on the methodological limits of intersectionality also emerge within feminist studies, we might think about Spillers's re-upping as a sort of perfect storm—it practices intersectionality and also has a post-structural philosophical sweep that manages to both critique agency and articulate a longing for it.[2] "Mama's Baby" also

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resituates ties between African and African American feminism even as it traffics in the contemporary moment's emphasis on enslavement and death as the key nodes of understanding Blackness. Bringing diaspora texture and context, as well as intersectional and post-intersectional feelings to bear on the contemporary moment, Spillers's vocabulary has resonated across Black studies and women's studies—moving from the human to the post-human, from reason to feeling, from internalized to structural identity politics, from scenes of trauma to sites of pleasure. It is particularly the emotional and embodied literacies she formulates and enables that I will take up in this essay.

As evidenced by the struggle of Black studies and women's studies scholars in public intellectual discourse over the past 30 years, grammar—and in particular, naming—is important to the work they do.[3] As interdisciplinary fields grounded in social justice, they seek to demonstrate the capacity for, and an ethical commitment to, inclusion and expansion (as well as critique, resistance, and redress). But institutional grammar can also seem inflexible—hence the fights about naming (for example, among the names of fields such as Afro-American, Africana studies; gender, feminist, sexuality studies, etc.), as well as debates about inclusion in core curriculum and "the canon" of these fields. These contests and visions can hardly be summed up in the time I have here, but these debates around naming have also exposed, often uncomfortably, our critical desires for specificity, for capacious inclusion, and for a sustainable, defined, and *better* politics—as well as the way these desires act in contradictory ways or even impossible tension in the field. And yet, the recognition of these tensions and unfulfilled desires seems to lie at the heart of the fields, feeding growth and transformation rather than closing off the will to engage. This challenge to adopt and adapt to new literacies is at the heart of Black feminist thought, or Black feminist "study," to use the latest formulation of theory-as-practice (Harney & Moten, 2013). As Spillers herself has outlined in interviews, she sees the work she does within the institution of the university as a type of expansive history not just in content but in "that I do it the *way* that I do it" (Leonard & Spillers, 2007, p. 1058). In other words, Spillers sees her provocative work as the crucial labor of engendering Black feminist literacies—the methods of reading White supremacist institutionality as well as the alternate ways of knowing, reading, and feeling that Black feminist practice can offer, provoke, and inspire.

Spillers insists on new ways to read not just history and culture, but en-

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tire social structures that organize our everyday political, social, and emotional lives. Her essay opened up—and continues to open up—questions around gender, race, sexuality, and the body that infuse Black feminist theory's interrogations of various sites of inquiry: pleasure, biopower, history, the body, the visual, and the human. She charts this not just through her unpacking of the grammar, linguistic and conceptual structures, that surround and occlude Black women's bodies, but also through the introduction of a series of new conceptual terms for reading: "pornotroping," "ungendering," and "flesh" being the most prominent. Although these terms are not as structuring—not as much an enclosure—as the "grammar" she critiques, they have become touchstones, jumping off points, for fields of inquiry surrounding Black women and Black feminist thought. These fields then look to Spillers to gain new literacies. In the sections that follow, I will briefly explore the afterlives of the terms "ungendering" and "flesh" as vocabularies that move away from representation and visibility politics as the key literacies of justice for Black women. I argue in each that Spillers provides not just new-old analytics that resonate, but that her work offers an epistemological model of *doing* Black feminist thought that compassionately resists the certainty of any one explanatory model of justice.

Ungendering Literacy: The Grammar of History/the Grammar of Injury

The purchase of "Mama's Baby" in many ways hinges, most clearly, on a way to excavate, challenge, and re-interpret the racialized history of gender, or the gendered history of racialization, which for Spillers is in the class of cultural grammar that "confirm[s] the human body as a metonymic figure for an entire repertoire of humans social arrangements" wherein these grammars "take[] on constancy, assume[] the look and the affects of the Eternal" (Spillers, 1987, p. 66). To undo the reification, Spillers takes some steps backward in time for her most provocative claim of the piece: that the Middle Passage is a decisive breaking/starting point for the formation of the racial-sexual body, and that it should be treated as the radical break that it is, rather than as a marginal event that is viewed through a more continuous historiography of "gender," particularly "woman," that imagines social organization via a normative Whiteness.

"Mama's Baby" also centralizes gender, sexuality, and the body at the heart of the Middle Passage, even as it claims modern gender's undoing at

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the very site. In this, Spillers anticipates and complicates Paul Gilroy's 1993 formation of *The Black Atlantic* through the Middle Passage as the inaugural cultural event of modernity's formation—even more interesting to note in light of Spillers's own suspicion of diaspora studies' rise as a way to get around "gender" (as critiqued in the 2007 forum with Leonard). The work that has been done in the name of and in the aftermath of Spillers's renegotiated primal scene of gendering has, in tandem with scholars such as Darlene Clark Hine, Stephanie Camp, and Deborah Gray White, opened up Black feminist historiography to the deep specificities of Black women's enslaved experience. Providing a conceptual avenue for articulating Black women's invisibility as written through the woman of color feminist articulations of exclusion from feminist- and anti-racist-movement building in the 1960s and 1970s, Spillers has encouraged a generation of historians to think through Black women's subject formation in the New World. Jennifer Morgan's astounding 2011 study of African women and maternity as a discursive precursor and continuous undergirding of the racialized chattel slave trade itself, and Marisa Fuentes's 2016 investigation of the experience of urban enslavement and Black women's difficult archival absent-presences have functioned in similar fashion.[4] As just a small sampling of those influenced by the methodological challenge of "Mama's Baby," these scholars of history, particularly the history of enslavement, find in Spillers's formulation not a retreat from or leveling of gender within Blackness as a category, but a way to engage the formulation of "Black women" as one that marks a set of gendered processes that are not reducible to the margins of White femininity nor to only their points of intersection.

More recent historical investments move further afield from pornotroping—the hyper visual, hyper-gendered practices and vocabularies of Black gender that Spillers calls out for their repetition and solidification into everyday and academic life. Pornotroping defined most of the scholarship on Spillers and "Mama's Baby" in the past. The more recent move to recognize ungendering as the understood key term of her work marks a larger shift than my depiction of continuity across Black feminist historic practice would suggest. This shift away from representation reflects a tension with the literacies available to talk about Black women even within Black feminist studies, including the construction of *Black women* solely through injury, or "wounded attachment," as Jennifer Nash phrased it in a 2017 article. Ungendering represents a departure for thinking and reading, "for living and for dying" in Spillers's terms, a method that echoes the foci

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of Afro-pessimist discourses on enslavement and death and Black feminist discourses of redress and the erotics of the living body. The frustration with a larger academic field that seems to both elide and limit Black women to the American grammar scripts that Spillers elucidates is what comes in now, 30 years later, as an attachment to but also a frustration with the critical desires of Black feminist theory writ large, and its political commitments and methodologies, without jettisoning the conceptual terrain of either *women* or *feminism*—or injury and agency—altogether.

At the site of women's studies (understood broadly here to include feminist, gender, queer, and sexuality studies), the re-emphasis on Spillers comes from the continued effort to extricate Black feminist theory from the grips of White feminist paradigms that structure the field(s). Of course, this looks quite different in the current moment, due to the proliferation of intersectionality as the defining feature of both Black feminist thought and of women's studies methodology. As such, Black feminist theory is at once the "hot object" that Ann duCille so richly exemplified mixed feelings about in her 1994 piece, and, as Brittney Cooper diagnosed in 2015, is constantly positing Black women as the undergirding support system of both feminist and Black studies in a mode that leaves Black feminist thought always already theoretically belated. This happens through the elision of intersectionality as a method with Black women as an object of study—particularly as the marked object of injury, the most wounded, in perpetuity (Nash, 2017). As such, *Black woman* as an object of study (I'll address the valance of this problematic terminology of objectness in a moment) are yoked to passé formulations of identity politics, a formulation that largely reshaped feminist institutionalizations and the way these programs, departments, and curriculum are shaped. As many critics and defenders of intersectionality have noted, this leaves Black women as both the static bottom of the hierarchy of power, ironically the top or pedestal of the "oppression Olympics" in any intellectual inquiry, and reduces Black feminism to the unexamined, monolithic, already-assumed, known object—the one that requires no more critique, analysis, or intellectual development as a field.

"Mama's Baby," though it remained a staple in Black feminist theory courses over the years, did not maintain the structural centrality, the interdisciplinary force of organizational and institutional integration that Crenshaw's similarly timed work on intersectionality did. Spillers's vocabulary of ungendering is both the key to Spillers's difficulty and her resurgence, as it is a psychoanalytic and post-deconstruction call to arms that gives action

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to Evelyn Higginbotham's later articulation of "The Metalanguage of Race" and gender as diagnoses of feminist studies (1992). Though Higginbotham herself calls for a closer examination and articulation of how Whiteness operates in the field of historical methodology, and references movements like womanism that attempt to find their ways out of the linguistic and representational morass of Whiteness that clings to feminism in particular, Spillers attempts a conceptual and terminological shift away from the grammar—the structure, sequence, and mastery—of "woman" as a category of Whiteness mystified through universal application that keeps White women central to its structure even when it seems to name race. Through ungendering, historians from Morgan (2011) to Hartman (1997, 2008) to Fuentes and Sarah Haley (2016) today, like Spillers, can hang onto to "Black women," but claim a different psychic and structural history for the coming to be of Black women as subjects of history—one that denotes a decisive break with the formation of White womanhood and White feminism. Ungendering potentially unmoors "Black women" from critiques of identity politics and intersectionality by claiming a difference in kind that remakes the terms of Black feminism away from the institutional and intellectual histories of White feminism altogether, arguing not for monolithic or discreet categories that intersect but for a break that allows Black feminist history to excavate Black women's lives through a lens that is not additive or inclusive as much as it is the projection of an entirely new genealogical imagining of "Black women" as a cohesive if not homogenous category of social-historical experience.

In this, Black feminist theorists are not alone, of course. In African gender, feminist, and sexuality studies, the tension between so-called identity categories of gender and sexuality whose grammar "originates" in the West and the erasure and violence done under and through those grammars is evident across scholarly work in the field. Sylvia Tamale's groundbreaking 2011 work on African sexualities insists on sexuality but also questions how and why the study of sexuality seems to start with the West and move to the global south, and never the reverse. The 1997 provocative book by African feminist scholar Oyeronke Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women*, suggests that gender as a significant social organizational concept is largely overstated in African (here, Yoruban) history, misread by those who are already bringing in Western hierarchies of gender and its omnipresence as a significant category of social order. The "Female Genital Mutilation" debates of the 1990s found that arguing against female circumcision could also align one with racist pornotroping of African women and African cultures in the name of

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"sisterhood." These are just a few diasporic sites of contention. Those working on both the history and the present of African sexualities are in constant negotiation with terminology that turns against one's own scholarship, presuming its "goals" include justice for Black women and girls, as it acknowledges that White queer and feminist studies of the global north remain the unmarked norm that defines theoretical terrains and purchase in the academy and beyond. These very visions and definitions of freedom and liberation are the "insurgent ground" in the next grouping of post-Spillers' scholars. These writers return to her conceptualization of flesh as a way to rethink the limits and possibilities of studying the Black body, modeling perhaps new ways to *do*—and to feel about the doing of—Black feminist study.

Reading Flesh: Black Feminist Underpinnings of the Human, the Body, and the Object

If the reset to an ungendered body becomes a recourse to the use of the Black women's body as "a resource for metaphor" (p. 66), in Spillers's terms, then a new turn to Spillers as a theorist of the human moves through the flesh itself as a way to foreground embodiment as a significant political site and way of knowing justice that is centered on Black women's embodied and emotional experience. Instead of privileged acts of resistance or scenes of (un)freedom in alignment with masculinist paradigms of liberation, Spillers's flesh seems to offer a new generation of scholars a way to hang on to the injury of state and structural violence as central to Black political subjectivity while also making conceptual space for abjection, pleasure, and objectification (to name just a few contemporary sites of scholarly inquiry) as critical questions rather than impossible intellectual and political closures. There are hints of certain negative formulations of pleasure in "Mama's Baby" itself, which laments the "un-protected female flesh" (207) as one tenant, one recognition of ungendering, and also rests on the break of kinship and motherhood/maternity for much of its emotional-political heft. Spillers herself recognizes the structural pull of these constructions of negation, in this piece as well as in her "beached whale" metaphor in "Interstices," the companion piece to "Mama's Baby", as she narrates the process of finding it difficult to come up with a "sexuality," in the way we usually employ the term as a positive structure, for and in Black women's experience (1987; 1984). Leaning on discourses of the primacy of women's protection and the affective norms of maternal feeling is a double-edged

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sword of ungendered thinking, of course—one wants to acknowledge the deep and documented losses of enslavement, while also not wanting to reify the White normative narratives of gendered meaning as sole sites of value. The work left in her essay's considerable wake, then, seeks space for a fuller range of affective and kinship attachments in creating visions of justice for Black women and girls.

The repetition of equating pleasure with power and agency, and then pleasure with sexuality, and hence sexuality with liberation/choice, remain a critical entanglement that haunts Black feminist and Black sexuality studies. But, as a tension, it also animates some of the recent "uses" of enfleshment, and the kind of literacies it has entailed "for living and for dying," for Afro-pessimism, optimism, and Black erotics. In Alexander Weheliye's *Habeas Viscus*, for instance, Spillers's formulation of the flesh is what, along with Sylvia Wynter's articulation of the "genres of the human" (18) allows Weheliye's turn to Black feminist thought as the antidote to critical theory's limited understanding and depiction of humanism and bare life (Weheliye, 2014). Weheliye is not interested in "Black women," per se, but what the flesh seems to open up to him and to others is a space of thinking Black political subjectivity and possibility differently, outside of freedom/resistance narratives that privilege a liberal humanist agency and action as their core of recognition, and their core political goal for reparation. Flesh offers Weheliye a new literacy, in other words, a new way of reading for, and reading against, anti-Blackness, like the challenge Spillers's own map of the flesh with its lack of agency offers to her in trying to articulate something other than a "beached whale" metaphor. In this, he turns to Spillers as an investigation of biopower—who will live and who will die, in Michel Foucault (2008) and then Achille Mbembé (2003) and Jasbir Puar's (2007) formulations—with flesh as biopower's key resource. But, like Spillers, Weheliye is also interested in the flesh because of what it retains—its materiality, its possibility to become something else entirely out of a recognizable discursive grasp.

Weheliye then claims Black "flesh as the limit of the human and the possibility for its un- and re-making as a political subject, and in doing so claims Black feminism via Spillers as the conceptual center of Black studies and political thought." This relationship between human and post-human studies and the new persistence of Spillers's work emphasizes how Black feminist theory has shifted conceptual and not just grammatical terrain, and how a theory like Spillers's flesh has the potential to ground Black women as the conceptual, touchstone subjects of social and political life even when it

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is not speaking directly about Black women as objects of study. Fred Moten's work transforms the discourses of injury, as well—the pornotrope, thingness, objectification—by arguing for objectification not as the end but the start of what he names "Black study" (2013). Inhabiting "thingness" cannot be the limit of Black study, for Moten. And this, too, is the innovation of Spillers's flesh in that it provides that interstice, that opening, of wound and portal, in Octavia Butlerian terms, to imagine the injury not as the end of inquiry, but its very beginning (Butler, 2003).

For Moten and Weheliye, Spillers stands as "Black feminist theorist" not to represent "Black women," but to represent a theoretical contribution to Black studies by a Black feminist theorist that is then portable to other areas of exploration and analysis within the field. As pleasing as it is to see Black feminist theorists employed as the basis for new conceptions of the human without the constant recourse to thinking and representing Black feminism as too specific to be broadly applicable, I do want to think about an expanded field of criticism where one could both imagine the broad application of Black feminist theory beyond Black women's bodies, but also imagine those bodies themselves—specifically fleshed, raced, gendered, sexual bodies—as significant to the political projects of social, anti-racist justice. Here I may betray a bit of my own tense excitement and skepticism about Spillers's circulation in work that does not consider gender a central category of analysis, just as Amber Musser's review essay on Weheliye's book cautions (Musser, 2016). As a citational matter, she points to another collective body who has remade the flesh of Spillers's essay into a question of Black erotics, which I turn to here, and which Musser gently suggests is a body of work that Black studies scholars like Weheliye might find as rich and necessary interlocutors in the project of Black political remakings of the public sphere—and which, I will argue along with those scholars taking up this queer enfleshment of Spillers, is also remaking what we think of as the literacies of Black feminism.

Though Spillers herself does not often dwell on the space of specific literary representations in "Mama's Baby," she does begin with some of the "controlling images" that Collins has laid out. Collins, a sociologist by training, was taken up as the dominant methodological paradigm of Black feminist theory in the 1990s, both for the literacy of reading controlling images/representations and for forwarding reading practices of intersectionality as repairs to said images' pervasiveness (with pornotroping being a simultaneous structural diagnosis, in many ways, of representational practices). Spill-

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ers, we should remember, is a member of a generation of literary scholars who uncovered, curated, and analyzed the forgotten work of Black women writers from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the 1980s and early 1990s, sparking the very nuanced debates about respectability and middle-class conceptions and representations of sexuality that dominate the field through to the more recent moments I speak about in this essay.[5] The body of work they uncovered, and their critical mappings of that work, remain key in thinking about the nuances of sexuality, desire, class, and the history of Black women's cultural production. One could map the way that desire, love, and erotics play out in this scholarship that explores post-emancipation periods as the critical vocabulary Spillers transports to consider the formational moment of the Middle Passage from the positionality of Black women's embodied and affective experience.

Enmeshed in this movement, moment, and set of debates, Spillers's own work on ungendering and flesh also suggests both the uber-significance of the representational sphere to Black feminist intellectual projects, and the limits of reading practices that seek repair in this same domain. Scholars such as Nicole Fleetwood (2010) have articulated this very issue in, for instance, taking up the visual-as-site-of-repair in terms of race when it is the very terrain in which racial subjection so often happens—a move similar to that of Aida Levy-Hussen (2016), who critiques the turn to historical narrative fiction as the route to psychological repair in contemporary African American literature. Rather than police for a different but just as stringent grammar of "good" representation, Spillers suggests representation's inescapably problematic presence. Here the work of Musser (2014), Darieck Scott (2010), Ariane Cruz (2016), Michelle Stephens (2014) and Anne Cheng (2011) on skin, Christina Sharpe's (2016) wake work, Jennifer Nash (2014) and Mireille Miller-Young's (2014) work on Black women and pornography, and even Carolyn Cooper's (1995) earlier work on the embodied presence of Black women in the sonic and performative spaces of dancehall might form another genealogy of Black feminism, along with Evelynn Hammonds (1994), that fits into this queer and post-humanist critical moment of flesh. This body of work collectively seeks to undo such binaries and fictions of legible corporeal and representational agency. It is post-representational, in that none of these scholars chooses to focus intellectual energy on dis- or recovering "good representations" to counter the easily locatable "bad" ones. Flesh, in its metaphoric materialism, offers a literacy of both/and, and beyond. It is operationalized as the vocabulary of the future of Black feminist

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subjectivity that refuses the terms of liberal humanism as its base and its limits, but also refuses to abandon the important territory of cultural production even as it questions our methods of reading and recognizing representational politics.

