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Visionary Daughters of Academia:
The Care/Work of Black and Black-biracial Women Faculty
in California Community Colleges

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
for the requirements for the degree
Doctorate of Philosophy in Interdisciplinary Humanities
Spring 2024

by
Jamie Lulamae Moore

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This Dissertation of Jamie Lulamae Moore is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

Anne Zanzucchi

Eileen Camfield

Mai-Linh Hong

Ashaki Jackson

Dedication

To my mother, Theresa.

To my ancestors, encouraging me in the edges of my dreams.

To all Black women in community colleges.

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Curriculum Vitae

Work Experience

08/2020 – present	Community College Teaching Coordinator The Puente Project
08/2015 – present	Full Professor, English College of the Sequoias, Visalia, CA
08/2020 – 05/2024	Graduate Writing Consultant (Teaching Assistant) University Writing Center, University of Merced, CA
08/2019 – 05/2020	Teaching Assistant, Literature and Languages University of California, Merced, CA
08/2013 - 06/2015	Adjunct Professor, English College of the Sequoias, Visalia, CA
12/2012 – 12/2015	Lecturer, MFA Program, Antioch University Los Angeles

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05/2024	Ph.D in Interdisciplinary Humanities, (Emphasis in Pedagogy, Literature and Faculty Development) University of California, Merced
05/2022	Masters of Arts, Interdisciplinary Humanities University of California, Merced
06/2013	Post-MFA Certificate in Teaching Creative Writing Antioch University Los Angeles
12/2012	Masters of Fine Arts, Creative Writing (Fiction Emphasis) Antioch University Los Angeles, CA
06/2010	Bachelors of Arts in Liberal Studies Sonoma State University
05/2008	Associate of Arts, University Transfer Santa Rosa Junior College

Academic Recognitions

06/2022	2022 Summer Wheelhouse Fellow for Community College Research UC Davis Wheelhouse Center for Community College Leadership and Research
06/2021	Luce Foundation Fellowship UC Merced Asylum for the Arts Project
05/2021	Excellence in Service to the Interdisciplinary Humanities Graduate Group UC Merced
05/2021	Excellence in Graduate Teaching in Literature UC Merced
05/2020	Interdisciplinary Humanities Outstanding Research and Scholarship Award, UC Merced

06/2019 Summer Bridge Program Fellowship
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Research Projects

Ongoing Resilience Research Group, (focusing on resilience factors for first-generation, generation Z college students)
with Dr. Eileen Camfield

Fall 2020 Gateway to Merced Project Oral History Interview
with Interdisciplinary Humanities 206 Course, Dr. Vergara and Dr. Saeteurn.

Academic Presentations

04/2023 Linguistic Justice Practitioners Roundtable
Linguistic Justice Practice in Community College and Beyond,
Conference with Glendale Community College

10/2022 “The Puente Project’s Equity Framework: An Audit of
Organizational Praxis and the Implementation of Justice-Driven
Change”
Strengthening Student Success Conference, (Hybrid)

06/2022 “Re-Framing Resilience to Promote Care (Not Conformity)
ELON University 18th Annual Teaching and Learning Conference

03/2022 “Resilience as Resistance, Not Replication”
Association of American Colleges and Universities Conference

03/2022 “Queer Community Care”
Puente Project Statewide Conference

01/2021 “Teaching Resilience: It Takes More than Grit”
Association of American Colleges and Universities Conference

05/2020 (Accepted Presentation Postponed Due to COVID19)
“Pasión a Acción: Creating Community Engaged Scholars in the
Puente Program,” National Conference on Race and Ethnicity

08/2019 “Capstone: Institutional Ethnography in Evaluating Community
College Relationships.” Summer Bridge Program, UC Merced.

06/ 2019 “Building a Successful Puente Team” & “Developing your English
Classroom”
Puente Project Summer Institute

05/2019 “Bridging Acceleration in California Community Colleges: the
Puente Project as a Model for Success in a Changing Academic
Landscape”
NCORE, 2019

10/ 2018 “Trans and Genderqueer Poetry”
Puente Project Statewide English Instructor Summit

03/2018 “Using Queer Literature in the Puente Classroom”
Puente Project Statewide Conference

10/ 2017	“Doing it Anyway: Teaching Accelerated English Even When It’s Hard.” Strengthening Student Success Conference
10/2017	“First Person Plural: Using LGBT+ Literature to Affirm and Connect POC Students in a Rural Community” CCC+LGBT Summit, UC Riverside
06/2012	“The Dialogue of Difference: Cultural Conversation in the Creative Writing Workshop” Antioch University Los Angeles
12/2012	“Writing the In-Between: Finding a Balance of Cultural Authenticity with Multiracial Characters” Antioch University Los Angeles

Publications

Academic

09/2021	California Acceleration Project “Transforming the Research Paper: Using Oral History to Center Students’ Voices and Communities”
10/2020	<i>Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice</i> “Sifting through Gen Z Stereotypes: Using Critical Empathy to Assess Invisible Learning”

Novella

05/2021	<i>Our Small Faces (Re-release)</i> Doubleback Books
11/2013	<i>Our Small Faces</i> ELJ Publications

Short Fiction

04/2024	<i>Calyx Journal</i> “Praise Dance,” Novel Excerpt
02/2019	<i>TAYO Literary Magazine</i> “The Lord’s Prayer,” Novel Excerpt
11/2018	<i>Track/ Four</i> “Stones,” Novel Excerpt
12/2017	The Nervous Breakdown “Ghosts,” Novel Excerpt
09/2016	Drunk Monkeys Featured Writer of the Month Novel Excerpt
02/2014	Mojave River Review “Have Mercy, Hold On,” Short Story
12/2013	Blackberry Magazine “He Called Me Beautiful,” Short Story
12/2013	Emerge Literary Journal

10/2010

“Island,” Flash Fiction
Moonshot Magazine
“Crayon Colors,” Short Story

Abstract

This dissertation examines the visible and invisible labor of Black and Black-biracial women faculty in California Community Colleges, introducing the theory of daughtering as a method to understand patterns of care-giving and its resulting burnout. Using a mixed method approach that includes institutional ethnography, autotheory, oral history and literary analysis, the research reveals that the current context of equity and social justice movements within the community college system has created a different set of labor demands on Black and Black-biracial women faculty. This reframes the perception of care/work provided by these faculty and relies on their cultural knowledge to lead equity solutions related to student care. Institutional resistance to change and existing systems of social coordination leave faculty feeling powerless and siloed into positions that require emotional labor. These positions have a deleterious effect on well-being and persistence. Daughtering as theory gives insight to internalized perception of self and serving-ness that Black and Black-biracial women faculty bring to their positions and how this identity results in specific methods of performing care/work. This research also presents the concept of visionary daughtering as a method of transforming care/work into autonomous power and reclamation of voice to stay alive within academia.

Preface: Parts of Myself, Alive

“It never came linearly. It tends to come the way a flower blooms. [...] These concepts don’t come in a linear fashion. They build up. They build up, you know? So as you’re talking they build up and they build up the way music builds up and up and up until you get that sudden...” – Sylvia Wynter¹

This dissertation comes from a central question: How do I not die in academia? To look larger and address the primary audience for this work: How do Black and biracial women not die in academia? This phrasing is very important to the positioning of my argument and research, as I do not believe in a whole body, whole spirit survival in an institution that “we were never meant to survive.”² I do not believe academia is a space where we can thrive without trading in some essential part of our selves for success. I also reject the responsibility to contribute to the performative dialogue of what kind of diversity or equity effort will change the higher education institution, particularly when the bodies of Black women “are thrown over a river of tormented history to bridge the gap,”³ their work siloed and devalued, and they are individually scapegoated for failures as they face endless barriers to actual change. As Anne duCille expands on in “The Occult of True Black Womanhood: Critical Demeanor and Black Feminist Studies,” “this sense of being a bridge – of being walked on and passed over, of being used up and burnt out, of having to ‘publish while perishing,’ as some have described their situations – seems to be a part of the human condition of many Black women scholars.” Additionally, in the study of pedagogy and faculty identity development, there are many texts that resolve that the classroom space is the “end all be all” for institutional change. While I still believe that the classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy,⁴ it can not be a truly radical space when we put the burden of healing/fixing/surviving on our students as we refuse to do the work ourselves.

¹ As quoted in Alexis Pauline Gumbs’s *Dub*, from an interview. I use this quote to open this preface to signal to the power of repetition in describing the cumulative effect of macro/micro-aggressive attacks and the necessity to tell this story in a non-linear, narrative, person-focused way. Writing from the center of the trauma means the writing can come in mosaic and this project attempts to honor non-western epistemology and Black feminist storytelling traditions.

² Audre Lorde, “Litany for Survival.” In this poem, Lorde calls to “those of us/who were imprinted with fear,” which is often the condition for not only Black and biracial women in their general cultural upbringing as girls, as daughters, but also reinforced in specific ways in higher education institution as both as students and as faculty. Over the course of the poem, Lorde describes how this fear, this acquiescence to white supremacist, patriarchal forces, creates a mindset of scarcity in terms of security, love, and recognition of our humanity. The primary focus of this autotheoretical study is to understand the parallel between these coded messages of fear – the coding of daughterhood that for many can translate into a trauma response of “fawning” of people pleasing in professional spaces – and how the recognition of this pattern might open up a space for powerful self-awareness.

³ Moraga, Cherrie, “Introduction.” *This Bridge Called my Back*. 1981.

⁴ hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress*

I know it because I tried it. Reading all the folks I'm supposed to have read and bringing them into my classroom space,⁵ I designed semester after semester of curriculum meant to bring topics that felt untraditional and radical to my students. We talked about inherited trauma, agency, reclamation of voice, systemic oppression, the injustice of "justice" systems, the school to prison pipeline, even joy as a revolutionary act. I wanted them to feel seen, but also, to feel healed by the things I told them was going to heal them, and to tell me about it in the performative structure of an essay. I told them to feel free but still had to assign them a letter grade on how well they represented their growth. I played a game of leverage without thinking about it too consciously, hoping that they would feel so empowered by the material that they would feel inspired enough to finish assignments; I hoped they would help make me feel like any of the course-outline-required, prescriptive, assignments mattered. It mostly didn't work, even while I convinced myself and was affirmed by the literature that I was doing what I could to fight the system. From August to December, from January to May, each group of students and I watched each other fade away. All of us trying to tell each other what was wrong without the right words and struggling to figure out who we are. All of us told we were supposed to be here.

I still wanted to leave – and I mean to say leave in multiple ways. I wanted to physically leave the classroom, especially on the days I knew I was asking more than I had to give. I wanted to leave the profession, especially as I gained more power and influence on campus – all positions to groom me as an informant to administration. But/and/also having experienced a deep, irreparable spiritual death in all these academic spaces, having sacrificed my body to the point it shook with shock. I no longer wanted to reside in a body I did not recognize. The burnout I experienced will multi-level, multi-sensory, and while Baldwin tells us, "you think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read⁶," the institution successfully siloes us to believe we experience this disillusionment all alone. I write, analyze, accuse, and evaluate from the space of this spirit death, while also acknowledging my continued participation in academia for economic security. It is why this work begins with a eulogy. It is an attempt to name the spirit death for what it is, to honor Drs. Tiffani Marie and Kenjus Watson eulogize as apocalyptic education⁷; to reclaim survival in the way Audre Lorde attempts through Alexis Pauline's Gumbs interpretation.⁸

⁵ In an effort to call in the performativity and savior-istic of the "woke, radical teacher," who may be trying their best to be anti-oppressive but still is forced to operate within artificial structures of assessment, student learning outcomes, institutional reports, etc. We can not "bell hooks" or "Paulo Freire" our curriculum to a point that is actually healing if we too are not committed to the active process of decolonization over and over again, with them.