Critics who are in direct and indirect conversation with Spillers's flesh have remade the field in their investments in the position of Black women's bodies as those implicated by but not contained within traditional constructions of political subjectivity in the U.S. and the neoliberal order beyond its borders. Musser engages Spillers directly but reframes the flesh as something that can trade on and within schemas of power and pleasure that both question and retain agency—à la the uncomfortable tableau of Kara Walker installations that offers "perverse" versions of enslaved sexuality as both challenging and pleasurable visions of thing-ness. Fleetwood engages Spillers to create a theory of "excess flesh," a methodology that recognizes hypervisibility as a Black feminist strategy that employs and deploys varying desires for both artist and audience that, she hopes, can take us beyond looking to the visual field as both the cause and the cure of bad racial representation. Cooper (1995), Daphne Brooks (2006), and Nash all reposition the performing Black female body as not fully captive of masculinist, misogynist structures of meaning and media, in dance, theatre, and pornography, respectively. Dorothy Roberts (1997) and Alondra Nelson (2016) (as well as Cathy Cohen [1999], Katherine Bond Stockton [2006], Ashon Crawley [2013], Scott [2010], Shatema Threadcraft [2016], and others) reinvigorate not just the study of race, health, and embodiment but ways that Black flesh has, in fact, ordered our very vision of the body and its interactions with the social and political structures of the state—again, not necessarily in direct relation to Spillers, but still defining a field of study that leads us to better understand her resurgence. Elizabeth Povinelli (2006) extends this to work across queer and indigenous studies to theorize the flesh as a porous and vulnerable site—a site of care and of violence, a site of freedom and responsibility/interdependence. James Bliss (2015), Kara Keeling (2007), Tavia Nyong'o (2009), Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2016), and C. Sharpe (2016) find in Spillers, specifically, spaces that realign our ideas of kinship and sociality to include racialized-sexualized terror as well as other forms of intimacy. "Flesh" here is a portable affective vocabulary—"fugitive," in Gumbs's terms—even as subjects and bodies remain enclosed by other grammars.

"Mama's Baby" offers a literacy that includes histories of terror but also, for contemporary scholars, modes of theorizing uncertainty and vulnerabil-

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ity, intimacy and pleasure, that are nonetheless unthinkable outside of historical, structural, and present-tense violence. To insist on the oppositions between terror and intimacy is to force the two into dialectical relation—as Musser insists on her own work on enfleshment. Sexuality is not free from physical and emotional violence but exists within it, and vice versa. Spillers's literacies cannot be contained or controlled, then, as much as one might be pained to see them in use beyond their original objects of study or of critique. They are instead rooted in and routed through the centrality of Black women's bodies, histories, and experiences, reorienting the political subject around vulnerability, risk, and interdependence: the flesh, exposed and enclosed, alienated and embodied. Spillers's critique of grammar doesn't abandon Black women, but it also doesn't just include them—it demands rethinking the entire process of (un)gendering, of becoming (un)human, through the Black female body.

If, as Spillers insists, "words will most certainly kill us," her methodology seems to endure in her conceptual, anti-grammatical critical vocabulary (1987, p. 60). These terms, this flesh, are offering depth and texture to the map of intersectionality that Black feminism has been drawn from and to for the past 25 years as well.[6] "Mama's Baby" asked and asks: How can Black feminist thought maintain a distinction from White feminist discourse (as well as Black studies that assume the masculine subject) and its normalizing tendencies without only inhabiting the genres of injury and tragedy? And how might flesh travel even when, like the Black women it adheres to and is, as ontologically constructed through Spillers's vocabulary, it can't materially or discursively get out of "objectness"? Most uncomfortably, how, some of these critics ask, can we bring ourselves to imagine an enfleshed subject that would not *want* to escape from objectification—who occupies, in the terms of this special issue, an unrecognizable or politically unpalatable "lover identity," or a set of relations between race, gender, and sexuality that is as yet illegible or unthought in our terms of justice?

Spillers's work is a flexible paradigm whose use we should both diffuse and question, much as scholars have interacted with Crenshaw's model in the field. One does not have to figure out how to religiously adhere to her reading, or even her method. She is of this time and also being pushed ahead of it, and we might mark that convergence not as divine but as desired, also asking who will be brought up as the crucial paradigm of Black feminist thought in the coming years, in future moments that seem to demand other literacies—those theorists, staples on Black feminist syllabi and

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footnotes, who have already and might again provide future ground to reinvigorate Black feminist study through attention to the alternate analytical vocabularies they author. As we continue to mine earlier eras for "new" critical genealogies of Black feminist thought, we should be aware that reactivation inevitably involves looking for what we already know—backdating, as it were, a story we'd like to tell—as well as marking our exhaustion with existing methodologies for seeking emotional and social justice for Black women and girls.

Spillers offers us a desired vocabulary and a reflection on our current critical needs that lean in to the complexities of Blackness and the body. The enthusiastic re-exercise of Spillers's vocabularies signals a critical desire to reanimate and realign Black feminist critical thought in a moment of political intensities that careen across "the living and the dying," between suffering and the capacity for pleasure, sometimes pitching one against another. Spillers speaks to both impulses—to track the names given and to feel and do something different for and as Black feminist thinkers, readers, and writers. Though "Mama's Baby" allows us to backdate the stories we are telling and want to tell now, we shouldn't confuse that with Spillers, or us, being eternally "right" about the exact terms of engagement. We can mark the essay's move to epistemology itself—to upending our ways of knowing and doing "Black women"—as the work of Black feminist literacies, and justice for Black women and girls. "Mama's Baby" imagines the world as it is ordered by and through Black women's embodied and emotional histories. In following Spillers, we trust that this world made of and by Black women's lives and thoughts is expansive beyond our current critical measure and moment, and so remains open to the invention of new genealogies, new politics, and new strategies for the just futures of Black feminist thought.

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Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Jennifer Nash for her questions and comments that revealed the buried thread of this essay in earlier drafts; Denise Cruz, Tshepo Masango Chery, and Alex Hernandez for their daily writing support; Jewel Pereyra for her research assistance; and Sean Williams, always.

Notes

1. Of course, Hortense Spillers is still an amazing, active scholar. It is not my intention to reduce her scholarly influence to "Mama's Baby," or to foreclose her future impact. I truly seek to map the popular influence of this particular essay from this particular moment in her career.

2. See articles by J. Nash (2014) and books by A. Carastathis (2014), and V. May (2014) on intersectionality debates.

3. See R. Wiegman (2000), R. Lee (2000), W. Brown (1997), J. Butler (1994) for a selection of the women's studies name debates, and J. Joyce (2004) and R. M. Karenga (2009) for a bit of the history on name debates in Black studies.

4. I should add: as well as so many other Black feminist historians and historians of Black women and slavery, too numerous to name here.

5. See H. V. Carby (1987), Duval Harrison (1988), C. A. Wall (1995), C. Tate (1993), D. E. McDowell (1995), M. H. Washington (1987), A. DuCille (1994), etc.

6. Not that Crenshaw performs this flattening, but the wider application of and insistence on—indeed, the conflation of all and every Black feminism as—intersectionality has produced some critical fatigue and enthusiastic re-exploration of its utility.

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Damn, I Love the Strippers!

A Black Feminist Analysis of Rihanna's "Pour It Up"

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ABSTRACT—This article argues that Rihanna's music video for "Pour It Up" disrupts the grotesque/hypersexual dichotomy regarding Black women's bodies in the popular/mainstream music industry by constructing exotic dancers as multi-dimensional artists and athletes, not always already objects lacking autonomy and self-determination or silenced bodies reduced to their appearance. Additionally, the article argues that the video subverts the idea that exotic dancing is *only* significant as a consumer commodity, as well as the idea that constructions of Black exotic dancers must always perpetuate discourses that denigrate Black women.

KEYWORDS—objectification, sex work, exotic dance, Black feminism, Rihanna, "Pour It Up"

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On new year's eve in 2010, my husband and I accompanied some friends to a dance club in Denver, CO to celebrate. We were having a great time—drinking, dancing, and singing along with old and new hip hop and R&B classics—when a woman approached me and politely asked, "Could you please move a little to the left?" I am sure my face looked puzzled, as I couldn't hear her clearly, given the extreme noise over which we were trying to communicate. As a result, she clarified, smiling, "I'm going to come down pretty fast, and I just don't want to hit you." I followed her eyes, and looked up at the pole next to us—which had to be 20 to 30 feet tall—and quickly obliged. In fact, I was excited to see what she was about to do. And when she did her thing, my eyes widened, and my jaw dropped in complete amazement. She climbed up the pole, using incredible upper body strength, and slid down *upside down*, using only the strength of her inner thighs, at what seemed like 100 mph, stopping *just short* of hitting her head on the floor. The crowd and I—who had been watching her with intense anticipation—erupted with applause. Almost three years later, I found myself responding similarly when I watched Rihanna's long-awaited video for her single "Pour It Up" from her seventh studio album *Unapologetic* (2012).

To date, "Pour It Up" has garnered over 250 million views on the RihannaVEVO channel (RihannaVEVO, 2013), and continues to inspire vigorous debates about its construction of Black women exotic dancers. Soon after the video's release on October 11, 2013, Darnell L. Moore, Managing Editor of *The Feminist Wire*, decided to publish "Sound Off: Black Women Writers Respond to Rihanna's 'Pour It Up," which featured brief responses to the video written by Janet Mock, me, and Sylvia A. Harvey. In it, Mock (Administrator, 2013) writes,

> The video for "Pour It Up" bored me . . . . What would've been groundbreaking to me would've been an actual narrative of the lives of women who dance for money, women engaged in stigmatized work, women who are told that they are shameful and their lives should be kept secret. Instead, all "Pour It Up" did was showcase women dancing for money as another woman sits idly, twerking upside down, mind you, on a gold throne while draped in gaudy Chanel product placements.

Similarly, Harvey (Administrator, 2013) claims:

> The video serves as a reminder that commodification, hyper-sexualization, and the defiling of black women's bodies are thriving. When competition

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for the spotlight leads to self-degradation there is cause for concern and conversation, particularly when there are women across the globe that have no claims to their own bodies.

In my response, I (Administrator, 2013) point out YouTube viewer comments that also critique the valorization of exotic dancers in "Pour It Up" and the denigration of women that supposedly follows. For instance, Beckie Abingdon writes, "Did we really go through years of fighting for women rights, showing that we aren't sexual objects, only for people like Rihanna to throw it back into history's face? This generation is doomed with so called 'role models' like her" (RihannaVEVO, 2013). Similarly, Ganjifarian comments, "I don't see the fascination with being a piece of meat. Is that not what began the women's rights movement?" (RihannaVEVO, 2013). Other users point out the supposed negative impact "Pour It Up" would have on young women and girls, including Faith Bowman, who writes, "All I can think about is the little girls and weak women who will imitate this. Really sad. Why is she doing this?" (RihannaVEVO, 2013). Subsequently, I argued that these kinds of readings ignore the fact that "Pour It Up" is a music video, not a documentary, and that the video has much to offer in terms of groundbreaking narratives of women engaged in typically stigmatized work, if we are willing to consider the labor the dancers perform in the video as critical works of art and athleticism worth serious attention. Here, then, I build on this argument in suggesting that "Pour It Up" is a vehicle through which we can better understand the ontological and epistemological complexities of Black women exotic dancers, if we reject reliance on oral-centric, crisis-focused, and simplistic liberation/empowerment narratives that erase the unique and profound skills required to perform their labor.

My thinking here is indebted to theorists—especially Black feminists—who have studied objectification, subjectivity, and sexuality (including sex work) in ways that challenge this simplicity. Hence, I want to advocate for a way of understanding "Pour It Up" that recognizes Black women artists' ability to disrupt dominant narratives that subjugate Black women's sexualized bodies in popular culture by reading these bodies on their own terms. As J. C. Nash (2008) argues, "Visual lenses are so thoroughly smudged by race, even images that black women have produced are subject to (mis)readings informed by that dominant conception of black women's sexual deviance" (p. 60). Still, we must recognize the impetus for responses to the video that illustrate very real and understandable fears about Black women's sex-

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ual deviance. As T. Rose (Baker, 2004) argues during a discussion about the "internalization of the Jezebel image" that has become so prevalent in music videos, "It's very easy for people to associate hypersexuality with Black women . . . . because of the memories we have of these images and representations collectively as a society." At the same time, it is important to heed the caution leveled by M. Miller-Young (2014) when she argues that Black women sex workers have long-confronted prevailing stigmas about their work and fears about Black women's sexual deviance that are inextricably linked to upholding ideas about respectable Black womanhood. My reading of "Pour It Up" rejects the stigmatization of Black sex workers—particularly Black women—by paying serious attention to the significance of their labor on their terms, which is especially important given the ways Black women exotic dancers have often been denigrated in visual culture, especially in music videos.

On that note, prior to "Pour It Up," there have been few music videos featuring Black women exotic dancers that focus even remotely on their artistry and athleticism. For example, in Dr. Dre's "The Next Episode" (1999), as the bridge before the second verse begins, a dancer is filmed holding the weight of her entire body on a dance pole, swinging herself in a circular motion while holding her legs tightly at waist-length in the shape of the letter "s." In the next frame, as the bridge continues, another dancer is filmed sliding down another pole with her back toward the ground and her legs facing upward. The first dancer appears to be performing what Nicole "The Pole" Williams—a dancer in "Pour It Up"—refers to as "a basic beginner spin," a move that requires great strength and agility. Williams (Dyer, 2013) explains, "When I do a basic beginner spin, I'm literally working my back, my chest, my biceps, my triceps, my shoulders, and my abdominal muscles. It's about putting in the time like it is with any other sport." Yet in this video, the primary focus is the consumption of exotic dance, not the exotic dancers' talent. Along these lines, throughout most of "The Next Episode," male consumers—including Snoop Dogg, Dr. Dre, Tha Dogg Pound, and seemingly hundreds of extras—are surrounded by scantily clad women, drinking, partying, and throwing money at exotic dancers in stereotypical fashion. This is problematic, because as R. Emerson (2002) points out, "The one-dimensional depiction of Black women as objects of male pleasure undermines their legitimacy and agency as artists" (p. 123). Additionally, most of the dancers in the video, the two that I mentioned aside, are not performing at the level of those in "Pour It Up," not even as skilled twerk dancers, fur-

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ther illustrating the primacy of the consumption of exotic dancing rather than the dancers' skills.

This problem has plagued constructions of Black exotic dancers in popular music videos for more than two decades. For instance, 2Pac's strip club-themed video for "How Do U Want It" (featuring K-Ci and JoJo), a single from his fifth studio album *All Eyez on Me* (1996), features a number of pornography actresses—including Nina Hartley, Heather Hunter, and Angel Kelly—but no professional exotic dancers. As a result, the video relies heavily on a number of strip club tropes—women dancing in cages with large live snakes and around dance poles while being touched by men and drenched with whipped cream and liquor, for example—without paying attention to the extraordinary skills required to perform exotic dance. This is also the case in the video for T-Pain's "I'm 'n Luv (Wit a Stripper)" (featuring Mike Jones) from his 2005 debut studio album *Rappa Ternt Sanga*. Although several scenes showcase women dancing in the strip club, they are primarily constructed as "eye candy," as they are not consistently performing with the kind of artistry and athleticism that would challenge popular constructions of exotic dance performance. Further, the video reinforces the idea that exotic dancers are insignificant without the hyper-presence of male consumers. M. Hunter and K. Soto (2009) problematize these "pornographic gender relations" in hip hop because they are often primarily transactional, they often rely on the humiliation of women, and they rarely ever focus on women's pleasure, if at all (p. 171). Hence, these kinds of videos, unlike "Pour It Up," do little to construct Black exotic dancers as more than objectified servants.

This construction is also prevalent in contemporary music videos. For example, 2 Chainz's "I Luv Dem Strippers" (featuring Nicki Minaj), from his debut studio album *Based on a T.R.U. Story* (2012), most certainly exhibits the talent of Black exotic dancers more than "How Do U Want It" or "I'm 'n Luv (Wit a Stripper)" without entirely abandoning these stereotypical elements. At times, the dancers showcase skills that obviously require a great deal of time, energy, and practice to execute. For instance, in one scene, one dancer is positioning herself on a pole with two hands—perfectly straight, belly up, and perpendicular to the dance pole—while another dancer is holding herself up on the same pole, twerking with one of her legs resting on the aforementioned dancer's belly and her other leg resting on the aforementioned dancer's shin. An even more astonishing scene entails both women on the same pole riding each other like bicycles: In one shot, a dancer is holding herself up on the pole with just the inside of her right arm and

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both inner thighs, with her buttocks facing up as her legs are held straight together and perpendicular to the pole, moving the other dancer's shoes in a bicycling motion. The second dancer is sitting on the former, holding herself on the pole with one hand with her other hand on her hip as she moves her feet in a bicycling motion. Here, then, the dancers are able to utilize a popular music video as a site of expression and resistance, communicating the value of their labor by demonstrating their talent through their bodies and movements (Emerson, 2002; Hobson and Bartlow, 2008). Still, there are more scenes in "I Luv Dem Strippers" that adhere to stereotypical strip club tropes in that they focus primarily on male consumers, including popular rappers Young Jeezy and T.I. These consumers are shown groping the dancers and throwing money at them, perpetuating the popular/mainstream music industry norm that almost always constructs Black women and their bodies as grotesque and/or hypersexualized, especially when their bodies perform exotic dance.

Conversely, "Pour It Up" disrupts this dichotomy by attending to the ontological complexities of Black women exotic dancers, mainly by constructing them as multi-dimensional artists and athletes, not always already objects lacking autonomy and self-determination or silenced bodies reduced entirely to their appearance. My understanding of objectivity relies, in large part, on the work of M. C. Nussbaum (1995), who argues that objectivity entails at least one of seven processes—instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership, and denial of subjectivity (p. 257). R. Langton (2009) further develops Nussbaum's theory by including reduction to body, reduction to appearance, and silencing as processes of objectification (p. 228).