⁶ Shared by Baldwin in a 1963 interview

⁷ Published initially as an article in Rootwork Journal, then as an audiobook / podcast accompaniment, Marie and Watson's work uses the framework of a traditional southern Black church service, specifically funeral traditions, to explore their disconnection and trauma experienced in higher education. This preface and the introduction to this research is meant to be in direct conversation / chorus with them, aligning with my own participation in these traditions.

⁸ Gumbs writes in "The Shape of My Impact for The Feminist Wire, "Audre Lorde is right. Survival is a Promise. It is not a promise that any university or non-profit organization can make to me. It is a promise with my currently breathing body to the ancestors that move through it." She sees her livingness in honor

After years of teaching, and even more years studying pedagogy, my most important conclusion for other professors like me is that perhaps our best hope for survival (not just in the livingness way, but in the honoring our existence way) is the work of publicly speaking on how we try to not let ourselves die. The stepping back, the context-gathering, the history-learning, the system recognition, the routine-making, the boundary setting, the storytelling. Perhaps when we recognize that public mourning, grief and commitment to inner work allows us to exist as full people in our professional and classroom spaces we take the steps to recognize our own humanity, by seeing ourselves, we can help others see themselves. Perhaps when we reclaim our feelings and spirits in a space where we are not supposed to feel, we can create just enough space to keep going. Not for the institution, as “the university is not about the preservation of a bright brown body. The university will use me alive and use me dead. The university does not intend to love me. The university does not know how to love me. The university in fact, does not love me. But the universe does” (Gumbs, “The Shape of My Impact”). Sometimes, our students do. Sometimes, some of us find each other and love with what’s left. And mostly, we must gather the energy remaining for our healing and for loving ourselves, if not just for ourselves in the moment, for our lineage – biological, chosen, and / or claimed.

We don’t do the work of healing, of asserting of our humanity or of challenging systems that comprise us because it hurts. It presents physical and emotional and professional danger. If we do this work aloud, it positions us to be interpreted as “too” – too emotional, too angry, too radical. Insert every trope and stereotype that previous literature has covered about Black women in academia. To add to this discourse, I argue that it comprises everything that academia told us, (us being those early, high academic achievers that found a kind of belonging perhaps we did not even have in our homeplaces). For those of us poor Black kids who were too smart, too talkative, too bookish, but our mommas and daddies and aunties and kinfolks saw in us a potential to bring home some professional title so they gave us time and fed us books and praised our grades. We were meant to believe in a mobility centered on us, shouldered by us. We were special, weren’t we? We were strong, weren’t we? We were different? We were good. We were behaved. We deserve it, don’t we?

We deserve to be special, strong, different, assimilated, good, behaved; we deserve all this because we gritted our teeth and made it. We learned the language, we danced the dance, we sat with our hands folded and listened and took instructions. To have a better chance at living, at surviving. A different kind of hardening. One that comes with money. We are experts at appearances. We are experts at performance. We are experts at translating. We are experts on the white people we’ve read. We didn’t struggle for nothing, we invested in it, (the “we” here being our mommas and daddies and aunties and kinfolk and all of ‘em). This has to be it.⁹

not of her own work or work she provides to the institution, but as a reflection of her service and legacy to her ancestors.

⁹ In an interview with poet and educational consultant, I. Adeficha, about the impact of the cultural pressures of choosing to pursue academia instead of immediately entering the workforce, particularly as a creative. We discuss the refrain of “there is always teaching,” since we are not given narratives of writers or artists who live and support others from their creative work.

Look at how expert we are. And see, see, see doesn't that make us worthy of respect? Doesn't that make us more civil? Doesn't it make it more human?

Do you see me? Or do you see a tool?

To challenge this discourse – the discourse of the stereotypes and tropes of Black women, performance and assimilation in academia – I ask: what is it about our cultural ways of knowing and being that uniquely prepare Black and Black-biracial women for teaching that we can capitalize not only for our professional development, but for the assertion of our healing?

As I write this, my legs shake. I have to bounce my body to keep the tension moving to not settle in one spot. I am clenching my jaw so hard I can hear the internal squeak of my molars grinding. My shoulders are rounded, neck tucked, as if I must rush these words, as if I have to hide. Because I am so deeply adverse to truth-telling. I am so fear-trained away from causing any kind of problem. I am aware of the consequences of not being the person/thing/solution/diversity that someone else wants; I carry that in my blood pressure, cortisol, and rhythms of my heart. As an oldest daughter, as a student, as a faculty member, I have developed anxiety and panic disorder, a complex migraine disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. All of this dis-ease of the body and mind is also skill, a keen adeptness at flexing/ morphing myself into who I need to be to survive in certain spaces. I recognize these self-preserving, warning signs from my body, also remembering that Lorde says, “when I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.” To move towards the truth-telling is the vision, and the more I practice, a steadying of the self. Perhaps less optimistic than Lorde, yet no less true and in connection with the reality of my present existence/ positionality of “trying not to die,” Alexis Pauline Gumbs reminds me not even to fear the opinion of the institution because, “an institution knows how to preserve itself and it knows that Black feminists are a trouble more useful as dead invocation than as live troublemakers, raising concerns in faculty meetings.” I have little proof that not moving through this space of fear will allot me any more physical protection, in fact, the opposite might be true.

These body lessons and habits are deep-ingrained, practiced in tense minutes in department meetings, committee votes, hiring panels, and teaching reviews. These body lessons and habits were learned as a little girl sitting in the pew of a Black church with her hands crossed in her lap, as the oldest daughter who had to know how to run the household, as a parentified child who held the heaviness of caring for lives before she knew what her own life was for. I knew that to approach this research, I had to simultaneously surrender to my own healing.

A large part of that healing for me, and which I hope resonates for other Black and Black-biracial women faculty, is recognizing patterns of socialization and behavior, learned and observed, that give insight to the way we build relationships in our college

communities with students and colleagues. It is also naming, claiming and leveraging our community cultural wealth¹⁰ for personal healing and professional survival.

I write from a position of relative privilege: I am a tenured professor in a community college, in a state where this position has comparable, if not more, potential financial security and mobility than positions at nearby universities. With that acknowledgement, I want to break down aspects of my positionality and background that will provide insight to my approach and structure of this work.

I was born and raised in northern California, with much of my childhood defined by my family's involvement in an insular Black Baptist church community in an otherwise primarily white and Latinx area. My father was Black and my mother is white, so we were not the typical family in that community, but my mother quickly became assimilated into these spaces and made herself daughter to Black elders of the church to assure she was equipped to raise Black children. Over the time of our enmeshment in this community, my mother had six children. As her oldest daughter, I was looked to and trained as her second hand – caregiving was expected and communal in these spaces. I was raised deeply situated in Blackness as a primary identity, despite the lightness of my skin. I was given books by Black writers and quizzed on Black history at home and in community spaces. I was a voracious reader and writer, encouraged by my mother and adoptive grandmother (from the church community). My early school spaces were relatively multi-cultural, becoming whiter in high school and college. After high school, I chose to attend the local community college, primarily out of my lack of economic resources and necessity to support my family. I was lucky to have such a fulfilling experience at the community college, which cemented my interest and passion in teaching in higher education. I knew as a student there that the community college was the most diverse higher education space that existed within the larger system and would allow me the able to be a part of other people's definition of their academic and intellectual selves.

With the goal of teaching in mind and the pressure to obtain a graduate degree as soon as possible to be able to start a career to help provide for my family (and self), I pursued a Master's of Fine Arts in creative writing – a degree that allowed me to explore my passion for writing and literature, but would also qualify me to teach English at a community college. The mixed experience in my MFA program planted the seed of activism in me, particularly for advocating for the better integration of multicultural literature in curriculum. I started teaching in the community college at age 25 and achieved tenure at the same college at age 30. I returned to graduate school at age 31, already experiencing immense burnout and 6 years into a career I planned on continuing.

With this professional and education background and a solid philosophical and literary location in Black feminist storytelling methods, my advisor Dr. Anne Zanzucchi dubbed me “the MFA with a PhD.” Looking for ways to honor my voice and the voices

¹⁰ In “Whose Culture has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth,” Tara Yasso teaches as community cultural wealth as a theory that shifts the notion of cultural capital away from traditionalist modes and deficit models of thinking. Yasso outlines six aspects of cultural wealth that broaden our thinking of the assets students (and colleagues) bring to our learning spaces. Most relevant to this research familial capital (including lessons of caring and providing for others), social capital (networks and social contacts), and navigational capital (skill of moving through institutions).

of my Black colleagues and students, I position myself as a storyteller first. Outside of the supportive space of my committee, I realized even as a graduate student, even with my agency as a teacher, within “this illusion of some safety to be found / the heavy-footed hoped to silence us” (Lorde, “Litany for Survival”). I have resisted coursework that centered all white, European male writers or worked to protect or shield the institution by portraying it as a place of safety, intellectual freedom or democracy when that has not my my experience. As a storyteller, I center narrative first, look for ways to honor cultural traditions, and aim to make clear how the stories we tell about our selves, each other, and our institutions outline our futures. For myself and other Black / Black-biracial women faculty, I wish to foster a storytelling imagination that gives us back control of our own stories and the potential to vision personal liberation in the stories we tell about ourselves.

The structure of this dissertation plays with forms, moving between the academic and the personal, exploring anecdotes of teaching and assimilating into academia alongside historical context and literary analysis that gives insight to the community college system and Black feminist thought. Through creative writing techniques, letter writing, and oral history, this work aims to speak directly to Black and Black-biracial women, sometimes with languaging that is derived from the communities, signifying to those who share the cultural upbringing and knowledge. With this writing style, I am experimenting with the method and practice of autotheory, (which will be defined in a proceeding chapter), embedding citations in narrative to call in literary ancestors as a practice of love, acknowledgment and discourse building. My use of autotheory also aims to make theory from these personal experiences, in the Black feminist tradition of writers like Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Claudia Rankine. From my experience and the voices of Black and Black-biracial women community college faculty across the state, I add to the discourse of daughtering as method (originated by Venus Evans-Winters) and offer the theory of visionary daughtering (expanded from phrasing proposed by Alexis Pauline Gumbs). To provide the historical and cultural context of the community colleges and positioning of Black faculty, I used a mixed methods approach, incorporating institutional ethnography and autotheory to explore key documents that define the new equity movement of these colleges.

Gumbs writes, “I survive, not because I am barely alive, but because I am flagrantly alive in the sight of my ancestors. The universe loves us. And we sell ourselves cheap when we forget. Our ancestors are teaching us what we deserve.” I adapt the spirit of this message to say, I prevent parts of myself from dying because these parts of myself are alive in the legacy of my ancestors. The universe loves us. The institution will buy us for cheap when we forget. We stand in lineage and teach ourselves and each other what we deserve with the wealth of our knowledge and skills.