Although it may seem that the dancers in "Pour It Up"—Asha Franklin, Secret Moneii, Candace Cane, and Williams—are objectified, primarily taking this position ignores their work as a way of voicing the significance of their labor. Their ability to twerk and perform extraordinary moves on and around dance poles demonstrates that their skill development requires a lot of time, energy, and practice. As Cane (Dyer, 2013) states,

> I don't just go up there and shake my ass, I actually put on a show and do headstands, flips, cartwheels, climbing all the way up 30 feet in the air and hanging from the ceiling of the club. I tend to shy away from the clubs though. I don't have to take my clothes off for you to appreciate my talent.

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At most, one could charge instrumentality, given that Rihanna and the executives at her record label and publishing companies most certainly employed the dancers for their economic and sociocultural purposes. However, taking that approach *entirely* denies the dancers and their choreographer subjectivity.[1] In "Pour It Up," the dancers do speak for themselves in unprecedented ways (at least in the popular music industry), defining their subjectivity not by ignoring discourses about exotic dancing, as Cane's comments illustrate, but by articulating the significance of their labor through performance.

The focus on performance, especially when contrasted with other constructions of Black exotic dancers in popular music videos, is another way in which "Pour It Up" carefully attends to the ontological complexities of exotic dancers. Just as the first verse of the song begins, Williams is filmed sliding down a dance pole, hanging in mid-air using only her inner thighs and the space between her head, neck, and right shoulder to hold on. Throughout the video, Williams is filmed performing extraordinary acrobatics on the same pole, including the aforementioned "basic beginner spin," demonstrating noteworthy upper body strength—holding onto the pole with two hands and swinging her body around and posing her legs, held completely still, in various positions. At another point, Williams is filmed sliding down the dance pole upside down without using her hands or any part of her upper body—holding on with the full strength of her inner thighs. Here, I want to note that (mis)readings of the video deny the possibility of Black women exotic dancers expressing their agency in the space of the music video, which ignores exotic dance labor as a way of communicating the significance of that agency. Along these lines, Emerson (2002) notes that Black women have sometimes found the music video a space in which they can exhibit the kind of control over their bodies that is necessary to negotiate "contradictory and often conflicting notions" about their sexuality (p. 128). Regarding "Pour It Up," the focus on exotic dance performance rather than exotic dance consumption allows it to function as one such subversive space in which exotic dancers legitimize themselves through their labor.

The focus on performance is also amplified in that the video does not take place in a typical strip club setting and, consequently, there is a lack of focus on customers. In problematizing the strip club industry, S. Jeffreys (2008) suggests, "Women are not able to join in this bonding, which is expressly constructed between men through their objectification of naked women" (p. 427). Similarly, Miller-Young (2008) argues that "black women are

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constructed through representation as hypersexual, accessible, and devalued [which] contributes to their subjugation" (p. 278). Although 2 Chainz's "I Luv Dem Strippers" showcases brilliant work performed by Black exotic dancers, that work is constructed primarily as intensifying the significance of the strip club consumer. In other words, the video legitimizes consumers by focusing on the extensive amounts of money they spend in strip clubs. In this way, the shots of dancers' brilliant performances are few, far between, and quick. Contrarily, men—and exotic dance consumers in general—are entirely absent in "Pour It Up," so it demands that viewers' attention be focused on the dancing. One of the most noteworthy scenes along these lines occurs about halfway through the video when Williams is filmed bicycling up high on an extremely tall pole, holding on with the inside of her right forearm and her left hand. In this shot, her muscle definition—particularly in her upper left arm, her left buttocks, and her left thigh—is emphasized, indicating the immense amount of strength required for her to perform. In highlighting the performance and athleticism of the dancers, "Pour It Up" contests the idea of "men-only bonding" that is so prevalent in exotic dance consumer culture, rejecting the construction of exotic dancers as entirely hyper-accessible and only in *service to* consumers.

"Pour It Up" also challenges the idea that constructions of Black exotic dancers always already perpetuate discourses that denigrate Black women, especially regarding hypersexual deviance. This kind of theoretical policing—which is often leveled in response to controlling images[2] of Black women, especially the "Jezebel" in this case—further silences Black exotic dancers and renders them illegible. This prevents even Black feminist scholars from paying critical attention to the complex ways Black exotic dancers navigate power and resistance. Thus, we have yet to fully acknowledge the complexities of these women's subjectivity, especially as we theorize their desires to perform exotic dancing. To be fair, this territory is not completely uncharted. As G. D. Pough (2007) notes,

> These women see the videos as their entry into the world of stardom. They are aspiring actresses, models, singers, and even rappers themselves. They gladly pose in the magazines and preen in the videos, and the best and brightest of them are paid very well to do so . . . . These are not necessarily the poor, victimized women of old. (p. 86)

Still, I want to offer yet another way of thinking about exotic dancers and their work, as we must be willing to reckon with the idea that some women

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pursue this style of dance because they *enjoy* the artistry and athleticism, as well as the emphasis on sex/uality. As Williams (Dyer, 2013) notes, "As a pole dance instructor, it's about helping women to transform their bodies and get out of their shells." Likewise, Franklin (Dyer, 2013) comments, "It's funny, as exposed as we were in 'Pour It Up,' [that exposure] made me more comfortable in my own skin." Juxtaposing an analysis of the dancers' performances in the video with their own analyses of the video and their work further illustrates that while theoretical and critical practices have somewhat expanded beyond the victim-empowered binary in relation to exotic dancing, we do not yet fully understand the range of exotic dancer subjectivities in ways that we could if our frameworks were as advanced as that which informs "Pour It Up."

To be fair, the lyrics of "Pour It Up" dedicate very little attention to the artistic athleticism of exotic dancers and the positioning of Rihanna throughout the video also detracts from the significance of the dancers as artists and athletes. More specifically, only two lines throughout the entire song reference the performance of exotic dancers: one that references their work on dance poles and another that references the work they do for money. The latter line, however, is more concerned with consumers' ability to control exotic dancers because of the money they spend. Likewise, most of the lyrics focus mostly on crass consumerism and materialism. Rihanna frequently tells listeners to "pour it up" (drink alcohol) and "throw it up" (spend money) throughout the song while acknowledging her ability to do the same. Additionally, Rihanna is constructed as a consumer in the video, throwing money and pouring money on herself, just as men typically do in popular music videos set in strip clubs. As Mock (Administrator, 2013) noted, Rihanna is often filmed sitting "on a gold throne while draped in gaudy Chanel product placements." In fact, many scenes feature the exotic dancers at the margins of the screen, while Rihanna is placed at the center, signifying her position as the central figure. One could argue that this makes sense, given that Rihanna is the singer and star of the video. However, I question this logic given the tension between Rihanna and Vincent Haycock, who was relieved of his duties as Director of the video due to conflict over creative control (Sanfiorenzo, 2013). Although neither has spoken in detail about this, I have theorized, given the final cut of the video, that Haycock may have wanted to focus less on the dancers and more on strip club consumer culture, while Rihanna likely wanted to retain the focus on her and the dancers. Further, there are examples of music videos that do not visually feature the

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artist at all with creators choosing, instead, to emphasize other aspects of the songs and the stories they tell. In any case, it is important to point out that Rihanna never throws money *at* the dancers, subverting the idea that the dancers are *only* significant as a consumer commodity.

Rihanna's attempts to subvert the denigration of exotic dancers also results in her dancing in the video, often on and around a dance pole. As Oth'than "Otheezy" Burnside, the video's choreographer, points out, "Rihanna is amazing and she's naturally not afraid of her body and her sexuality. It was very easy for me to give her certain moves" (Dyer, 2013). Similarly, Moneii notes, "RiRi was good! She asked for some pointers, so I taught her how to make her booty go up and down separately. She was getting it!" (Dyer, 2013). One the one hand, I do appreciate Rihanna's direction of the video—especially her having myriad conversations with the dancers in order to acknowledge their expertise. On the other hand, her dancing in the video suggests, at least in part, that exotic dancing is something that can be achieved simply through a desire to do so, detracting from the time, energy, and practice required to dance professionally. I encountered the implications of such a theoretical position when one of my undergraduate students met with me to discuss a project she wanted to pursue examining exotic dance. Her research plan entailed visiting Atlanta to audition at an unspecified strip club that apparently conducts open auditions. My first question was, "What kind of talent do you have or plan to acquire that will allow you to be an exotic dancer?" When she was not prepared to answer, I spoke with her at length about the danger in assuming professional dancers do "easy" work that requires little to no professional commitment, and decided against supporting that particular project. "Pour It Up," in many ways, perpetuates this simplistic logic because of Rihanna's positioning as an exotic dancer in the video.

Another limitation of the video is that it perpetuates the idea that only dancers with "ideal" body types have the kind of health, shape, and physicality required to pursue rigorous dancing. As Takiyah Nur Amin (personal communication, October 24, 2014) points out, "We only revere certain bodies as 'suitable' for dance . . . these ideals are also present in the professional dance realm, particularly when we think about Black women." In this way, the dancers in "Pour It Up" adhere to a homogenous standard of beauty and acceptability. Most of the dancers are light-skinned. All the dancers have relatively thin bodies that most audiences would deem "suitable" for dance, especially exotic dance. This did not need to be the case: Roslyn "Roz the

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Diva" Mays—personal trainer, gym instructor and award-winning pole-dancer—founded Dangerous Curves, the first annual pole-dancing contest for plus-size women in the U.S. the same year as the album's release. It stands to reason that Rihanna and her music video production team may not be familiar with the competition, but it is often assumed that women with bodies like those at this competition would not have bodies "sexy" enough for "Pour It Up."

As an additional caution against positioning "Pour It Up" as radical meta-anarrative about Black exotic dancers, the working environment on set was not always safe and comfortable for the dancers. As Cane states,

> Coming to the set, I didn't expect to be pole dancing on water. It looked great on camera but is such a hazard. The pole was wet, it was very difficult to maintain our grip. I went to flip upside down and slipped all the way down. (Dyer, 2013)

This treatment of the dancers behind the scenes is indicative of the ways in which exotic dancers and their work are often disregarded and disrespected, even by someone like Rihanna who appears to appreciate the work more than other major "players" in the popular/mainstream music industry.

Still, intellectuals can build from this work as we continue thinking about Black exotic dance and strengthening our investments in Black feminist theories about objectivity, subjectivity, and sex work. Otherwise, when popular and academic discourses theorize exotic dancers as primarily oppressed objects merely "shaking their ass for cash," their strength, agility, endurance, and artistry are ignored. Subsequently, this ignorance becomes the reductive mechanism often employed to position ourselves as heroes who will recover dancers' sexuality and/or eradicate their oppression. Instead, we should attempt to understand more clearly the ways in which exotic dancers communicate their own significance on their own terms, including understanding that they do "speak out" and "talk back" with their bodies and movements. "Pour It Up" offers new possibilities for popular and academic discourses about exotic dancers by theorizing their performances as a space where Black pleasure politics can become unchained from debilitating objectification. As Hobson (2002) suggests, "Somehow, the creation of a black feminist aesthetic must challenge dominant culture's discourse of the black body grotesque and articulate a black liberation discourse on the black body beautiful" (p. 89). As we continue to theorize and politicize desire and pleasure more saliently, we must challenge dominant discourses as we simulta-

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neously identify the spaces in which we can begin to build foundations that model and communicate the importance of our work.

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Notes

1. Here, I rely on T. de Lauretis's (1984) definition of subjectivity when she claims, "Subjectivity is produced not by external ideas, values, or material causes, but by one's personal, subjective engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, and affect) to the events of the world" (p. 159).

2. Here, I am relying on P. H. Collins's (2000) definition of "controlling images" when she claims, "The dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of several interrelated, socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group's interest in maintaining Black women's subordination" (p. 72).

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Beyond the Side Eye

Black Women's Ancestral Anger as a Liberatory Practice

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ABSTRACT—This article investigates how hauntology provides an entry into the ways relationships, forged out of trauma and anger, give way to Black women's political actions. Anger, resulting from race-gender trauma, gives voice to the dead allowing them to speak in the here and now. Said anger can provide a vehicle to work through collective trauma and in my case, speak to Black women's experiences with democracy. In this article I bring together hauntology, anger, and Black feminist praxis as a way of showing how hauntological relationships allow for an expression of intergenerational narratives of trauma and a critique of the state and state-centered violence, and offer a way for healing and achieving justice.

KEY WORDS—Anger, Autoethnography, Black feminism, Black women, hauntology

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> The death of Trayvon Martin, [2012] touches me in a place so deep that I simply don't have the words to explain nor can I fully comprehend.
>
> —Personal Journal Entry

Yes, I am moved, by the murders of Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland (from structural violence), Roneshia McBride, Rekia Boyd, Eric Garner, Mike Brown, Freddie Gray . . . , but there is something about the murder of Trayvon Martin that continues to resonate with me in a manner that is different from the other murders by the hands of the police and/or "private" citizens. I could never understand my response to Trayvon. We never met and I know nothing of this young man beyond what was shared on social media and other outlets. I searched his face to see if I saw the faces of my younger Black male cousins. There was no clear recognition, but the sorrow I felt was real. Then I had a conversation with a dear friend, a Black woman and mothering member of the academy.

"Julia, you are mourning," she calmly told me, "You're in deep mourning" (V. Saleh-Hannah Personal Communication, 2013). I was seeking answers to my experience—which was one of sadness and anger. This is a woman who studies hauntology and Black womanhood and so I listened. In that moment, my sister-colleague introduced me to the theory that the memory of violence and trauma can haunt. I was aware of the notion of hauntology through my reading of books such as *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. But had never thought of my experience with the death of Trayvon Martin through a lens of hauntology.

> As Viviane Saleh-Hanna (2015) states:
>
> Black Feminist Hauntology is an anti-colonial analysis of time that captures the expanding and repetitive nature of structural violence, a process whereby we begin to locate a language to speak about the actual, not just symbolic or theorized violence that is racial colonialism. (n.p.)

What Viviane gave me, in our discussions and through her writings, was a language—both academic and non-academic—to analyze, explain, and understand the depth of my emotions regarding the murder of Trayvon Martin. Years later, in 2017, another piece of this puzzle was revealed. My expe-

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rience with the murder of Trayvon Martin opened me up to hauntings and deeper spiritual and political relationships with the women who comprise my ancestral feminine divine spirit. It is through my experience with trauma and the resulting anger that my political project for justice and liberation of Black women and their communities has been changed and now includes more of a focus on healing. Furthermore, as a result of their visits, I have found a way to a place of healing others and myself.

In this paper, I investigate how hauntology provides an entry into the ways relationships forged out of trauma and anger give way to Black women's political actions—a way of asserting Black women's subjectivity. Anger, resulting from race-gender trauma, can give voice to the dead and allow them to speak in the here and now. As I argue, anger can provide a vehicle to work through collective trauma and, in my case, speak to Black women's experiences with democracy.

I place my personal experiences with race-gender trauma—and the resulting sadness and anger—alongside residues of the past via hauntology. To this end, I offer a personal testimony of anger, an emotion that has been instrumental in my fight against the oppression faced by Black women and their communities. Anger, resulting from the ongoing trauma we face allows me to tap into a genealogy of Black womanhood who cannot rest until justice is achieved. So how do we achieve justice for the Black feminine divine sprit of which I am a part? This brings me to Black feminist work, that, while captured in more recent Black feminist scholarship, is a part of the process of haunting—if we think of Black feminist work as a historical and on-going project to challenge silence and invisibility that results in the historical and ongoing oppression of Black women and their communities.

I bring together hauntology, anger, and Black feminist praxis as a way of showing how hauntological relationships allow for an expression of intergenerational narratives of trauma, silence, resistance, etc., and a desire to critique the state and state-centered violence as a way of healing and achieving justice. To facilitate this type of testifying, I rely on Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000) and autoethnography (Adams, 2012) to explore how my experiences with anger not only opened me up to my divine ancestral feminine lineage, but give me a place of hope to engage in a political project as I face trauma. Considering Black women's use of anger, across time, space, and generations, in their quest for social justice adds to our understanding of Black women's political behavior, which may help explain contemporary events.

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Hauntings: Entering into Relation with my Black Feminine Divine Lineage

Hauntings provide
an entry point
into knowing.
The question is:
do we want to know?

Hauntology is often associated with trauma (and rightly so), but I want us to also consider hauntology as a place of healing, love, and activism. As Saleh-Hanna (2015, n.p.) posits, "As we know, ghosts remain because justice has not been achieved." While we work to heal from the trauma, which is indeed intergenerational, and to achieve a just society for Black women, the ghosts/ancestors do bring into our lives healing love and direction for activism. This has been my experience with hauntology.

The murder of Trayvon Martin and the subsequent attacks I faced brought me to a place of intense pain (I explore some of my experiences below). At times, I doubted myself, my voice, and my role in the quest for social justice. I felt myself drawing into a ball—a ball of protection to minimize the trauma I faced (and to some extent continue to face). The trauma and mourning I experienced at the murder of Trayvon Martin showed me that I was carrying my pain and the pain of the women who make up my Black feminine divine lineage. It was as if Trayvon Martin was birthed, in another lifetime, to one of these women and as a consequence to me. As Anne Whitehead (2004) states:

> Trauma does not lie in the possession of the individual, to be recounted at will, but rather acts as a haunting or possessive influence which not only insistently and intrusively returns but is, moreover, experienced for the first time only in its belated repetition. (p. 5)

The murder of Trayvon Martin opened me up to the bleated repetition of trauma faced by the women who make up my Black feminine divine lineage. I write on my experiences with haunting in other places, and as such, do not offer an extensive analysis of them here. Instead, my focus is in showing how the visits showed me the interrelatedness of my experiences with anger and how they continue to shape my experience with healing vis-à-vis the political work I do.

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In 2015, Ida B. Wells Barnett visited me. She came to me with a smile and with her hands open, as though she was offering me something. Ida B. Wells Barnett, in the face of the lynching of members of her community, chose to use her voice to make visible the atrocities of the state and private citizens against Blacks. She became a journalist and ran a newspaper with no formal training. I argue that anger, given how it functions (see below), was an impetus of Ida B. Wells Barnett's defiance and decision to speak in the face of violence. The intensity of the trauma I faced often left me immobile, unsure as to what to do. One of the ways this manifested was in my writing—I got to a point where I could not write. During this visit, she instructed me, in a very gentle way, to tell the stories of Black women. My role in the fight for freedom was to record stories of Black women and the complexities and depth of our experiences. Ida B. Wells Barnett gave me a way out of that immobility. She allowed me to move beyond my fear of the unknown, my fear of being harmed, and to speak.

In January 2017, as I was undergoing an acupuncture session, I heard a voice. It was a quiet, determined voice of a woman. An older woman, whom I sensed was enslaved, said, "they tried to kill me before, but they didn't." Not knowing what to do, I laid quietly while pondering the meaning of this visit. Finally, I realized that this was the woman who had lost her son (sometime in the past) in a manner similar to the loss of Trayvon Martin. This was a woman who was a part of me—her trauma, her sadness, her anger, and her sense of determination for justice resided in me. In that moment everything made sense. I understood the message I received from Ida B. Wells Barnett to write our stories—to tell the stories of Black women in a way that they could not be ignored.

These visits, and others, allowed me to give voice to the trauma I faced in the present and the past with the hope of changing the future. Hauntings blur boundaries between the past and present and between self and other. According to Avery Gordon (2008, p. 14), haunting is an alteration of time where what appears to have been concealed from the past is now no longer avoidable and as such becomes present by the person who is visited. Haunting requires, and in essence demands, attention by stating that what one has "repressed, blocked or confined" is still alive and near, resulting in a "something-must-be-done" feeling. My opening to this legion of women who graced me with their visits helped me make the unbearable past and present bearable and they moved me to action.

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A Black Feminist Theoretical Framework of Anger

"Every Black woman in America lives her life somewhere along a wide curve of ancient and unexpressed angers" (Lorde, 2007[1984], p. 145). Emotion has been discussed and referenced in works analyzing the modern civil rights movement (see Robnett, 1997), however, emotion, especially anger, remains under-theorized from an intersectional perspective. Developed by Black women and other women of color, intersectionality is a standpoint theory, challenging the simultaneity of oppressive power structures experienced by Black women and women of color (Crenshaw, 1989; Smith, 2000). Given the limited literature on the intersection of race, gender, and emotions, we know little about how African American women link emotions to questions of identity and politics—through time and space. In this section, I offer a framework of anger using the work of Black women that allows us to bring together emotion, in this case anger, and hauntology as a means of thinking of how Black women resist and heal from trauma.

Anger, in general, is often constructed as a negative emotion, something to be shunned and silenced (hooks, 1995). Furthermore, women are frequently coerced into silence (Houston & Kramarae, 1991) and they are often socialized to be silent (Montoya, 2000). As Kim (2013) argues:

> Regardless of the merits of that persons' reasons for anger, the characterization of "angry" can dismiss not only the content of that person's thoughts and feelings, but also the entire person, in a sense erasing subjectivity and agency. This sense of anger as pathological is often associated with women and racial-cultural Other. (p. 1)

hooks further argues that the silencing and shaming of anger serves to promote and sustain White racial order. As hooks (1995) theorizes, part of the colonizing process has been to teach people of color to repress their rage against racism so that Whites do not feel targeted. As a result, anger becomes internalized or misused and renders the oppressed powerless. Black women, as a result of their race and gender, are targeted for the repression of anger. The stereotype of the angry Black woman is one way this repression expresses itself. The pejorative stereotype suggests that Black women are ill tempered, overbearing, illogical, hostile, and aggressive without provocation (Davis 1981; West, 1995; Collins, 2000; Chito Childs, 2005). As such, it is used to dismiss Black women's legitimate complaints against state-sanctioned oppression and inequalities (see Griffin, 2012). I am less concerned with the stereotype of the angry Black woman and instead direct

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my focus on anger as an emotion and a political tool. Anger is thought of as "part of the 'stuff' connecting human beings to each other and the world around them, like an unseen lens that colors all our thoughts, actions, perceptions and judgments" (Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2001, p. 10).

There exists no unified definition of anger (see Edmunds & Kendrick, 1980). Instead, anger is often categorized as an "attack-emotion" in the sense that anger is used to "attack," in either a destructive or non-destructive sense, another person or system who or that is perceived as having committed a wrong, in hopes of achieving a different account (Fischer & Roseman, 2007). In this analysis, anger is not treated as "an inevitable, justifiable reaction to conditions of inequality but as a social product contained, transformed, given meaning, and used strategically" (Mirchandani, 2003, p. 36).

Audre Lorde and bell hooks offer a Black feminist intervention of the social functioning of anger among Black women and other community members. Lorde suggests that anger represents a desire by the oppressed to live a just and equitable life. Consider the following:

> Black women are expected to use our anger only in the service of other people's salvation or learning. But that time is over. My anger has meant pain to me but it has also meant survival, and before I give it up I'm going to be sure that there is something at least as powerful to replace it on the road to clarity. (Lorde, 2007[1984], p. 132)

In this same text Lorde asserts that anger is not simply an individual response to oppression, but is in fact a collective expression. Consequently, Black women's anger should be thought of as both a collective political and an evaluative emotion that results from their standpoint. Thus, the emotion of anger is recognized as political.

Given the understanding that anger can be political, the expression of it can be used in the service of liberation. As described by Gottlieb (1992), anger is part of a sequence of political activity that moves from suffering to anger to revolt, in the form of individual and collective action. At the same time, hooks (1995) reminds us that one must be careful not to become consumed by anger. This is the case, according to Novaco (2007, p. 35), because "anger is also problematic as a chronic stressor causing wear and tear on the body when recurrently activated." For anger to be liberatory it must be translated into action, action that works against White supremacy, the source of the rage (Lorde, 2007[1984]). It is also important to hold on to hope, as Ahmed explains:

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> But hope is also implicit in the very attachment to protest: it suggests that what angers us is not inevitable, even if transformation can sometimes feel impossible. Indeed, anger without hope can lead to despair or a sense of tiredness produced by the 'inevitability' of the repetition of what one is against. (Ahmed, 2004, p. 251)

As stated earlier, I argue that anger serves as a primary emotion that leads some Black women to the place of action.

Drawing on bell hooks and Audre Lorde, a Black feminist understanding of anger suggests that it is a legitimate emotional response to multiple and interlocking oppressive systems and structures. Anger is evaluative in that it is used to challenge what is wrong and as a means of resisting what is wrong. Anger is a central emotion for inspiring action. It is necessary for survival. Anger, based in history, is simultaneously individual and collective, visionary, relational, generational, and political. Anger as an emotion is "in-between" in the sense that its ontology is neither present nor fixed. Anger can exist between worlds and can give voice to the dead; thereby, fostering a relationship with those existing in the now. In other words, anger can haunt.

Autoethnography: Anger as Pedagogy of Resistance and Healing

My experiences with the murder of Trayvon Martin, and the subsequent visits from the women of my feminine divine linage showed me that the past and future affect my (our) sense of place in the present (the use of the term "my" here is not to suggest individualism, but should be read as a collective as I am a part of a lineage of Black women—the women who haunt). Ida B. Wells Barnet and the woman to whom Trayvon belonged to in a previous life were both haunted by state-sanctioned violence. So as I write this section of the paper, I encourage you to read it in a relational manner because while it is my voice, it is simultaneously the voices of the women of my past and my future. I write with the hope that Lorde says is necessary for anger to be productive, that the future will have a different story to tell.

I employ an auto-ethnographic approach, grounded in Black feminist thought, to tell our stories of anger, resistance, and healing. Autoethnography holds the potential to promote change, in part because it calls on "us to reflect on what could be different because of what we have learned" (Wall, 2008, p. 3). In thinking about Black feminist autoethnography, Griffin (2012) writes:

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> Black feminist autoethnography as means to voice is obligated to: raise social consciousness regarding the everyday struggles common to Black womanhood; embrace self-definition as a means for Black women to be labeled, acknowledged, and remembered as they wish; humanize Black women at the intersections of multiple forms of oppression; resist the imposition of controlling images; and self-reflexively account for how Black women can reproduce systemic oppression. (p. 12)

Not only is much knowledge to be gained from lived experiences, the work of autoethnography also moves Black women from object to subject, a key objective of Black feminist thought. This is what the women were asking me to do during their visits.

Autoethnography relies on personal narratives and first person accounts and essays within the context of culture (DeMunck, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Chang, 2008). Through my (our) personal narratives, I give meaning to my (our) various encounters with race-gender violence (by sate, quasi-state, and private entities), to produce the data that inform this analysis. This allows me to explore relationships forged out of trauma and anger as a way of asserting Black women's subjectivity. My individual experiences occur within "larger historical and sociological contexts" (Richardson, 2000, p. 483). My meaning making process of these encounters does not have "lines clearly drawn where description ends and analysis begins, or where analysis becomes interpretation" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 11). This does not suggest that this qualitative analysis lacks rigor.

Unearthing Ancestral Anger: Moving from the One to the Many

> The spiritual and the political become one
> The past, present and future become *one*

As Lorde (2007[1984], p. 127) writes, "anger is loaded with information and energy." My anger, and the anger expressed by Black women (I am not suggesting that all Black women experience anger in the same manner and neither am I suggesting that they all use anger in the same manner) is filled with information that shows how I (we) are working in a context of both opposition/threat—the real life threat of either being detained by the police (the opposition) at best or at worse killed—and self-articulation against violence. Such expressions represent a tension felt by Black women, often

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on daily basis and often undergirding their anger. Black women experience the dialectic between power and vulnerability/opposition and defiance and threat. Yet, we express anger in response to oppressive structures and our constrained ability to protect ourselves, our families, and our communities from state-sanctioned violence; this is the information embedded in our anger. As Rodriguez and Boahene (2012, p. 454) posit, "women express anger at exclusion, unbridled privilege, racial misrepresentations, silence, ill-use, stereotypes, defensiveness, being misnamed, betrayed, and against co-optation." So as you read my entries I ask that you read them in the context of an articulation of anger that is directed towards the systematic and institutionalized inequalities I (we) face on a daily basis. My expressions are not unique, and as such, they demonstrate, at least in part, the voices of Black women who for centuries have fought to address the intersectional concerns of Black women and who have fought to redress race-gender oppression.

My writings and the writings of Audre Lorde and bell hooks represent an articulation of our subjectivity vis-à-vis state-sanctioned violence. Such violence is structural in nature. Structural violence, as articulated by Weigert (1999) is:

> preventable harm or damage . . . where there is no actor committing the violence or where it is not meaningful to search for the actor(s); such violence emerges from the unequal distribution of power and resources or, in other words, is said to be built into the structure(s). (p. 431)

In response to structural violence, bell hooks (1995) argues:

> It was these sequences of racialized incidents involving black woman that intensified my rage against the white man sitting next to me. I felt a "killing rage." I wanted to stab him softly, to shoot him with the gun I wished I had in my purse. And as I watched his pain, I would say to him tenderly "racism hurts". (p. 11)

What I share here is an articulation of my pain, individual and collective, that results from racism and other interlocking systems of oppression. I seek to expose, challenge, and dismantle dominant structures and ideologies that result in the marginalization of Black women—what Ida B. Wells Barnett in her visit encouraged me to do. What I write is a response to the invisibility of Black women and the stories told by the dominant culture, which expect Black women to be silent and by default complicit in the violence imparted on their communities. Below I discuss how my anger embodies four ele-

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ments of a particular Black feminist praxis of the political use of anger—this shows how anger is translated into action, thereby moving Black women from objects to subjects.

Challenging Group Muting

> Today I received the first email sent in response to the Trayvon Martin rally [2012] I organized on campus. Wow! The violence of these emails. I think that they are coming from white men who seem to think that it's appropriate for them to use race-gender violent language to put me in my "place." Some of the language I'll never repeat. But the one that tells me how they wish my family would die horrible deaths is beyond troubling
>
> Journal entry, 2012

I received the first email as my family and I were heading out to lunch. I made the error of checking my email on the ride to the restaurant. In a moment, I choose to remain quiet because I did not want these individuals to ruin our time together. Upon returning home I went into my office, closed the door, sat there and cried. I cried at the nature of the violence conveyed in the emails. I cried because I was afraid. And I cried because I was angry.

The rally was organized in response to experiences with profiling on our campus, of students, other colleagues, and myself. At the time of the organization of the rally, I had been on campus four years and had been profiled five times. Beyond this, there was violence directed towards the Black Studies Program that resulted in, for example, posters being torn down and/or destroyed. Several Black students often spoke with me after their experiences with racial violence on our campus. We had to do something. The invisibility of our pain had become a burden that was too much to bear. We had gone through the "proper" channels to lodge our concerns and seek redress. So the time had come for us to publicize our pain. In private, our voices were muted and we remained invisible. But we recognized that there was power in our collective voices and in bringing our struggles for justice to the public.

I was told that an individual, with "high standing" at the institution, stated, "What did she expect?" in response to the attacks I faced. Instead of interrogating the anti-Black climate prevalent on campus and beyond that led us to organize in the first place, I was viewed as the source of the violence

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and trauma I experienced. The response of the institution follows the practice and process of group-muting, which is an attempt to silence those on the margin (see Berger, 2004; R. N. Brown, 2008).

Although I experienced some fear and sadness in response to our attempts to bring into the open what many of us suffered privately—racism and anti-Blackness—I also found myself rather angry. A few days after receiving the emails I wrote in my journal, "I will not be silenced!!! Yes, I'm afraid, but I'm angrier at the audacity of some people to try to intimidate me. They clearly don't know where I come from." When I wrote they don't know where "I come from," I was thinking of the legions of Black women who had resisted silencing practices that could result in deaths—physical, emotional, and psychic—the women that make up my feminine divine lineage. Zora Neal Hurston captures my understanding of the ancestral memory and knowledge of resistance, born out of anger, with these words: "Like the dead seeming cold rocks, I have memory within that came out of the material that went to make me" (1969, p. 11).

This type of resistance is seen in other Black women's responses to silencing and is reflected in the organizing efforts of Black Lives Matter (which originated after the death of Trayvon Martin) and in Twitter activism that relied on hashtags such as #IfIDieInPoliceCustody (begun after the mysterious death of Sandra Bland). Black death like the murder of Philando Castile (which was live-streamed on Facebook as he was shot by a police officer while his fiancé and four-year-old daughter were in the same car) can work to mute those who resist. Fear, intimidation, and silence in the face of racial assaults are used to force oppressed individuals into silence, dampening/muting their calls for freedom and justice. But yet, Black women resist. I argue that their resistance comes from anger. Consider the following tweets in response to #IfIDieInPoliceCustody. On July 17, 2015, Yung Metaphysique, @SoloExMachina, tweeted, "#IfIDieInPoliceCustody I hope no one insinuates it was simply a consequence of me being outspoken against the thing that killed me." Charlene Carruthers, @CharleneCac, tweeted (July 17, 2015) "#Ifidieinpolicecustody Do not make calls for peace or forgiveness. Do not speculate about my mental state. I'm Black and constantly enraged." It is anger, over injustices, that propelled the actions that lead to the formation of Black Lives Matter and the use of hashtags that call into question social constructions of Blackness in relation to structural violence. This anger did not just emerge in our current times, this is an anger that is intergenerational and consequently provides a blue print for living and resisting state-

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sanctioned violence. Why? Because anger provides a way of knowing that is birthed from hauntologcial relationships. And yes, we rallied.

Resisting the Notion that I'm Here for Others' Gratification

> Dear Lord, I'm so sad. I'm tired of always having to fight for my existence. I'm tired of working at a place that wants to showcase me for diversity points, but that requires me to be silent when it comes to the race-gender oppression I face. I'm tired of being profiled. I'm tired of watching videos of Black men, women and children being murdered as though we are in some friggin' video game and the more of us that are murdered the more points the murderer gets. I'm tired of talking about "micro-aggressions" and I'm tired with "difficult dialogues." Where is this all getting us? We are no closer to being seen and treated as humans with a God-given right to be free. I will no longer participate in their discussions on micro-aggressions. If they want to talk to me or want to use my labor in service of their institutions then we will have to talk about anti-Blackness and racism. We need to talk about race-gender violence that students are experiencing in the classroom. I will not let them pimp me while our experiences are not allowed to be brought front and center. To borrow from Toni Morrison [*Bluest Eye*] I will not allow them to use me to rearrange lies and call it truth.
>
> Journal entry, 2016

When I wrote this, I was reflecting on the notion that Black women's anger seems valid only when it is used in the service of others. Donna Kate Rushin (2015) said it best when she wrote, "The bridge I must be/Is the bridge to my own power/I must translate/My own fears/Mediate/ My own weaknesses . . . And then/I will be useful." I wanted my anger to be used in the service of myself and those that are marginalized. I wanted my anger to be used in service of my Black feminine divine lineage.

My resistance to being used as a token challenges hegemonic constructions of Black female bodies that are often commodified for sexual gratification (Jordan-Zachery, 2017) or rendered invisible. As the above journal entry suggests, I was reconfiguring my (our) anger in my (our) own terms to be used in service of my (our) liberation. bell hooks (1998, p. 67) argues

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that dominant constructions of Black womanhood often prevent the understanding of an alternative representation that would "articulate a vision of resistance, of decolonization that provides strategies for the construction of a liberatory, black female body politics. Black female bodies are almost framed within a context of patriarchal, pornographic, racialized sexualization." Furthermore, my entry offers a broader political message suggesting that I (we) do not see myself (us) as valuable only to others and that I (we) will not be rendered invisible.

As I argue in *Shadow Bodies: Black Women, Ideology, Representation and Politics*, the Black female body serves as a discursive text and is used to evoke particular modes of narrative framing by the public—that is they offer identity narratives. These narratives construct structures of meaning that maintain and perpetuate Black women and girls' oppression. One structure of meaning is that Black women's labor is valuable when it is in the service of others. However, Hortense Spillers through her notion of pornotroping, which refers to the "othering" of Black women and girls' bodies, tells us that while pornotropia is powerful, it is not completely and fully determining because individuals can exercise their response(s) to such. By deciding that I would not be used in some neo-liberal, color-blind story of diversity and inclusion, I was in fact rejecting a form of pornotroping.

The #sayhername campaign, launched May 20, 2015 by the African American Policy Forum similarly captures Black women's deployment of their anger in service of themselves rather than in service of others. As Kimberlé Crenshaw states on the website,

> Although Black women are routinely killed, raped, and beaten by the police, their experiences are rarely foregrounded in popular understanding of police brutality. Yet, inclusion of Black women's experiences in social movements, media narratives, and policy demands around policing and police brutality is critical to effectively combating racialized state violence for Black communities and other communities of color.