In this House, Black Church

“The queer prophet comes to us to make us comfortable with who we are and make us see ourselves as sacred. ...To invite us into the deepest, most sacred part of ourselves, which is the poetry of ourselves.” -Alexis DeVeaux¹¹

Have you ever been to Black church?
Fan in one hand, bulletin in the other
Piano tempering the air

Holding you even if you ain't meant to be here

Have you ever been to a Black funeral?
The one where you hold the rest of your day
Because dozens of us dead now

You better dress
Step slow and sit quiet if it's not your house
Bite blood to your tongue if call/response confounds you

Black church even made my momma Black
Made me, this me
Even when they didn't have a place to hold me queer

Bury me Black.

¹¹ Mobile Homecoming Revival Video: <https://www.mobilehomecoming.org/media/videos>

Introduction

Eulogy of Academic Spirit Death

“Along with a host of Black people, we too believed our schooling was a means towards liberation... We conflated our humanization with matriculation in schools. We know recognize the inextricable link between our social death and the function of schools.” – Marie and Watson, “Remembering an Apocalyptic Education: Revealing Life Beneath the Waves of Black Being”

“By writing the autobiography, it was not just this Gloria I would be rid of, but the past that had a hold on me, that kept me from the present. I wanted not to forget the past but to break its hold. This death in writing was to be liberatory.” bell hooks, *Remembered Rapture*

Processional

Please stand.

Her mother, first, because she trained her the best ways she knew to survive.

Her father, who taught her performance of both truth and untruths.

Her uncle, for whom education was the way to self-worth and respect.

Six younger siblings, eyes still rolling at her “you never had to-s”

Six older siblings, wondering if they ever knew.

Her Gran-gran, who did.

Her Fresno friends, who held her in the complicated realities.

Her college colleagues, heads hanging in complicity.

Her Puente colleagues, who held her heart, but often too tightly.

Her advising committee, who agreed and made the way.

Her therapist, who told her she was changed.

Prelude

Jamie, the Daughter, at the pulpit.

In *When You Learn the Alphabet*, Kendra Allen tells us, “The daughter was born making sure not to say the wrong thing, making sure not to make the wrong move. They never have to watch the way they say things because that's just who they are. Sorry becomes a fluent language whether she's done something wrong or not. Whether she was there or not. When she's older, whether she chooses to back down or not. She was a good child. She could be a better daughter.”

Good people of this place, thank you for gathering here to listen, hold space, for an unconventional meeting, for the examination of my own the legacy and autopsy of my spirit. I've spent ten years of service at the front of room, but a lifetime of sitting student. A legacy of raised hands, reassuring nods. Of steady progression to the goals I believed in. There was a time it nurtured my spirit, and for sure seemed to be the seedlings of my ancestors, to reflect on the impact of my work in the institution. Professor, teacher (because we know how those titles can be different), chair, lead, coordinator, mentor. Can

you feel the ripples of those roles? How I held eager hands even as my own trembled. How I nursed the papercuts of doubt, slipped in the tender skin between my fingers by the colleagues, staff and students who questioned my training, belonging, and expertise. There's pride in a callous, isn't there? I've never not been prepared. I've never not been ready to fight. I've never not had the best, brightest, newest, most innovative in the room just to stand alongside average white men. But that work makes the body weary. It tangles the mind. It sits like a weight against my throat and isn't it true you all told me over and over again not to lose my voice?

I was born, raised and pruned for agreeableness. For a soft voice and resilient heart. That's why it started here, in the church, to make sure these habits were vague-nerve deep. Do you remember me sitting in the pew next to my white momma, maybe fourth row back, hair plaited, hands folded. Still Sunday Dressed even when most people stopped caring about Sunday Dress because our family never let anyone think less of us. It was here that I was called on first to stand in front of a group, to practice public speaking. The deacons said I was the best morning bulletin reader, and that even when I read the weekly Black American History Maker with shaky knees, I made all of them proud with my clear voice. By calling me up again and again, these kin reassured me of my Blackness, my belonging. It was here, reading our history aloud, that planted the seed of interest in lineage and legacy each week. The church claimed me scholar before academia did. Though they thought this was honor, they should've seen it as burden as well.

Will you bow your heads with me? Our daughter, our daughters, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy names. How much can we carry, dear Lord? How much do they give us in their selfishness; how much do they ask us to know? I have read about and witness the burial of too many scholarly Black women, and their voices haunt the edges of our spaces, still watching over us. Still studying and moving things out of our way without a trace. Holding our secrets so tightly, our transgressions disintegrate into their palms. They told us, they still whisper, "we took care of ourselves, we took care of younger children, served our fathers and elders first, and submitted to our mothers...all the while exist[ing] in a family structure and community that judged us on how well we did [it] all."¹² We never gave them the help nor the pedestal. Instead, we always told them the best way to be in order to aid us. To keep us lifted. Institutions critiqued to keep them small, quiet, and cornered. We didn't see that they knew more than we could understand from the blinders of our egos. We didn't know the ways their imagination and ingenuity kept us alive.

In the reflection of the good daughters, the leaders, we ask for their skills of observance, for their reach towards healing. Because through the physical, emotional and spiritual work, we know that these daughters, and all our "[daughters] want [us] to never lose what

¹² Evans Winters, Venus. *Black Feminist Qualitative Inquiry: Writing A Mosaic of our Daughter's Bodies*

she has given... a sense that there is something deeper, more to this life than the everyday.”¹³

Let us sing.

Hymn

Jamila Woods’s “Eartha” fades in from speakers that frame the pulpit.

“The space you take up
The curve of your learning
That’s my labor, my love
Explaining myself again
I could have run a mile instead
I could have twist my ends instead
I’m laid out in bed
Gaslight in my head
But I said what I said
I don’t wanna compromise
Can we make it through the night?
I’m trying to see eye-to-eye
But you look right over me
Your words stuck on repeat
And I’m tired of your shit

Who gonna share my love for me with me?
Who gonna share my love for me with me?”¹⁴

As the recording ends, the musicians in pulpit carry it forward. The brother on the drum set picks up the kick-beat of the song. The head of choir follows with the chords on the piano. The choir sings the ending lines, “who gonna share my love for me with me,” their voices starting low, then building, building. The alto in the back grabs the tambourine and hits that clack-hiss on the two and four that gets the energy up, that signals to the drum to pick the pace, until the choir starts swaying two-step and the congregation follows, until the chant rings the walls and blankets everyone in a way that makes the Believers feel that familiar tingle in their hands and feet (because they think it’s a question that they know the answer to and that holy answer compels them to move, to travel that answer around the room), until some of the church aunties began their aisle-long dance, until the spirit of “who gonna” bends their backs and knees and makes them unsteady, until those who know the answer to “who gonna” is actually Themselves pull the aunties back up. And the Black women, (who’ve undone Belief but carry spirit), fan them, humming with

¹³ hooks, bell. “Reflections of a Good Daughter.” *Double Stitch: Black Women Write About Mothers and Daughters*

¹⁴ Woods, Jamila. *LEGACY! LEGACY!*, musical album, 2019

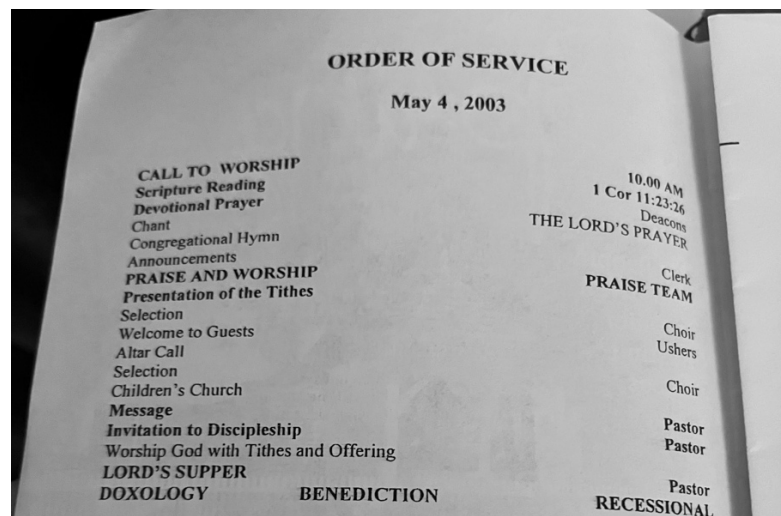
the ways they know. And the academics confusedly clap on the one and three, too distracted by watching them to feel or intuit rhythms.

The drums slow pace and patter out as the aunties move from stomp, to step, to seat. As the service transitions, the chords of the piano play the deacon to the pulpit.

Order of Service

An Elder at the pulpit.

Good afternoon, everyone. I said, good afternoon. For those unknowing, I am here to share the order of our service today. At the close of this eulogy, we will proceed with a full-length service, customary to the tradition of southern Black Baptists, and the origin of Professor Jamie's daughtering training. (See image below). The service will continue with an in-depth scripture reading of the institution's holy documents, as will be described momentarily in our guiding ritual. We will offer a devotional prayer for our daughters, as well as a chant practice. Our praise and worship will be guided by and introduce us to the methods of visionary daughtering. Next, we will present our tithes at the altar of Black Feminist Literature. Proceeding that, our altar call and testimony will invite the histories of other women standing in the same legacy of academic performance. After a choir selection and dismissal of our young, our message today will relay the path forward for our sisters using their embodied knowledge. Moving towards the service close, our invitation to discipleship will outline the ways of the Visionary Daughter. Our benediction will call upon our literary ancestors and activist organizations to guide our future practice, and our recessional will close our formal service. Thank you.



[Fig. 1: Photograph of the bulletin of Community Baptist Church of Santa Rosa, CA]

Reflection: The Academy Imagined This Spirit Death

Jamie, the Scholar, at the pulpit.

To thrive we must heal. But how do we heal when we are not given the space of our own imagination? This space is a beginning, the many services of burnt out, broken, disappeared sisters and kin give us those spaces if we are tuned to what they really mean. Are we really tuned to what our minds and bodies are asking for when we no longer have the patience to be present at the meeting, or the energy to advise the student, or the emotional capacity to hold a white colleague's feelings? If we are, perhaps we should find ways to step away. I say that in grief of our dear sisters, our dear daughters, of me, another woman spent up by this place. Another woman who can no longer bring that knowledge-giving - that survival-teaching - to the young people because she was hounded and hosed by the gangs of white folks in the institution. Those folks, maybe some in this room, burning so hot behind the ears with shame and guilt at any truth she got brave enough to speak in a meeting, that they met together in the corners of their offices to stir up stories about her.

Do you know how well daughters are attuned to hearing? Did you ever consider that her trained ears could hear your whispers? That she was literally built to suss out secrets? Y'all weren't as slick as you thought you were.

Today I invite you down here with me. Come down here¹⁵ and lay with me in the dirt; in the box you've tried to bury us in. Do you feel the achy itch of the soil against your shoulders? Do you feel the mounting pressure of each shovel of dirt on our body? We are in your metaphors right now, because this is exactly what you've imagined, isn't it? A silencing, a stuffing of the mouth until no breath can pass? Policies and assessments and reviews and rules of speaking and "don't you know how to speak like us" and "sounds like just your feelings" and false objectivity and committee procedures and aggregated data. Rules like hands at our throat, you kept us collared.

Come down here with me. The literal holding down of our body – when wasn't a white man's hand holding my shoulder as if in greeting, but in actuality checking to make sure he appears taller? When you are seen as a threat, they want to constantly remind you of your body's softness, smallness, pliability. Hair ruffled, led by the waist, palm at the hand of her back, all directing me to the exact place they wanted. When you are seen as a caretaker, they want to remind you of your body's belonging not to yourself, but to all the people who want consoling for their assimilation. The ask of a hug, the taking of it, the cornering for physical comfort, the grasp of my hand. Holding so tight, the circulation is gone, the tingling passes, the numbness sets in. This is the place we get cut off from our bodies.