Exposing Existing Gaps

My writings also show how I (we) use my (our) anger to expose the gap between social practice and normative policies. Consider the following:

> My heading is pounding. It's going to be a long day. After the first text I received I have yet to fall back asleep. I'm here trying to write my way

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> through my anger. The first text read, "Dr. J-Z you won't believe what's happening. They are yelling at us to go home and shut up." That was followed by another and another. The final one read "Dr. J-Z I've just been called a nig*er" [this text came around midnight]. Multiple students and multiple texts. I decided not to attend the silent vigil in support of Missouri. I can't spend time questioning my choice. My head hurts because of my lack of sleep and because I'm angry. I'm tired of students being called nig*er. I'm tired of the ever-increasing anti-Black racism. Obama's election doesn't seem to help—I never thought it would. But truth be told, I did long for something different. (Journal entry, 2016)

Working through my tiredness and my anger, I decided to write an open letter to the president of the institution. I asked that they stand in the gap for those of us facing anti-Blackness. I even offered concrete actions that would facilitate standing in the gap. It has been over a year and they have not responded. But I did get a response from an individual who is in a position of power, whether substantive or symbolic is debatable. The response was that we should meet and talk about the issues. I was angered by this response. How many meetings did we need? How many conversations must we have so that you can record the violence we face in your black and white notebooks? What are you doing with these notebooks? After reading this rather dismissive response, these were some of my thoughts. We had met so many times and yet they took no substantive action. We were still being profiled, among other racist experiences.

My letter to the president showed that although Black women (and others) have secured legal protections under the law and that the institution was committed to inclusion (at least in theory), our presence in public spaces is not always protected and/or secure. In my letter, I discussed how Black women and their communities experience marginalization and surveillance, thus challenging the notion of the private autonomy of citizenship/belonging—a cornerstone of neo-liberalism. Furthermore, my letter exposed the limited notion of color-blindness often couched in rhetoric that we are "all God's children" or that we are all equal members of the "family." In the vein of Black feminism, I sought to make what is often invisible visible by asking: How is the institution treating some bodies? Mine was a question of democratic principles and practices. In choosing to speak out and resist attempts to silence me by limiting my voice in the public sphere, I highlighted the disjuncture between how the institution saw itself and how those of African

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descent and others experienced our realities. This is part of a long tradition among Black feminist (Crenshaw, 1989; Isoke, 2013). Indeed, this is how we turn our anger into action.

Prefigurative Politics

On July 17, 2015, Charlene Carruthers, @CharleneCac, tweeted, "#IfIDieinPoliceCustody Protest and throw out all notions of respectability. Have the courage of a rioter." What she offered is an understanding of (Black) women's politics that moves outside of what is often sanctioned. She is refiguring a politics of inclusion; telling a different story than the dominant culture's story often used to construct Black womanhood. But she is also pushing the boundaries of democratic participation by suggesting that institutionalized politics is ill equipped to respond to her "death" and that the story of her death should not be contained to private deliberations.

While I cannot speak to Charlene Carruther's emotional state when she tweeted the above statement, I would argue that anger led her to the point where she sought an alternative for the representation of her humanity. By asking folk to riot, she is encouraging them to pick up her anger in the fight for social justice. Here anger is much more than a response to just any wrong she experienced as an individual. She would become the ghosts that Viviane Saleh-Hanna speaks of—in the sense that she becomes a part of Black women's legacy of anger and their quest for justice.

Cuthers was invoking what Schwab (2010) refers to as soul murder and trans-generational trauma. Soul murder occurs when what is most essential to the person, in this case freedom and human dignity, is killed but the body is alive. What is available when the soul (of an individual and/or group of people) has been murdered? I contemplated this in the following journal entry.

> I feel like I'm being haunted by Sandra Bland. She's calling me to do something. It's like she has reminded me that the work I need to do for Trayvon Martin must continue but it must be different. I hear her words, "Cause you know this straight bullshit. And you're full of shit. Full of straight shit. That's all y'all are is some straight scared cops. South Carolina got y'all bitch asses scared. That's all it is. Fucking scared of a female." I don't know why these words seem etched in my mind. Maybe it's because I read them as her indictment of a race-gendered oppressive state that hides behind the ideology of law and order. An ideology that is necessary to prop up neo-liberalism. Yeah, I'm really finding myself in opposition to neoliberalism. Yeah, Bland's words fuel my anger, but it's

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> the last recording of her voice that seems to push me to a place I can't understand. It's not even what she says, "I'm still at a loss . . . I don't even know" that's haunting me. The despair in her voice came a little to close to home as it threatened to reveal my despair. I too don't know how I got here—a place that refuses to see my humanity. Yes, how did we get here? (Personal journal, 2016)

Sandra Bland brought me to a place that I call "Soul Healing" in my journal. Soul healing is my attempt to not simply archive Black women's emotions, but to use these efforts to resist soul murder. This is a place, emotional, and psychic, were I (re)imagine our humanity—this is my political project. This is the political project given to me by the women I am in relationship with—the women who visit me to share the wisdom that came from their anger.

My project includes, in part, organizing *Dearly Beloved*. *Dearly Beloved,* started by Viviane Selah-Hanna and me, is a quilting project that seeks to memorialize those killed by state and quasi-state violence. This project gathers women of color, to not simply stitch the patches that make up the quilt, but to offer a communal space for healing. This is our attempt to resist the official narratives of death that are often used to control and define Blackness and the "Other."

Dearly Beloved is part of my larger attempt to create a community for Black women, where we not only address our traumas, but find healing—soul healing. In order to create and hold such a space, I have worked to organize the Consortium for the Study of Black women and Girls. We held our first Black Women and Girls as Producers of Knowledge and Agents of Change symposium in 2016 (BWGSymposium.org). In this space we think of Black women and girls not as broken and in need of fixing. We encourage conversations about Black women and girls as worthwhile subjects of research and activism. The Collaborative offers both physical and discursive opportunities to engage Black women and girls' subjectivities. Many in attendance told me the symposium was "healing" and "transformative." Darlene Clark Hine (1994, p. 43) captures my intention in creating these types of spaces when she stated, "it was imperative that they [Black women] collectively create alternative self-images and shield from scrutiny these private, empowering definitions of self" as a means of protecting themselves from negative oppressive constructions. By creating these alternative spaces of healing I am engaging in prefigurative politics of inclusion and representation. My anger produced a particular performance where I engaged in a

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political project to reclaim and re-signify, both material and symbolic, voices of Black women through collective healing.

Concluding Thoughts

These women from my past, from our collective past, are demanding recognition. It is through them that I find my place in the fight for justice. It is through this woman, who told me not to worry about being killed by race-gender oppression, that I find healing. Healing for me means affirmation of Black humanity, which has to take place outside of hetero-patriarchal capitalist structures. My anger functions to create healing which, according to hooks (1995), is a communal effort that requires recognition (Bryant-Davis, 2007) and involves mourning (Butler, 2006).

In this essay, I center my experiences with anger. However, I recognize that trauma and anger are transmitted through social networks and experienced relationally among those who inhabit these spaces—in my case the Black feminine divine linage of which I am a part. Anger is real, spatial, temporal, ontological, and epistemological in nature. Thus, when we analyze the intersection of Black womanhood and anger, we have to consider the social functions anger performs. Parks (2010) argues that some Black women use anger to enact social change. State sanctioned violence necessitated that I honor the trauma faced by the women of my divine feminine lineage. They called on me to bear witness, and part of my bearing witness is to speak/record my trauma and theirs. Their hauntings taught me how to live, how to survive, how to fight, how to heal.

My testimony is not simply about my healing, vis-à-vis my actions born of anger, but, following the instructions given by Ida B. Wells Barnett, it serves as a form of my attempt to enact social change. I share my experiences with trauma and anger as a form of textual healing (Griffin, 1996) because it offers a way of constructing a different vision of Black women and emotions and Black women an opportunity to (re)claim power by allowing us to build relationships. As Lorde (2007[1984], p. 151) says, "Black women have a history of the use and sharing of power. From the Amazon legions of Dahomey through the Ashanti warrior queen Yaa Asantewaa and the freedom fighter Harriet Tubman . . . We have a tradition of closeness and mutual care and support. . . ." These are types of relationships that transcend time and space and that operate in the "in betweenness" and heal our souls.

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These relationships make it possible for us to continue to strive towards justice and freedom. This is how we stop our anger from consuming us and in effect resist soul death. This is how we enact the justice our feminine divine ancestors seek.

Julia S. Jordan-Zachery: I am a feminist interdisciplinary scholar and teacher whose interests focus primarily on cultural politics and public policy. An interdisciplinary approach is attractive because the types of questions I explore, in both my teaching and research, require integration of multiple theoretical and methodological approaches. I use an interdisciplinary approach to address complex problems around issues of inequality and social justice. My activities are primarily designed to generate new frameworks for understanding race, class, gender and public policy. As an interdisciplinary scholar, I borrow from and contribute primarily to the fields of Black Studies, Political Science and Women's studies and Gender Studies. A central goal of my research is to contribute to the development of Black feminist theory and practice.

My journey in academe involves somewhat of a winding path. It started at the age of 16 when I entered Medgar Evers College (Brooklyn, NY). I later transferred to Brooklyn College, NY and earned a B.A. in Economics in 1992. Holding on to the dream of being an economist I attended the University of Connecticut and earned my M.A. in Economics. For various reasons I opted to pursue my Ph.D. in Political Science. And here I am today, a Professor of Public and Community Service at Providence College. Additionally, I serve as the Director of the Black Studies Program.

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Beyond Blurred Lines

Black Girls, Urban Teacher Education, and Anti-Rape Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT—In this critical essay, the authors confront silences in urban education research on sexual victimization and other forms of gendered violence in the lives of Black girls. This essay is guided by two overarching questions: What are the silences and challenges regarding sexual victimization and Black girls in urban education? In what ways can (teacher) educators cultivate learning environments that support human rights-oriented and culturally relevant sexual and health education for all students by centering Black girls' gender-specific experiences with sexual victimization? The authors ground their discussion in historical, legal, and psychological research on Black girls and sexual victimization, present findings from a thematic review of interdisciplinary literature to suggest essential components of human rights-oriented and culturally relevant sexual and health education for Black girls and young women, and outline compelling professional and moral considerations for urban (teacher) educators and activists committed to anti-rape advocacy and rape awareness.

KEYWORDS—Black girls, rape, sexual assault, urban education, teacher education

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Introduction

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, about 4,271,000 Black girls between the ages of five and 18 are enrolled in schools across the United States (NCES, 2016). A recent survey indicated approximately sixty-four percent of school-aged girls—2.7 million children—will experience some form of sexual victimization before reaching adulthood (Tonnesen, 2013). For Black girls living and learning in neighborhoods and schools with concentrated poverty, the gender-specific risks of sexual harassment, exploitation, and sexual violence are often exacerbated (Miller, 2008). Thus, the data on rape, molestation, incest, and other forms of sexual violence are a necessary consideration when working to understand the social and academic needs of Black girl students, specifically in under-resourced urban environments. These numbers remind us that in addition to serving as mandated reporters in situations where sexual victimization is suspected, pre-service and in-service educators need to be equipped to help Black girls make sense of the popular societal discourse on race, gender, and rape. This discourse includes news stories about Daniel Holtzclaw, a White Oklahoma City police officer, who was convicted of raping and assaulting thirteen citizens while on patrol. All of the women who testified against him in court were Black. It includes rapper Rich Homie Quan's leaked single, which featured lyrics such as, "Don't want your ho, just want that cookie from her. She tried to resist, so I took it from her." This discourse includes the blog posts that critiqued or defended actor and movie producer Nate Parker, when he attributed his past rape charges and stalking behavior to youth and ignorance. It necessarily includes ongoing allegations against R&B singer R. Kelly, who for decades has been accused of coercing and sexually assaulting Black girls (and women). Kelly's defenders often blame the victims themselves, insulting Black girls' intellect, sexuality, and morality.

The societal popular discourse on race, gender, and rape gets perpetuated in schools through the school culture and climate, teacher pedagogy and practice, student-teacher relationships, and policy development (such as discipline and dress codes). However, no substantive literature base exists that considers the role of the aforementioned stories and statistics in the teaching and learning process in urban communities, and in the healthy identity development of Black girls. Our identities as Black women who are

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also teacher educators and mothers of Black girls compel us to lovingly challenge the field of urban teacher education to confront silences on sexual assault, sexual victimization, and other forms of gendered violence, specifically in the lives of Black girls. Urban schools and urban teacher education are of interest because these schools have been identified as sites in which Black girls face distinct challenges, including disproportionate exclusionary discipline, high rates of poverty, high rates of teacher turnover, and invisibility as it relates to experiences with sexual assault and gendered violence (Evans-Winters, 2005; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Id-Deen, 2016; Miller, 2008; Morris, 2016; Popkin et al., 2015). This critical essay is informed by two guiding questions: What are the silences and challenges regarding sexual victimization and Black girls in urban education? In what ways can (teacher) educators cultivate learning environments that support human rights-oriented and culturally relevant sexual and health education for all students by centering Black girls' gender-specific experiences with sexual victimization?

Our objective is to begin a conversation about school cultures and curricula that support raising issues of dignity, consent, power and sexual coercion in classrooms. We hope that education researchers, activists, and practitioners will be inspired to more critically consider how issues of race, gender, and rape inform their work with Black girls in urban schooling contexts. We begin by providing a brief overview of our positionalities in relationship to the topics in this essay. We then define key terms that provide context for the essay. Next, we situate this conversation within historical, legal, and psychological research on Black women, Black girls, and sexual assault. Then, we present findings from a thematic review of interdisciplinary literature to discuss some of the challenges that face the field of urban teacher education in meaningfully addressing the role that rape, the threat of rape, and rape stigma play in the lives and educational experiences of many Black girls. We draw on scholarship primarily from the fields of education, social work, health, and psychology to examine the silences in urban education and teacher education scholarship on rape and sexual violence experienced by Black girls. In the conclusion, we outline compelling professional and moral considerations for urban (teacher) educators and activists committed to anti-rape advocacy and rape awareness. We conclude by encouraging future directions for urban educators and activists working to fill the silence on Black girls' sexual vulnerabilities and possible sexual futures.

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Researchers' Positionalities

Our interest in examining this topic stems from our personal and professional experiences As Black women, teacher educators, mothers, sisters, daughters, and activists. We draw on our cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998) and time spent in schools as students, teachers, and researchers to make sense of the literature on sexual violence against Black girl students. Here, we reflect on personal and professional experiences that shape our interest in how Black girls' bodies are positioned, interacted with, and assaulted in schools, and the ways in which schools and school personnel can lift the veil of silence about sexual assault and rape and foster the development of identity-affirming learning spaces (Carter, 2007) for Black girls.

Ashley. I was raped the summer after I completed middle school. As I progressed through high school, there were many in-school opportunities where the issue of sexual violence (and healing) could have been raised: advanced placement or honors courses in English, history, civics, and journalism; extracurricular involvement in theater, the Black student union, and speech and debate; or during countless visits to the guidance counselor's office and referrals to in-school-suspension. Although rape was a common theme and concern for most girls in my social circle, the word *rape* itself was notably absent. My peers used euphemisms: "You know her step-daddy *touched* her," or, "They *ran a train on that*" (which seldom if ever referred to an act of consensual group sex). My teachers seemed to avoid any deep confrontation as well. A notable silence occurred when a health sciences teacher played a rape-themed episode of "Degrassi: Junior High" during a unit on sexual education. My fingertips trembled on my desk as she turned off the tube television and the tape ejected from the VCR. I had no reason to be anxious: my teacher turned on the lights immediately after the episode, waited for the bell to ring, and dismissed us to our next class.

I was a late convert to teacher education, where I began to make connections between my health sciences teacher's decision-making and broader sociopolitical issues that keep conversations about rape out of most K-12 classrooms. Many of the urban pre-service and in-service teachers I have encountered seem hesitant to engage questions of consent and sexual contact outside of health education courses, or annoyed that yet another issue is being added to a growing list of social problems that don't readily align with existing standards. I do not have nor do I seek easy answers to their questions. Instead, I support them in thinking about autonomy, empathy and advocacy

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as prerequisites for critical citizenship, and the ways that critical citizens are necessarily concerned about the sexual vulnerabilities of Black girls.

Dorinda. I remember a playground game at recess during elementary school, where young boys found it comical to grope the buttocks of young girls. Many of the girls, myself included, found this humorous and played along, allowing the boys to grope us as a sign that they thought we were cute. Unbeknownst to the teachers, these types of games continued throughout the school year. Girls who were not "lucky enough" to be groped were considered ugly. This type of sexualized play at an early age informed my developing thoughts regarding the role of my body in being pleasurable to the opposite sex. In many ways, the objectification of my female body and its use for the opposite sex was being formulated in my formative years. Additionally the boys in my class were learning about the types of access they might have to girls' bodies without necessarily asking permission. During my days as a high school math teacher, I recall many stories of Black female students complaining about the inappropriate touching of their bodies committed by boys in the school. Now as a teacher educator, I am reminded of stories over the last 12 years from my Black female pre-service teachers regarding their own experiences—and those of their friends—with inappropriate touching and sexual relationships between male adults and female students in their high schools. These interactions often occurred on school grounds. My history with personal inappropriate touching of my Black female body, and hearing of experiences from my Black female students, leads me to implore the field of urban teacher education (and teacher education writ large) to be more explicit in its attention to issues of gendered violence, sexual assault, and rape against Black girls in schools.

Key Terms

The word *rape* is used often in public discourse, but the definition of rape and related terms are constantly evolving (Freedman, 2015). We use *rape* and *sexual assault* to describe any vaginal, oral, or anal penetration that occurs without an individual's active and continuing consent. Buchanan, Settles, and Woods (2008) defined *sexual harassment* as "a variety of unwanted gender-related comments and behaviors" that is intended or experienced as offensive, demeaning or threatening (p. 348). *Sexual coercion* is the use of manipulative or exploitative tactics to compel sex "from an unwilling partner" (Eaton & Stephens, 2016, p. 2). *Sexual victimization* is a more expansive

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concept, and includes "a continuum [with] behaviors ranging from threats/pressures to engage in vaginal, anal, or oral sex to physical violence to force a woman or man to engage in sexual activity against his or her will" (Cecil & Matson, 2005, p. 203). An overlapping term is *gendered violence*, which we define as physical force and psychological intimidation used to reinforce systems of patriarchy (Cardyn, 2002; Crenshaw, 1991).

This brief review of keywords is not intended to be exhaustive. We note the need to acknowledge and introduce teachers to newer language that is useful in describing the types of gendered violence that Black girls face. *Acquaintance rape* is perpetrated by someone known to the victim, with or without a pre-existing romantic relationship (Casarino, 1996). *Date rape* is perpetrated by an intimate partner or romantic interest, and often involves the voluntary or involuntary ingestion of drugs or alcohol that incapacitate the victim (Rosenbaum, 2007). With the growing popularity of social media, collaborative online content and photo and video sharing phone applications, there is also an urgency to recognize the threat of *cyberstalking*, the use of electronic communication devices to repeatedly threaten or harass an individual (Packard, 2000); *sexualized cyberbullying,* the use of technology to socially exclude, threaten, insult, or shame another person (Korenis & Billick, 2014, p. 98); and *revenge pornography* or *revenge porn*, "the non-consensual distribution of [sexually] explicit images to incite embarrassment or shame" (Eikren & Ingram-Waters, 2016, para. 1). We also note that while these terms are useful for making sense of broad patterns of violence in the lives of women, gendered violence is often understood and experienced differently across racial and cultural lines. Diversity in historical, material, and social conditions have produced "differing gender-role norms regarding work and family caretaking, social status, and race-based sexual stereotypes" (Buchanan, Settles, & Woods, 2008, p. 348). Women of different racial and ethnic backgrounds might also be targeted for different reasons (Buchanan, Settles, & Woods, 2008; Collins, 2002).

Black Girls and Rape: Historical Considerations

Although sexual assault, sexual victimization, and gendered violence can be inflicted on a member of any race or gender, Tonnesen (2013) noted, "Black girls and young women experience some of the highest levels of sexual harassment at school and have a heightened risk of gendered violence in their communities" (p. 10). Developing insight into contemporary implications

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of Black girls' sexual assault requires attention to the historical sexual vulnerabilities of Black women and girls. The problem of rape in the lives of Black girls is deeply rooted in dominant narratives about Black women's humanity, femininity, and citizenship. In this section, we review how the current condition of Black girls' vulnerability to sexual assault can be directly connected to pervasive racialized and gendered exploitation that began with the chattel enslavement of African and African-descended women. This brief discussion introduces important themes of legal exclusion, prejudice, and misrepresentation that only foreshadow the types of conversations needed to support anti-rape school cultures and anti-rape teaching practices. Based on our personal experiences in teacher preparation programs, we argue that many teachers, students, teacher educators, and various instructional partners lack prior knowledge of Black women's history, and the assumptions about Black women's bodies that emerge in pedagogy, classroom interactions, and curricular materials. Many teacher preparation programs do not provide preservice teachers with a history course of any kind; thus, it would be far-fetched to expect a history of Black women's racialized and gendered experiences in the United States to be part of the teacher preparation program curriculum.

Historically, the legal understanding of rape has been tied to the social construction of race, gender, social class, and citizenship. European theories of racial and sexual difference characterized Black women as the "antithesis of . . . sexual mores and beauty" (Hammonds, 1999, p. 95). In contrast to wealthy and middle-class White women, enslaved and free Black women's sexual worth was systematically devalued and exploited. Prior to the American Civil War, the rape of a Black person was not considered a crime (Clark Hine, 1989; Gross, 2015; Wriggins, 1983). An exemplary case was Celia, an eighteen-year-old girl who killed her White male slave owner and rapist. Celia was tried and hanged for murder on the grounds that an enslaved Black woman did not meet the criteria of 'woman,' and thus was not entitled to protection from the state or the right of self-defense (McLaurin, 1991). In feminist legal theory, systematic rape has been conceptualized as a "badge of slavery," or, a practice deeply connected to the institution of chattel slavery that infringes upon the fundamental rights of citizens according to the Thirteenth Amendment (see Hearn, 1998; Pokorak, 2006). The 1865 passage of the Thirteenth Amendment did not eliminate sexual terrorism against Black communities, and it persisted throughout Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and into the post-Civil Rights era (Hammonds, 1999). Feimster (2009) con-

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tends that Black women's demands for legal protection from rape "radically influenced the politics of Reconstruction and the rise of Jim Crow" (p. 41).

Hall (1983) noted that "after the Civil War, the informal sexual arrangements of slavery shaded into the use of rape as a political weapon, and the special vulnerability of Black women helped shape the ex-slaves' struggle for the prerequisites of freedom" (p. 332). Newly freed Black women were leaders in these efforts and addressed rape and its aftermath by pursuing civil lawsuits for property or inheritance on behalf of themselves and their children (Milewski, 2012; 2012; Rosen, 2009). In 1875, Mary Gracie was made to testify about coercive sexual relations with her former White male owner when petitioning the court to retain ownership of her home and property. Gracie earned the money to purchase the Alabama home through her work as a seamstress, though she was forced to coordinate the sale through her former master's name because the property owners would not sell to Black people. After the man's death, his creditors argued that he had given the land to Gracie as a "mistress," rather than as the result of a legitimate business transaction (Milewski, 2012). The use of the term "mistress" ignored the reality that Gracie's sexual encounters with her master occurred under the duress of enslavement. Gracie ultimately lost her petition when her case was appealed to the Alabama Supreme Court, as well as her home and property. These histories of dehumanization, violence, loss of property, and loss of life are not isolated incidents. As the cases of Celia and Gracie demonstrate, Black women who testified about sexual assault were subject to the ruthless scrutiny of their moral character and sexual history (McGuire, 2004; Milewski, 2012).

Arguments for the emancipation, suffrage, and civic recognition of Black women were in part motivated by the desire to challenge sexual violence as a vehicle of White supremacy (Hammonds, 1999; Feimster, 2009). McGuire (2004) noted that,

> . . . during the Jim Crow era, women's bodies served as signposts of the social order, and white men used rape and rumors of rape not only to justify violence against black men but to remind black women that their bodies were not their own. (p. 907)

Although the use of lynching against Black men throughout the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras has been studied at length, fewer scholars have examined how rape was used as a weapon of racial terror against Black women and girls (Clark Hine, 1989; Feimster, 2009; McGuire, 2004; Rosen, 2009).

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However, as Beal (1969) and others have noted, Black women are uniquely vulnerable to intersecting systems of patriarchy and racism (see also Crenshaw, 1991; Harris-Perry, 2011). Clark Hine argued that "the links between Black women and illicit sexuality" had ongoing implications for Black women's citizenship and communities (p. 912). Understudied is the historical and contemporary reality of intraracial rape, during which Black women experience sexual violence from members of their own communities (Freedman, 2013; Collins, 1993; Roberts, 2014). No matter the identity of the assaulter, Black girls remain disproportionately at risk for sexual victimization and sexual assault (Cook, 2015; Tonnesen, 2013).

Although an estimated one in five women will experience sexual assault or rape (Black et al., 2011), young Black women face a unique risk informed by histories of institutional racism and violence, and economic inequality. In a study of 249 adolescent Black girls, Cecil and Matson (2005) found that only 23.4% of participants had never been sexually victimized. Nearly 60% of Black women have experienced sexual assault by the age of 18 (National Organization for Women New York City). Despite their increased vulnerability, Black women sexual assault survivors are less likely than White women to receive media coverage, to elicit public sympathy, or to have their rapists prosecuted (Collins, 1990; Neely, 2015). Black girl victims and their families are often forced to defend their moral character against a litany of racialized and gendered stereotypes, including the notion that Black girls are hypersexual (Neely, 2015). Despite notable differences in how the rape of Black and White girls is understood and prosecuted, research indicates that "the physical, psychological, and sexual effects" of rape are similar for both groups (Wyatt, 1992 as cited in Russo et al., 1997, p. 317). Black girls who have survived sexual assault are likely to experience low levels of self-esteem and high rates of depression (Cecil & Matson, 2005). Although many students struggle with inadequate resources to prevent, process, and heal following a sexual assault, the conditions in which Black girls experience rape and its aftermath occur in a complicated nexus of racism, sexism, and limited access to legal, medical, and mental health services.

Sexual violence against girls and women of color is rarely the focus of civil rights organizing at a national level, and it is also rarely a topic of discussion in urban education and teacher education. Research and discourse regarding Black girls and their identity development in urban contexts as well as their experiences with school discipline in urban schools is silent on the roles that sexual harassment and assault, rape, and other forms of

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sexual violence play in shaping identity development and performance, as well as the academic and social behaviors of Black girls in school. Furthermore, through their curriculum and field experiences, teacher preparation programs have been silent on raising preservice teachers' consciousness regarding rape and other forms of sexual violence and have not equipped teachers with the necessary tools to anticipate or respond to sexual harassment and assault when it occurs in the school context. Educators cannot single-handedly eradicate rape, the threat of rape, or rape stigma from the lives of Black girls. They can, however, address professional silences on rape and create possibilities for anti-rape advocacy in ways that take advantage of their expertise and that offer the potential for radically transforming education spaces for Black girls specifically, and for all students.

Challenges and Silences Regarding Rape and Black Girls in Urban Teacher Education

The field of urban teacher education would be notably enhanced by a deeper examination of how the experiences of Black girls and other girls of color with sexual violence and rape inform their identity development and academic and social behavior in school. As we conducted our review of the literature, we noted relevant and progressive conversations taking place in research on urban sex and health education. We present these findings to illustrate the importance of creative and interdisciplinary partnerships in addressing themes of sexual victimization, particularly in secondary schools. However, we were troubled by the scarcity of dialogue or empirical research on this topic and the broader topic of Black girls, sexual violence, and urban education. A Google Scholar search of the terms, "Black girls, rape, and school" yielded research on acquaintance rape and date rape among middle and high school students and did not necessarily have a focus on racialized forms of sexual violence. Several studies in the health field show that girls are reporting greater instances of unwanted sexual experiences either by an acquaintance or during a date (e.g., Davis, Peck, & Storment, 1993; Erickson & Rapkin, 1991; Rickert & Weimann, 1998); however, the research has not historically focused explicitly on Black girls' experiences with either form of rape.

Much of the research on Black girls in urban education explores their identity development and performance in schools (Fordham, 1993; Lei, 2003; Morris, 2007), their ability to be resilient in learning spaces (Evans-Winters,

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2005; Winn, 2011), and their experiences with school discipline (e.g., Blake et al., 2011; Blake, Butler, & Smith, 2015; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Morris, 2016; Wun, 2014, 2016). Literature on Black girls' identities and how their bodies are constructed as part of identity development, has shown that school dress codes have a disproportionately negative effect on Black girls compared to their female counterparts (e.g., Carter Andrews & Gutwein, 2017). Dress code policies that indicate acceptable lengths of skirts and shorts and prohibit spaghetti straps seem reasonable on the surface. However, , Black girls' bodies are often viewed through an entirely different lens: the same top and skirt on a Black female body and a White female body are not received equally. Girls who are busty, have thick thighs, and a "bubble booty" often get construed as slutty (Millner, 2014). These types of stereotypes and nuances regarding body politics that Black female students often have to navigate in urban schools are rarely, if ever, discussed in teacher preparation program classrooms. Thus, future teachers are ill-prepared to properly advocate for sensible student handbook policies and discipline policies at the district- and school-level or manage issues with body politics in the school culture and their own classrooms. As one mother stated in her online blog, her daughter was assumed to be "sexy. Inappropriate. Wild. Loose. And must be tamed, by any means necessary" based on what she was wearing (Millner, 2014). Her daughter's voice echoed sentiments of other Black and Brown girls who have reported to researchers about their experiences with dress code violations in their schools: "there's a lot of white girls who wear some scandalous clothes, and they never seem to get in trouble for it . . . like ever" (Millner, 2014).

In the field of criminology and criminal justice, work by Jody Miller (2008) has explored the complicated relationships between violence, poverty, and the sexualized lived of experiences of Black girls. Her interviews with Black girls *and* boys highlights the troubling realities of gender-based violence, and underscores the isolation, invisibility, and victimization that Black girls experience through sexualized violence not only in schools but also from family and friends. Miller's research is useful to examining rape and sexual assault among Black girls in urban communities because it illuminates the deeply troubling and engrained beliefs about gender that teach young people gender violence as deserved, due to individual Black girls' "flawed" characters. Miller's research, which draws upon the voices of adolescent Black girls and boys, can be useful in teacher preparation courses focused on urban education so that preservice teachers glean a deeper inter-

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sectional analysis of race, gender, socioeconomics, sexualized victimization, and power and how these issues manifest in communities and schools. Further, teacher educators can utilize this work to help future teachers cultivate pedagogies and dispositions for affirming Black girls' selves and advocating for their full humanity in school contexts.

In some of her latest work that lifts up the voices of Black girls and their experiences with school discipline, Kimberlé Crenshaw and colleagues (2015) find that these girls' experiences with sexual harassment and bullying in school contributes to their funneling into the school-to-prison pipeline. Instead of schools intervening in situations that involve sexual harassment, they use zero tolerance policies to curb situations; enforcement of these policies may actually increase girls' vulnerability to harassing behavior by penalizing them for attempting to defend themselves against such acts (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015). Crenshaw and her colleagues found that schools' inability or resistance to address Black girls' trauma associated with sexual assault and other forms of violence depicted an overemphasis on discipline instead of counseling and meeting the psychological and emotional needs of Black girls. Schools' failure to address Black girls' trauma undermined the students' capacity to achieve academic goals and complete schooling.

In many ways, schools perpetuate the slave-era legacy of institutionalized rape and sexual assault of Black women and girls. Though no causal data was identified, recent research on sexually vulnerable, at-risk girls indicated that they all reported disciplinary action against them, including detention, suspension, and expulsion (Bay-Cheng & Fava, 2014). Suspended or expelled girls often lose the relative safety and supervision provided by school leadership and school routines, increasing their vulnerability to sexual assault and sexual victimization. Schools' inability to consider how Black girls' experiences with sexual abuse leads to school push-out and incarceration perpetuates the stigmatization and criminalization of Black girls who have experienced rape and other forms of sexual violence. It also prevents teachers from exploring curriculum and practice that would allow them to enact human rights-oriented and culturally relevant sexual and health education that is gendered in ways that critically raise students' consciousness regarding sexual violence and how to resist it. These challenges and silences in urban teacher education are connected to challenges and silences in K-12 sex education and its lack of a racialized and gendered perspective inclusive of varying communities.

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Challenges and Silences Regarding Rape and Black Girls in Urban Sex Education

Controversy over sex education in schools reflects a lack of political, religious, and moral consensus on rape, LGBTQ rights and identities, adolescent sexuality, birth control, abortion and masturbation (Zimmerman, 2015). Communities and school leaders have tough questions to answer about the best ways to equip all students for responsible sexual citizenship. Within these broader debates on the appropriate content and pedagogies for sex education, we were inspired by research that supports rethinking sex education to meet the specific vulnerabilities of urban Black girls and other marginalized groups. Despite the dearth of explicit dialogue and research about rape and sexual violence against Black girls in urban contexts, there have been some programmatic attempts at increasing students' cultural sensitivity in this area; this work is a move in the right direction toward providing humanizing and relevant sex and health education in urban schools.

Some research highlights the utility of sexual assault and dating violence prevention programs for urban youth. For example, Weisz and Black (2001) examined the impact of one such program presented to 46 Black youth in an urban middle school. The youth participated in twelve 90-minute sessions over a six-week period in spring of one year followed by twelve 90-minute sessions over a 12-week period in the fall of the same year. The curriculum was implemented by co-trainers from the local Rape Counseling Center and co-trainers from the local university. Sessions included modeling, role-plays, experiential exercises, and discussions to help youth acquire knowledge and better understand their own attitudes and behavior about dating and violence. After engaging in the program, the seventh graders' knowledge and attitude scores on a posttest measure were significantly higher than pretest mean scores. The results support the notion that early prevention programming among urban youth might are useful and effective. However, the field is still challenged with fully understanding the impact of these types of programs, because evaluations of dating violence prevention programs are limited due to a lack of follow-up measures and the lack of racial/ethnic diversity in the samples. Studies evaluating the intermediate and long-term effects of such programs usually have been based on samples of primarily White youth and report inconsistent results (Frazier, Valtinson, & Candel, 1995; Lonsway, 1996).

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In a literature review on the effectiveness of comprehensive sex education, Haberland and Rogow (2015) described "mounting evidence" that "empowerment approaches" to sex education are effective, particularly for marginalized young women and girls (p. 17). Empowerment approaches describe sex education pedagogies that "empower learners to recognize how social inequities give rise to problems people experience as individuals," encourage students to "see themselves and others as equal members" in sexual relationships, and "engage learners to question prevailing norms through critical thinking and analysis about their social context" (Haberland & Rogow, 2015, p. 17). The authors argue that simply providing facts about sexual health is insufficient. Facilitators of empowering comprehensive sex education must be intentional in addressing issues of knowledge, power, and identity in conversations about sexual rights. Similarly, DiClemente et al. (2009) described the Horizons project, a sex education intervention which emphasized ethnic pride while offering information about HIV, condom use, and healthy relationships. The Horizons project "emphasized ethnic and gender pride by discussing the joys and challenges of being an African American adolescent female, acknowledging the accomplishments of African American women, reading poetry written by African American women, and framing artwork created by African American women artists" (p. 171). Facts about sexual health combined with a culturally relevant, empowering approach resulted in a 35% lower risk of acquiring chlamydia and an increase in condom use.

In another study, Eaton and Stephens (2016) interviewed 38 Black adolescent girls about understandings of male-female verbal sexual coercion. Black girls experience and respond to verbal sexual coercion in ways that draw on racialized and gendered scripts of femininity, intimacy, and sexuality. For example, their research describes some of the contextually specific ways in which young Black girls in urban communities associate romantic relationships with popularity, self-esteem, and social stability (Eaton & Stephens, 2016). Specific recommendations for sex education in predominantly Black, urban high schools included working to "reduce the importance of relationship termination in girls' minds," helping Black girls see relationship termination with sexual coercive or exploitative partners "as a positive outcome" (Eaton & Stephens, 2016, p. 22). The authors argue that culturally relevant, participant-derived data is necessary to facilitate meaningful, accessible, and efficacious sex education that empowers Black girls to resist verbal sexual coercion and identify sexual coercion as harmful. Although

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none of the programs in the cited studies were exclusively devoted to anti-rape advocacy and rape awareness, they each demonstrate that in order to be effective, discussions about Black girls' sexual identity and sexuality need to be connected to the values and experiences relevant to Black girls' out-of-school lives and communities.

Implications for Urban Education and Teacher Education

Our objective in this essay was to synthesize some of the powerful concepts and compelling research that shape our efforts as Black women teacher educators to integrate informed conversations about Black girls' sexual rights and anti-rape advocacy into urban education research and praxis, and to challenge urban teacher education to be more explicit in developing and including program curricula that centers Black girls' and women's historical and legal lived experiences with sexual victimization and rape. Given the perpetuation of negative societal discourse and stereotypes of Black girls and women and their sexuality in schools, it is incumbent upon schools, teachers, and teacher educators to create identity-affirming counter-spaces in schools where Black girls (and their peers) understand and respond to humanizing sex and health education. Our review of current literature underscores that pre-service and in-service teachers need curricula that allow them to critically examine sociohistorical depictions of Black women as Jezebels, breeders, and expendable sex objects and the ways in which modern-day media (television, social media, film, music, etc.) continues to normalize these depictions as part of Black femininity. They also need curricula that help them understand how their own content and lessons are filtered through lenses that view race and class as cultural influences that shape sexuality (Froyum, 2009). These curricula might draw on the stories of Celia, Mary Gracie, or other survivors of sexual assault and sexual victimization to reveal how intimately gender expectations have been and remain connected to citizenship identities. These curricula might also use empirical and narrative data to help pre-service teachers make sense of the ways Black girls and other women of color have historically been denied legal protections from rape, and are contemporarily excluded from the social ideal of an "appropriate" rape victim.