My death and ours, all actively imagined. Soul first, freedom snatched, then body withered. The best way we can fight is to take our minds back. How do we imagine ourselves alive again?

¹⁵ Zenju Earthlyn Manuel, "Darkness is Asking to Be Loved" <https://www.lionsroar.com/darkness-is-asking-to-be-loved/>

We must remember this was done to us. In a space we were not meant to survive¹⁶. And how long will we continue to try to change these spaces? How long will we submit ourselves and our babies to this? Is there potential to survive here at all? If there is, it is in the reclamation of our vision, of our imagining. Shange taught us this through little Indigo, our daughter of the spirits. She reminds us, “there wasn't enough for Indigo in the world she'd been born to, so she made-up what she needed. What she thought the black people need. Access to the moon. The power to heal. Daily visits with the spirit.”¹⁷ Let us call to our inner Indigo, nurture our fugitive spirits who dare to break the rules, hide our conjuring tools and use them even when they, and we, are condemned.

May I be bold enough here to say I *am* a visionary daughter. May I say we can vision, we can make up something better, something that we need. We can imagine our power to heal until it becomes a tangible thing that we can wrap ourselves in and finally rest.

Guiding Ritual: Inquiry and Theory

Jamie, the Professor, at the pulpit.

I honor that reflection, and my body's response to it, while also recognizing the work we must do here. The work we have in front of us today, in this service, is that very performance we are also mourning. The work we have in front of us today is the work of translating. As our form of meeting with each other may be new to many in the room, there will be some information lost to those on the outside of these cultural references, and there's not much we can do about that. However, our work thrives in invitation, and community activism must be rooted in accessibility. We will do our best to serve our work, to be of service to others, and to meet the task before us.

I will now share our guiding rituals; the methods by which we plan to engage in this mourning, research, presentation, and healing. Let us begin with embodied knowledge, that what is shared here is a culmination of lived experience and feeling. Let us begin with the acknowledgement that story and anecdote and even gossip are ventricles to the heart of connection. With this understanding, the narratives shared during this service are guided by a community-based epistemology, and also reflect several different ripples of community. Our first space of community bears witness in the structure of this service; the community of Black mothers, parents, grandparents, cousins and friends that share a lived experience of discrimination, epistemic violence, ancestry, persistence, and vision. This community of interest¹⁸ finds direct connection and representation in the academic through Black feminist epistemology, claims that have been “routinely ignored, discredited, or simply absorbed and marginalized into existing paradigms” can be brought to light and validated.¹⁹ As Patricia Hills Collins defined for us, “the four dimensions of Black feminist epistemology – lived experience as a criterion of meaning, the use of

¹⁶ Lorde, Audre. “A Litany for Survival,” <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/147275/a-litany-for-survival>

¹⁷ Shange, Ntozake. *Sassafrass, Cypress and Indigo*. St. Martin's Press, 1982, p.4-5

¹⁸ <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095755941>

¹⁹ Collins, Patricia. “Black Feminist Epistemology” *Black Feminist Thought*

dialogue, the ethic of personal accountability, and the ethic of caring,” serve as a basis for theory building from these shared stories.²⁰

Secondly, and paired with the emphasis on lived experience as meaning-making, is the guiding theory of institutional ethnography. This method allows us to bring light to the story-making within our institutions; it allows us to map how our rules, social interactions and texts create unspoken understandings of who we are and who we should be to survive in these spaces. Institutional ethnography allows us to step away from the guise of objectivity and acknowledge our positionality. It allows us to describe what we understand from the sociopolitical context of our workspace from our experience of actually moving through it. As Dorothy Smith taught us, “institutional ethnography begins in the local actualities of the everyday world, with the concerns and perspectives of people located distinctively in the institutional process.”²¹ In the context of this service, this method will be used to examine a document that aimed to change the doctrine of the community college, and whether seen as successful or not, momentarily shifted the focus of authority, of knowing, to Black women. It tried to spark a movement that exposed the ruling relations of the college and asked Black women – our daughters – to perform service by explaining the silent rules that govern us, back to us. To tell us what they could see when we couldn’t. Until it hurt to hear them and we didn’t want to anymore.

This whole work is framed by autotheory, which I see as an action of call and response rooted in the traditions we work to serve today. Autotheory is guided personal narrative, by the archeology of anecdote to make theory from the bones of our experiences. This is primarily the work of self-theory, interrupted and braced by the words of other scholars. In this work, autotheory will speak between the lines of Black feminist quotes that have been chosen to guide us towards persistence; ones that Jamie needed to be able to survive. Through self-analysis, close reading, and literary analysis, autotheory answers the question of “how writers and artists situate experiences of difference, in real and sincere ways, in spaces that are so hostile to those experiences.”²² Additionally, this usage of autotheory also meant as an honoring of Black women’s intellectual production²³, of biomythography,²⁴ and as a devotional citation practice.²⁵

As we move to our invocation, let us remember the blessing and honor of her legacy and the legacy of our mothers and daughters. Let us remember that they have, “handed down

²⁰ Collins, Patricia, “Black Feminist Epistemology” *Black Feminist Thought*

²¹ Smith, Dorothy. *Institutional Ethnography* p32

²² Fournier, Lauren. *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*, p266

²³ Cite Black Women. “Our Praxis:

²⁴ Lorde, Audre. *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*

²⁵ Greenwood, Storm. “Devotional Citation and Sustainable Practice.