A comprehensive sex, sexuality, and gender education does not end in the health education classroom. Teachers across content areas, school leaders at all levels, and teacher educators across programs can create space to

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engage the historical, sociological, and empirical realities of rape and anti-rape advocacy for Black girls and all students. Courses in the social or historical foundations that employ concepts of social justice, intersectionality, and equity in urban educational contexts are prime learning spaces for exploring sexual violence against Black girls and the connections to Black girls' identity development and performance, academic experiences, and overall socioemotional health and well-being in and out of school. We conclude this essay by challenging urban (teacher) educators to engage some specific professional and moral considerations if they are committed to anti-rape advocacy and rape awareness in urban schools. Any teacher preparation program curriculum should include historical, legal, and psychological analyses of Black girls' sexual victimization in schools and communities as a way for teachers to advocate for more humanizing and culturally relevant school discipline policies and sex and health education curriculum (Woodson, 2016).

Additionally, professional development for in-service educators has to include partnership with community organizations that specialize in anti-rape advocacy, rape awareness, and eradication of gendered violence in schools. Lastly, we cannot continue to assume we can remediate the negative experiences of Black girls in urban schools without listening to their voices. Black female narratives are essential to the teacher preparation curriculum and the K-12 curriculum. The work of scholars cited in this essay would be appropriate reading for a teacher education course/program focused on urban education as well as a K-12 sex and health education, social studies, ethnic studies, or some English courses where narrative voice is center to students' learning, critical thinking, and activism.

The continued vulnerability to racism, sexism, poverty, and other structures prevent many Black girls from experiencing sexual safety and from pursuing justice and accessing resources for healing and care in the aftermath of sexual assault or sexual victimization. As shown in the Weisz and Black research, school officials can partner with community organizations and staff whose expertise is in rape counseling and/or social work to co-facilitate a program intervention with youth and adolescents. Additionally, it can also be helpful to engage in critical dialogue about rape and gendered violence when the program facilitators share the same race as the majority of the students being trained (as was the case in the Weisz and Black study). It is important to identify culturally sensitive and responsive curricula to be used with youth who come from communities that have been

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historically marginalized and disenfranchised institutionally in the United States. Curricula should include a variety of learning mediums (e.g., role plays, simulations, dialogues, use of empirical research). This type of engagement is not only good for K-12 students but also preservice teachers in a teacher preparation program. The Weisz and Black research also provided implications for the need to use existing instruments and to develop measures for assessing the knowledge base and attitudes of preservice and in-service teachers regarding sexual assault and sexual violence. At an institutional level, schools of education and K-12 schools, perhaps, assume that future and in-service teachers are inherently equipped to address issues of sexual harassment and assault in the classroom; yet, they may not have dealt with their own histories and experiences with such violence. Providing institutional space for educators to critically reflect on their psychological and emotional well-being related to rape and other forms of sexual violence can be a necessary first step to helping them be successful with aiding Black girls in dealing with their trauma related to sexual assault.

We acknowledge that this essay does not include an international perspective on Black girls, sexual assault, and schooling. Even so, we acknowledge that this is timely and important given the ways in which Black girls' bodies are commodified and victimized in countries across the globe. Though gender and sexuality are recognized as an important axes of identity in urban education research, we have yet to explicitly promote frameworks that allow preservice teachers to meaningfully engage with the subject of gendered and sexual violence. More research is needed to acknowledge and advance our understanding of the nature, meaning, and implications of sexual assault in the lives of Black girls, and in urban education research more broadly. Every Black girl who wakes up to the threat of sexual violence in her home and community, who confronts this violence throughout the school day, or returns to this violence every night has a name. Her struggles present a unique challenge for educators in urban contexts and necessitate a range of historically informed, culturally sensitive, and human rights-oriented practices.

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Walking Through the Dark Forest

Embodied Literacies for Shadow Work in Higher Education and Beyond

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ABSTRACT—Drawing on Anzaldúan approaches to conducting shadow work, in this paper I utilize an abbreviated form of autohistoria-teoría to demonstrate the various ways in which I have cultivated literacies or modes of intelligibilities for meeting the dark, disowned, scary, and painful parts of our memories and experiences. Such literacies have been especially necessary for navigating higher education in the U.S. as a South Asian Brown woman. Using various shadow work literacies such as ethnodrama, poems, a letter to my child-self, dream work, and contemplative mixed media painting, I highlight how possibilities for healing and well-being can be created while working in higher education and engaging in social justice work.

KEYWORDS–healing, shadow work, higher education, autohistoria-teoría, autoethnography

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I LISTEN TO THE STEADY DRUMBEAT. BREATH, SLOW DOWN. HEART, SLOW down. Mind, slow down. I slip a bit further into the warm bath water. My skin disappears under a frothy, bubbled blanket as the drumbeat continues on my speaker. A woman's voice speaks over the drumbeat, instructing me to say, "I cleanse myself" three times before we embark on this shamanic journey into other worlds.

I purchased this album of shamanic drumbeats to usher me into the underworld, the womb, the middleworld, and the upperworld. It is part of my self-care: a reset of my mind, body, and spirit, especially at times when I am seeking answers, or feel limited in my capacity to continue to bear witness to or experience particularly difficult circumstances in my life. Sometimes I go on these drumbeat-guided journeys into other worlds even when I am not facing difficult circumstances, perhaps out of curiosity, but mostly as an act of preventive care.

> One afternoon I was sitting in my therapist's office, unable to stop crying, overwhelmed by the pressure and toxicity I was experiencing as a Brown woman in academia. I needed someone in a healing profession, outside of academia, to help me navigate through the darkness I was feeling. I questioned my belongingness in academia, something many people do, especially if they are minoritized repeatedly (Bhattacharya, 2015b; Pittman, 2012; Turner, González, & Wood, 2008; Wang, 2012). And this time, I questioned whether I wanted to remain in academia. The kind of oppression and toxicity I had experienced, my loss of innocence in confronting the realities of academia, made me feel like I was dying a thousand deaths. My identity as an academic, which I had crafted for well over a decade, was crumbling around me. I knew this was not my only identity. But after being an academic for twelve or so years, I had made the personal both political and professional (hooks, 2000).

I worked with Anzaldúa's notions of border crossings to understand the fragmentations of my being (Anzaldúa, 1987, 2009, 2015b) and gain a sense of wholeness about who I was in this world, including my purpose as an educator, a woman of color, and someone who has broken ranks with cultural and research norms. All these parts of me were parceled into my identity as an academic, such that who I was in my personal spaces was no longer markedly different from who I was as an academic. Thus, any aspect of my identity that was disrupted in my professional spaces was also disrupted in all my other spaces.

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I have had success as an academic in the past twelve years. I applied for tenure twice, at two universities, and it was readily granted both times. I have cultivated strong relationships with my students, most of whom are doctoral students. It has become obvious to me that Black and Brown students, along with other students who are minoritized, are often drawn to working with me. While I am happy and honored to help them, it requires significant labor (emotional, intellectual, and spiritual), for which I must continuously build a deep capacity to bear witness and hold space for the students as they journey through academia's rocky terrain. Yet when a series of events[1] occurred that made me question who I would become if I wasn't an academic, none of my accomplishments mattered.

> My therapist asks, "What would you want to be if you did not feel restricted by anything or anyone?"

I have never considered any path other than the career I have carefully crafted. I do not even know if I have the skills to be anything other than an academic. So, still sobbing, I respond with the first thing that comes to mind. "I want to be a shamanic qualitative researcher." I don't even know what that is, if it is anything. I am pretty sure there is no such job title in academia.

"What would it look like?" Stella, my therapist, asks.

"I don't know." I search for an answer—a model, a framework—as I normally do in my work. But I come up with nothing. "I have no clue."

For the next few months I read ethnographic studies about shamanism, shamanic rituals, and anything else I can get my hands on. The day I read Michael Herman's (1990) conceptualization of shamans as methodologists, I got visible goose bumps on my body, which I have learned to recognize as confirmation of an idea with which I am grappling. Herman (1990) explains that shamans teach others how to journey inward through various paths, based on the individual's own experiences, insights, and capacities. Shamans do not seek to make others dependent on them. Instead, they offer tools and guidance that enable others to embark on deep journeys on their own. I recognized many parallels between my role as a qualitative methodologist and the shaman's philosophy. Shamans offer their guidance for healing. I hold safe spaces for students, offer them unconditional positive regard, and witness the healing of those who choose to pursue deep inner journeys.

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Anzaldúa (2015a) reinforces the notion of shamans as healers who must fall apart themselves before they can be of service to others:

> The process of falling apart (the Coyolxauhqui process), of being wounded, is a sort of shamanic initiatory dismemberment that gives suffering a spiritual and soulful value. The shaman's initiatory ordeal includes some type of death or dismemberment during the ecstatic trance journey. Torn apart into basic elements and then reconstructed, the shaman acquires the power of healing and returns to help the community. To be healed we must be dismembered, pulled apart. The healing occurs in disintegration, in the demotion of the ego as the self's only authority. (p. 29)

Through the events that led me to question who I am as an academic and to reflect on who I want to become, I also endured an initiatory process of breaking apart the illusions I harbored about my own identity. Hence, here I was, in the bathtub, listening to the drumbeats and sinking into the water to travel to the underworld. Questions arose for me one by one. What if everything I knew about me, up to this point, was false? What would happen to me if I let go of all the ways in which I had crafted an identity? How would I fill up those empty spaces in my being?

> I return my focus to my heartbeat in the bathtub. The drum continues beating as a woman's voice tells me to let go, visualize and identify a hole in the ground, jump into it, and travel inward into my being—my consciousness. Let my imagination flow. Enter the depths of the underworld without fear. The voice tells me that if something appears to me in my travels, I can ask it whether or not it is there for my highest good. It will disappear if it is not for my highest good. This is, after all, just a creative exercise in imagination. I believe her. Anzaldúa (2015a) says:

> The creative process is an agency of transformation. Using the creative process to heal or restructure the images/stories that shape a person's consciousness is a more effective way of healing. When you allow the images to speak to you through the first person rather than restricting these images to the third person (things of which you speak), a dialogue—rather than a monologue—occurs. (p. 35)

I feel ready to enter this dialogue, so I tune into my body floating in the warm water. I imagine diving into the Indian Ocean in Tanzania, where I traveled last summer, to journey into the underworld. As I journey downwards, I go through a tunnel, riding on something smooth and slithery. I

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look down and it seems like a snake, a large one, perhaps an anaconda. I ask it, "Are you for my highest good?" It nods. I feel safe and ride the snake-slide into a clear blue-green pool. Later I would learn that in many cultures snakes symbolize death and rebirth, due to the shedding of their skin. I did not realize at that time that these deep inner journeys offered paths to transformation, an invitation to look at that which I had feared or disowned, to connect to spiritual wisdom and a sense of wholeness out of the various fragmented parts of self.

As the anaconda drops me off on the shores of the blue-green lake, I walk into a deep, dark green, mossy forest. This walk is unlike any walk I have taken before. It is as if I am walking through many versions of my life: decisions made, regrets held within, and unbirthed ideas. I feel a collective sense of pain and, simultaneously, clarity. I come to a clearing where the deep, mossy green forest is no longer so dark. A sliver of light shines through and I sit down on a rock to collect myself.

From the darker part of the jungle, an old man begins walking towards me. I cannot tell his age, but he is skeletal in appearance and based on his build and the thin loincloth he is wearing, he reminds me of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Gandhi-man stands in front of me, looks me straight in the eye, and says, "Finally. You can see me now."

"Yes, I see you." I agree. "Who are you? What do you want?"

"I want you to see me. Don't ignore me." He pounds the ground with his walking stick and sounds angry.

I stand up, moving closer to Gandhi-man to try to see him more clearly. He is bald and definitely appears human. He is extremely thin, so much so that I can see the outline of his ribs. He is wearing hardly any clothes except for the dirty, grey-white loincloth. He is barefoot. "I see you." I say.

Gandhi-man sits down on the rock where I had been sitting. He takes a deep breath. "I am your shadow. All that you don't like or don't want to see, you put on me. It is wearing on me, can't you see?"

I don't understand or know how to respond to such a question. I sit down on the forest floor near Gandhi-man's feet. I look up at him and tears roll down my cheek. "I didn't know you existed. I don't even know if this is real or if I am just making shit up."

Gandhi-man looks at me now in a kindly way. He nods his head as I speak and says, "It doesn't matter whether it is real or not. It matters how you understand and use this information."

I nod too. "So what do I do now?"

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"You cannot be afraid of me. You cannot avoid me. You cannot push all the things you don't want to see or know on me. It is too much. You have to see me. You have to talk to me. I am not THAT scary." Gandhi-man says all of this in one breath and stands up.

I stand up too and hug him. His skeletal body melts against my fleshy parts as if we are one body with two heads. I stay present in the moment without any fear of this strange man (am I contributing to the appropriation of my own cultural heritage?). "I won't be afraid anymore," I whisper. As I say this Gandhi-man disappears, and I am standing alone in the clearing again.

The voice on the speaker tells me to say goodbye to those I have met on my journey. The drumbeat slows. The voice tells me to come back to the room, wiggle my toes, stretch my arms. I return my focus to the frothy, bubbly blanket in the bathtub while I deeply exhale.

Autohistoria-teoría and Framing

Autohistoria-teoría is a term coined by Gloria Anzaldúa in her dissertation, which was later published by AnaLouise Keating (2015). A number of qualitative scholars have conceptualized and conducted critical autoethnographies that explore the ways in which structures of power play out in their own lived experiences (Boylorn, 2012; Boylorn & Orbe, 2013; Chawla, 2015; Pathak, 2013; Spry, 2011). However, Anzaldúa's conceptualization of autohistoria-teoría resonates most strongly with me because it incorporates and theorizes a process of self-excavation that integrates experiences, liminality, spirituality, imagination, creativity, art, calling on and working with ancestors and muses, and crossing multiple bordered spaces and realms.

I do not view Anzaldúa as standing in opposition to critical autoethnographers, and some might place her writing within the critical autoethnographic genre. I present Anzaldúa's work as a distinctive approach that calls to me, cuts through me, and deeply stirs my being. Anzaldúa (2015c) explains:

> In enacting the relationship between certain images and concepts and my own experience and psyche, I fuse personal narrative with theoretical discourse, autobiographical vignettes with theoretical prose. I create a hybrid genre, a new discursive mode, which I call "autohistoria" and "autohistoria-teoría." Conectando experiencias personales con realidades sociales results in autohistoria, and theorizing about this activity results in autohistoria-teoría. (p. 6)

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It is this fusing, this hybridity, and the fluidity of border crossings that appeal to me. Accordingly, this paper is written with a similar sensibility, in which personal narratives and scholarly insights are at times fused together and at other times hold distinct spaces. I use Anzaldúan thinking to reflect on how I, a South Asian Brown woman in academia, attend to my various emotional responses to structural inequities and cultivate some form of well-being, despite being vulnerable to battle fatigue. What kinds of shadow work literacies might I have cultivated throughout my academic life that could potentially be of use to others? How do such literacies expose the experiences and negotiations of various kinds of pain and suffering generated by a life in academia?

Academia is a microcosm of our social world, mirroring its various structures of oppression. I therefore focus this discussion primarily on my role as an academic only as a pragmatic demarcation for the purposes of this paper—and even then, within the paper I stretch the bounds of academia. Additionally, I reflect on how such shadow work literacies illuminate relationships between self and other, self and community, and self and disowned parts of self with respect to conducting social justice work.

To the best of my knowledge, the concept of shadow literacy I introduce in this paper has not previously been conceptualized in this way. Therefore, in the absence of an immediate body of literature, I draw from Anzaldúa's (2009) enactment of shadow work. The combining of literacy with shadow work is an original idea that I forward in this paper to address this special issue's call to further understandings of emotional justice for Black and Brown girls and women. Thus, in this paper, I begin with exploring the interiority of my experience as a Brown woman in academia. I scrutinize my wounds, navigate winding and difficult paths to meet and make sense of my shadow, and find ways to fuse my personal, professional, and public lives to enact healing. I explore how I have developed a sense of literacy or intelligibility around shadow work through my scholarship, which is grounded in post-oppositional discourses, experimenting with various methodological possibilities in qualitative inquiry. However, the methodological possibilities are not the focus of the paper. Rather, they illuminate my pathways with the understanding that those doing shadow work could engage in their own varied pathways. Yet, where necessary, I have added citations for the methodological possibilities that fostered shadow literacies for me.

Cultivating shadow literacies has allowed me to understand how wounds and trauma surface in my body and my being as a Brown woman. Devel-

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oping such literacies through methodological possibilities demonstrate the ways in which one can use these literacies in one's own work to discover fragmented parts of self; self in relation to other; and self in relation to oppressive, wounding discourses. The form of writing I employ in this creative/critical essay, autohistoria-teoría, is a productive form for exploring insights while developing shadow literacies. To foreground this work, I elaborate on this concept in the section that follows.

Please note that I did not situate the purpose of the paper earlier, as traditional norms of academic writing dictate. Instead, I led with fragmented vignettes and scholarly writing that intersect with and diverge from each other, enabling readers to encounter these narratives on their own merit, prior to my authoritative framing of such narratives. In this intentional, disruptive move, I resist situating myself on a pedestal, instructing readers how to read and think about my narratives before offering the narratives themselves, as if readers are not agentic enough to do so on their own. I do not divide this paper into the traditional sections expected of an academic paper. Instead, I offer the possibility of enacting critical work from a non-dominant perspective, by moving away from established academic traditions of knowledge production.

Developing and Dialoguing with Literacies for Shadow Work

The term *shadow* refers to parts of ourselves that we ignore or disown as something belonging to us (Jung, 2014). This idea has been taken up and advanced in various disciplines including, but not limited to, psychology, cultural studies, and wisdom traditions. Shadow can contain the darker parts of ourselves that we refuse to acknowledge. Shadow can encompass parts of ourselves that embody so much pain that we ignore or avoid looking at them. Shadow can also result from traumatic events in our lives, leading us to fragment and compartmentalize parts of ourselves to avoid suffering repeatedly or being hurt further (Anzaldúa, 2015b).

Anazaldúa (2015c) elaborates on the role of the shadow, explaining that "the shadow beast and attendant desconocimientos (the ignorance we cultivate to keep ourselves from knowledge so that we can remain unaccountable) have a tenacious hold on us" (p. 2). Anzaldúa reflects that if she were to process her reluctance to meet her shadow, she might discover the depth of a wound that she carried within herself, and through such a process arrive at a "pearl of great insight, a theory" (Anzaludúa, 2015c, p. 2). This concept

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of shadow is both personal and collective. According to Anzaldúa (2015b), we inherit the shadows of our family, community, and nation. Thus, doing shadow work requires a revolution within where darkness is not met with fear, but understood, articulated, explored, and shared with the world, enabling us to create healing images for ourselves and for our families, our communities, our nation . . . and perhaps the world.

To that end, in this section I will describe the history of my own shadow work, the literacies I have created while doing this work, and the discoveries such literacies have made possible. Shadow work is healing; it has allowed me to understand the interconnectivity between the light and the dark, the challengers and the supporters in my life, and the consequent paths and possibilities, thus creating my own healing images. Anzaldúa (2015b) lays out the following process for doing shadow work:

> In shadow work, the problem is part of the cure—you don't heal the wound; the wound heals you. First you must recognize and acknowledge la herida. Second, you must "intend" to heal. Then you must fall headlong into that wounding—attend to what the body is feeling, be its dismemberment and disintegration. Rupture and psychic fragmentation lead to dialogue with the wound. This dialogue, in turn, opens imaginings, and images awaken an awareness of something greater than our individual wounds, enabling us to imagine ways of going through nepantla's disorientations to achieve wholeness and interconnect to others on the planet. And finally, you have to plunge your hands into the mess, plunge your hands en la masa, into embodied practical material spiritual political acts. (pp. 89–90)

Thus, shadow work entails being aware of and allowing one's wounds to rise to the surface and using the awareness as a portal to journey into another world: another expansive, generative space of understanding, catalyzed by the wounds to create possibilities for understanding, insight, and healing. Over the last 12 years, I have embarked on various wound-inspired journeys into the dark forest, and come out the other side with insights to develop intelligibilities towards shadow work and healing.

For example, in my dissertation, I conducted an ethnographic case study with Indian women enrolled in their first year of graduate school in the U.S. I found that although the participants had no concept of being raced, they began to experience the pain of overt and covert structures of oppression without being able to attribute that pain to something familiar in their previous

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experiences, as they were not raced similarly (or at all) in India. These were women with considerable class and social privilege in India. Upon crossing the ocean their privileges were erased, yet they were not aware of such erasure—or rather, they could not imagine that it could happen, as they took their privileges for granted, as a given of their lives. That they would be Othered because of their heritage, their skin color, and the way they spoke was beyond their imagination and understanding (Bhattacharya, 2009).

My first effort at interpreting these experiences was a traditional descriptive approach in which I thematically documented the participants' experiences. I created front and back stage performances based on Goffman's (1959) figuration of the performative self. In this figuration I located the participants' performative acts in spaces where they felt safe as back stage performances, and those in spaces where they felt vulnerable as front stage performances. The participants were more agentic in some spaces than others, based on how they imagined the trustworthiness of the audience who witnessed their performances and how they understood the power relations that influenced their interactions with people in various spaces.

I created ethnodramatic scenes (Bhattacharya, 2009) of front and back stage performances for the participants, integrating interviews, observations, pictures, and archived data collected in the study. In creating these scenes, I engaged in emotional and shadow work literacy through various performative acts. Here emotional and shadow work literacy refer to the idea that by connecting with the participants' heavy emotions, the participants and I^2 were able to use these heavy emotions to journey into dark spaces within ourselves that were wounded from being dehumanized and considered inferior and inconsequential. I explored how we understood and navigated our emotions and pain when we were held in safety versus when we were engaged in heavily unbalanced power relations. In other words, how did we explore the ways in which we were being Othered if we knew we were being held in safety by a non-judgmental audience (back stage) versus being in front of an audience (front stage) in a space where we felt oppressed? The emotions that rose from our understanding of our performances in both spaces became our guide into our shadow work, to look at the wounding that has occurred when fellow human beings felt justified to dismiss our presence, history, contributions, culture, and ways of being, based on ignorance, hatred, and xenophobia. Additionally, these journeys through heavy emotions raised the question of how and when we became so

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dependent on the good opinions of others who see us as inferior and find it justifiable to oppress us.

Following the ethnodrama, I started to look at the silences in the data. I identified various points in our interactions where the participants fell silent when certain questions were asked, or when they were confused about how to interpret their experiences. They were continuously questioned about their culture, how backwards things were in India, and whether they could cook curry to bring to potluck dinners. These interactions led them to feel displaced and burdened by the weight of having to represent all of India, a country of over one billion people.

I began to trace these silences and considered questions that could be posed to the dominant group, or questions that would interrogate dominant discourses, as a way to flip the script. This act of tracing silences and identifying questions led me to write poems (Bhattacharya, 2007, 2013). The poems highlighted the participants' confusion about finding themselves in an exotic Other subject position and disrupted the dominant narrative that was a source of deep pain for the participants and me. Poems then became another form of literacy to create awareness of our wounds and a vehicle for shadow work. They offered insight into parts of me that felt raw, that were trapped in a binary relationship with the oppressor or oppressive discourses. Continuously being in opposition to oppressive discourses was akin to being in the master's house, using the master's tools (Lorde, 1984), and expecting the master to be defeated by my superior use of his tools. I continued to examine the ways in which we worked with silences, imposed and chosen, and how such silences shaped our daily lives as academics.

I began to think of all the moves I make as a Brown woman academic navigating the tricky, rocky, dangerous terrain of academia, which calls for the acrobatic skills of a Cirque du Soleil performer, and often silently. I started to conceptualize a fantasized ethnodramatic play, without any words, from the perspective of the main character Brownie (which was the narrated and projected version of me on stage), who located herself at the intersection multiple subject positions and identities, and was read as Brown or Black in academia. I imagined a play with the budget of a Cirque performance and considered how my character, Brownie, would perform if she demonstrated only the moves she made in silence in various academic spaces. Writing this play (Bhattacharya, 2014) became another way to conduct shadow work by falling "headlong into the wounding," as Anzaldúa suggested.

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It was challenging to imagine all the ways in which I have been silenced, as a Brown woman in academia, and the pain that caused as a result of feeling isolated, rejected, devalued, and dehumanized. While I intended to *heal,* writing the play detailed my journey through the dark forest and my way of engaging in dialogue with the skinny Gandhi-man I met in my meditation. Through that dialogue I understood that it is academia's acts of betrayal, breaches of trust, hatred, prejudice, bigotry, bullying, and daily microaggressions that have allowed me to continuously become aware of my shadow and the collective shadow of humanity beyond academia, as these pain points are not exclusive to academic interactions. Engaging in dialogue with my pain allowed me to perform the pain on paper, as a literacy, as a silent ethnodrama, as movement. It offered the insight that certain belief systems will keep me locked in a place of pain, while others will allow me to walk through the dark forest and see my pain illuminate understandings that are applicable to me and to others.

I imagined moving beyond an oppositional relationship with oppressors. I realized that my energetic resources were being drained and I needed to find a post-oppositional approach to doing critical work. AnaLouise Keating moved me into this frame with her theorization of post-oppositionality (Keating, 2013). Keating (2013) highlights the ways her academic training programmed her to be oppositional in order to be successful:

> My undergraduate and graduate work trained me to think oppositionally, to structure my articles and book chapters as a series of binary discussions that proceed through nuanced contrasts: first, describe other scholars' theories and perspectives; second, demonstrate the limitations in their views; third, explain why my views are superior to those of other scholars; fourth, persuade readers to reject the other scholars' views and embrace mine. (p. 2)

These ways of thinking create a binary division within ourselves and in our relationships with others. They lead us to think in terms of Us versus Them, placing ourselves in opposition to others and in a position that renders us superior. Keating (2013) labels this ontology *oppositional consciousness*, which represents:

> a binary either/or epistemology and praxis that structures our perceptions, politics, and actions through a resistant energy—a reaction against that which we seek to transform. Oppositional consciousness can take a

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> variety of modes and occurs both inside and outside academic settings (classrooms, journals, etc.). (p. 2)

Oppositional consciousness can lead to the fragmentation of parts of ourselves. If we continually define our identity in opposition to someone or something else, we retain this energy in our being as if we are constantly under attack. On this battlefield, we are rewarded by how well we can engage with oppositional energies to establish ourselves as the superior warrior and the ultimate survivor. Keating (2013) describes the cyclical nature of our engagement in such oppositional energies:

> We can't turn off the negative energies once we remove ourselves from the battlefield. We take these energies with us, into our work, our homes, our minds, our bodies, our souls. They eat away at us, devouring us as we direct this oppositional thinking at one another and at ourselves. We fragment. We crumble. We deteriorate from within. And then we regroup. We begin again. And on to the next corrosive battle. (p. 9)

I have felt the corrosive effects of this battle creating toxicity in my mind, body, and being. I knew I was losing parts of myself as a result of my engagement in this battle. I began to take up contemplative approaches as part of my practice, and eventually integrated these practices into my professional work.

I suspect I had already been integrating these practices of inner journeys, introspection, and mindfulness in some form or other for years without being aware of them, without even having the language to name them. But once these literacies for shadow work started to become visible to me, they captured my attention. I was compelled to make them visible in multiple forms in my professional work, to incorporate a clear focus on healing, and to try to make space for them in academic discourses. I believe we have to create influence as insiders in whichever circles of impact we may reside. My circle of impact is academia, and I have a responsibility to make my voice present in my academic work and in my relationships with students and colleagues. I accept this responsibility by demonstrating a love-based identity in which I am open-hearted and vulnerable. I accept it by holding safe space and offering unconditional positive regard and support to others who are walking through their own dark forests.

In 2015 I published two manuscripts in top journals in my field. In one publication, I traced some of the wounds I carry as an adult and as an academic back to a childhood trauma. I wrote a love letter to my six-year-old

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self (Bhattacharya, 2015a) to let her know it was okay for her to break her connection with her trauma and her wounds. I told her she was to become a healing agent of herself, and by extension the world around her, in whatever she chose to do with her life.

This letter embraced Anzaldúa's (2009) characterization of those who do shadow work and walk in multiple liminal spaces as agents of healing who "use visioning and the imaginal on behalf of the self and community" (p. 293). I held onto the notion of border crossing to move between worlds and times as I connected with my child-self. The letter also became an exploration of the dark forests where wounds have been hidden. I told my child-self what lay ahead for her: how she would navigate through trauma to eventually arrive at a clearing, and how she would become grateful for the portals of possibility her suffering produced.

These forms of describing, naming, and tracing conditions of pain comprised yet another literacy for shadow work, not only by creating a product (the letter), but also by understanding how to build intelligibility for doing the shadow work that lay ahead of my child-self. This literacy building was framed with post-oppositional theorizing that allowed me to recognize the energy drain I experienced by engaging with various de/colonizing social justice agendas that were structured primarily in opposition to dominant discourses and power structures. I did not advocate abandoning these agendas, but gently prodded us to think beyond the oppressor/oppressed binary, to explore the possibilities beyond those generated in the master's house, and to cross into a space for healing and agentic possibilities without needing to convince the master of anything.

The second manuscript I published in 2015 (Bhattacharya, 2015b) was grounded in vulnerability as my post-oppositional move. I sought to share vulnerable narratives that would not only depict my walk in the forest, but also help me understand how I had been relating to oppressive discourses and unbalanced power relations. Fortunately for me, in response to my submission one reviewer encouraged me to break with tradition and revise the manuscript in the spirit of what I really wanted to do—highlight the role of autoethnographic narratives as a means of exposing microaggressions in higher education.

I opened the paper with an insight I had gained after walking through the dark forest. It was a visualization of what Ladson-Billings (1998) describes as interest convergence, a condition that occurs when desires of the oppressor

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and oppressed converge. I began with a dream I had based on the movie *The Life of Pi,* where I was the character in a boat with the Royal Bengal tiger, Richard Parker. To stay alive I had to feed Richard Parker, or he would have me as his dinner. While we were learning to co-exist, I recognized that we would never be friends, even if I was saving his life. As long as Richard Parker was sleeping in the same boat with me I was not safe, nor could I assume that I could move close enough to Richard Parker to pet him, out of a friendly fondness from being in the same boat together, without putting my life at risk.

Engaging in this dream work was my breakthrough in shadow work literacy, where I began to identify the ways in which our collective struggle and liberation are entangled. I started to recognize that in the context of unbalanced power relations, even when one is not in opposition one must continuously be in some sort of relationship to the dominant agenda and the oppressor. Additionally, I realized that a post-oppositional approach to conducting justice work and understanding the wounds we carry does not imply that we will ever—through our talent, our generosity, our service, or our love—inspire agents of oppression or oppressive discourses to become inclusive, ethical, or egalitarian.

We must accept that Richard Parker in all his forms represents danger, rather than engaging in an energy-draining and futile oppositional relationship that seeks to convert him into something benevolent and friendly. His innate nature is that of a predator. Consequently, we can begin to imagine liberation, agency, and healing without the need to solicit support or agreement from Richard Parker, but by attracting instead the agents whose objectives are congruent with our agendas. By severing our relationship with past trauma and dispensing with our need to serve the master's agenda, we discover a way to author ourselves outside the bounds of the master narrative.

The most recent aspect of developing my shadow work literacy has come through my engagement in critical, contemplative, arts-based research. In engaging with imagination beyond a relationship with Richard Parker, I began to think of ways of border crossing into tangible memories of the past and desired memories of the future, aided by a spiritual understanding that we are held in loving support by our ancestors, guides, and other allies. I created a mixed media autoethnographic artwork on a mirror framed like a window. The artwork was facilitated by my friend and coauthor, a licensed art therapist with whom I was in a meditation group for three years prior to

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beginning the project (Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016). She guided my walk through the dark forest and held a safe space for me, and together we created layers of art, moving from foggy dense spaces to spaces of clearing.

We contemplated how we hold onto certain stories in our lives, what makes us let go of these stories, which narratives we can construct in the spaces left behind by old disappeared stories, and how we move from a place of pain to a place of self-worth and love. Embedded in these stories were border crossings in which the boundaries between the personal and the professional, nation-based identities, and liberation and struggle were blurred. I termed such crossings *transnational gendered and racialized shuttlings* to reflect the ways in which I moved through various spaces with this kind of awareness in my body and my being.

Layers of mixed media painting, gluing objects to a window pane, covering and revealing things, and crossing the borders of the window panes felt as though I was touching the stories of my life tangibly, honestly, and sincerely. This act of creation brought me to the current moment yet allowed me to exercise some form of compassionate detachment where I became the observer and documentarian of my narratives. This embodied experience made me realize I had developed a deep connection to this kind of shadow work literacy where paint meets glass pane, objects, fabric, and my narratives. I listened to what arose in those embodied practices, from memories, from my body, and from anything else to which I felt connected. This process allowed me to accept many parts of my fragmented self, even as I began to detach myself from the stories that had a strong hold on me and caused me pain.

Through this process of moving in and out of the dark forest and coming to places of clearing, I grew to understand the value of cultivating a practice that does not fear this shuttling, does not shy away from meeting the darker parts of ourselves, and walks through the dark forest with complete awareness. I came to appreciate a mystical design that was created so perfectly, just for me, enabling me to arrive at these deep and often elusive insights.

And So It Is . . .

Discussing shadow work literacies is not just for the purpose of developing and sharing tools so that people could have a best practice towards healing, although such a move is not entirely undesirable. However, doing shadow work—embracing the painful, hurt, damaged, scared, angry, offensive parts

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of myself, scrutinizing my wounds, and engaging in dialogue with them—allowed me not only to gain deep, critical insights, but also to experience a shift in consciousness. After each shadow work, it was as if I moved to a different place in my consciousness, similar to "leveling up" in a video game, although I do not necessarily want to hierarchically place any consciousness shift above another.

Perhaps these shifts signified an expansion of understanding, an unloading of the heaviness I carried with me, with a corresponding access to open-hearted insights. They made me feel lighter, with an awareness of my own consciousness I had not possessed before. This awareness was manifested in action as I considered how I wanted to interact with people in higher education going forward as a mentor, a colleague, educator, and a friend. What would my activism look like? How would I demonstrate the integration of my whole being in teaching, service, and research? How would I bring love into everything I did? What would I strive to leave behind as my imprint on the world when I finally leave this earth?

To generate happiness and embody well-being, as a woman of color who mentors other people of color and engages in loving relationships with various people of color, is to take walks in the dark forest, to engage in shadow work, and to cultivate one's own set of literacies to do the shadow work necessary to arrive at a place of clarity and insight. These literacies develop through deep journeys into portals of suffering, if we choose to travel through them. These portal travels are illuminative and instructive, opening up literacies that were not previously available to us. I invite others to take on these journeys, break rank with traditions, and be uninhibited and imaginative to make their own discoveries.

The call to the dark forest requires that we look into parts of ourselves where hate, anger, fear, and insecurity reside. It requires making the revolutionary move to find what is instructive in those spaces and in those emotions, if we embrace them courageously. What are we to make of them? What did we fail to see before, and what did we fail to understand, love, care for, feel, or hear?

The clarity of such knowledge and exploration of the interiority of one's experiences will help build reserves for social justice work, identifying how and when we feel drained, establishing triggers and alarms, and identifying the ways we can work with social justice agendas without being trapped in oppositional discourses. We cannot be in the business of exhausting our energies in a futile battle to persuade the master to change. We must seek our

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own path to healing and liberation, knowing full well that the master will remain unmoved. As our oppositional bond with the master is severed, we open up the opportunity to establish bonds of love with agents of liberation to heal our minds, bodies, and spirits.

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Recently, Dr. Bhattacharya has delved deeply in contemplative practices as pedagogical and epistemological tool for teaching and inquiring. In her spare time (which she makes sure she has), Dr. Bhattacharya participates in various types of movement-based fitness activities, enjoys the hiking options in and around Manhattan, Kansas, and spends a lot of her time in coffee shops and bistros. When she has even more time, she tries to move her body to the rhythms of salsa music. Being a bonafide geek, Dr. Bhattacharya enjoys television shows such as The Big Bang Theory and Frasier.

Notes

1. I am purposely not revealing these events, as they contain identifiable information that would implicate others, even with fictionalized identifiers. However, the details are not important. What is vital is to acknowledge that at any point in our lives we may arrive at such a moment of breakdown, for various reasons, due to a single event or a series of events.

2. I included myself along with the participants because de/colonial qualitative research calls for an entanglement between the researcher and the researched. Given that I was a cultural insider to the participants, we experienced familiarity with our shared wounds that rose to the surface. De/colonial qualitative research also calls for power sharing, which meant that as much as the participants shared their experiences with me, I too was obligated to share mine with them, to balance power differences between the researcher and the researched by putting myself under the same gaze of western academia to which the participants were subjected.

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