<https://maifeminism.com/devotional-citation-sustainable-praxis/>

respect for the possibilities – and the will to grasp them... This ability to hold on, even in very simple ways, is work Black women have done for a very long time.”²⁶

Ase.

Invocation

Jamie, a Daughter, at the pulpit, surrounded by an arc of ancestors.

As we move towards the beginning of the full program, we invite you to find your place for yourself – spiritually, mentally, physically. May it be as spectator, looking in to understand. May it be as ally, tracing back the story you’ve already been told because you see the reason to believe it now. May it be as kin, holding your truths alongside the ones shared here, finding the links that bind our daughters together. May we be blessed.

Let Us Begin Service.

²⁶ Walker, Alice. “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens,” *Double Stitch: Black Women Write About Mothers and Daughters*

Exploring a Black Feminist Autotheory

I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend – to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing.” -bell hooks, “Theory as Liberatory Practice,” Teaching to Transgress

In her book, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing and Criticism*, Lauren Fournier poses a question that positions the importance of autotheory as method when she asks, “how do writers and artists situate experiences of difference, in real and sincere ways, in spaces that are so hostile to those experiences?” (266). While autotheory as method is perhaps used and referenced most in literature and writing studies, particularly creative non-fiction and memoir, Fournier’s question opens a dialogue of how this methodology creates a space across disciplines for voices of various identities to share their experiences, particularly those that may be critical to the equity and inclusion work of an institution, while locating their work in a larger academic or literary discourse. Recent diversity, equity, and inclusion movements in higher education have revealed that although progress has been made in equality and access to higher education opportunities, there remains sizable equity and inclusion gaps in several key areas. These equity and inclusion gaps affect the entire institution, (students, faculty, and staff), and while equity conversations tend to end at student services, this research seeks to interrogate these gaps related to faculty. These gaps include: hiring and retaining of diverse faculty, promoting of faculty of color to tenure (or even full-time opportunities), early career burnout (particularly for Black women), and the cumulative, destructive effect of harassment and othering on faculty identity, mental health, and physical health. In diversity, equity and inclusion work at California community colleges, the participatory governance model means that most of this work is done through established faculty committees, (often comprised of tenured, white faculty members), and is limited to policy changes that are disconnected from the social and cultural context of the college.

In my experience as a community college professor, equity leader, and professional development trainer for multiple colleges, it is rare that equity and inclusion work includes intentional spaces to listen to, validate and critically consider the voices of Black faculty and faculty of color. Rather, personal experience and storytelling is subjected to labels of emotionality, non-relevance, and unprofessionalism. However, the lack of progress in diversity in hiring and the flight of (often young) Black scholars from academia makes it clear that the hostile environment of our institutions is an immediate equity issue, and one that also affects the well-being and success of our students. This chapter proposes autotheory as a method of engagement with faculty of color narratives, focusing on the stories of Black women in community colleges, particularly as it connects to the Black Feminist tradition of writing oneself and one’s lived experience as an assertion of worthy and method of critique of systems of oppression. Autotheory as method for faculty narratives bends genre to claim an interdisciplinary space for Black

Feminist narratives to situate their perspectives in larger academic discourses while resisting the systemic silencing of their voices.

For the purposes of this research, I am defining autotheory as the integration and analysis of theory in personal narrative writing, particularly in the effort to create new theory through the analysis of lived experience. Connected to other genres, autotheory is an evolution of creative and critical writing, (as well as art and performance), that in its feminist imperative seeks to reject dominant epistemologies in favor of expansive ways to understand embodied experiences. The richness of this method is in its intertextuality, which allows it to be multi-genre and interdisciplinary. It emphasizes the advancement of discourse and the necessity for intersectionality. Scholars in autotheory, such as Lauren Fournier and Arianne Zwartjes who will be discussed below, note that autotheory can “engender new ways of theorizing...that are responsive to and embedded in the lives of those doing the thinking and speaking, including those who have been historically precluded from positions of intellectual authority” (Fournier 270).

On this point, while this specific terming of “autotheory” feels contemporary, this practice of using personal narrative to create emergent theory is grounded in long literary and political history of Black writers engaging in this meta-awareness of the connection between their experience and theorizing. In this chapter and throughout this research, the experimentations of autotheory are based in this history, borrowing from writers such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Farrah Jasmine Griffiths, and Claudia Rankin, among others to demonstrate the following forms of autotheoretical form: quote response and integration, epistolary writing, mixing narrative and academic voice, writing in verse, assumed voices, intentional spacing, italicized text, and engaging in conversation with theory through annotation or footnotes. The following analysis and practice of autotheory seeks to interrogate the use of this method across this literary lineage for several purposes including a few major functions that fuel its contemporary usage: creating a sense of credibility for Black voices systemically silenced in academia, pushing beyond the accepted and traditional forms of scholarship to produce visionary work based in cultural epistemology, and emphasizing the role of narrative as beyond just individual expression, but important to collective freedom.

Institutions of higher education have existed to indoctrinate students to white, Eurocentric ideals, demanding assimilation into and performance of these ideals, particularly for survival in academic spaces. This epistemic violence served to silence the experience, narratives, and innovation of academics of color, particularly regarding research that attempted to center people of color in a way that was not “othering.” Through anecdotal storytelling and historical literary analysis, this chapter seeks to introduce the practice of autotheory as a methodology that has served to create the space in academia for voices outside the majority. In present discourse, it exists as a visionary practice that invites collective healing, particularly for those within academia. Leading through story serves as a counter to assimilation, standardization and stereotyping. While there is a contemporary resurgence of the term autotheory that often lacks the historical foundation in Black feminism in its labeling and analysis, the exploration and naming of epistemic violence is important to my understanding of the function of autotheory.

I Came to Theory Because I Was Hurting

The day I received my tenure certificate as a community college faculty member, I was drafting a personal account, paired with a resignation letter. One of these looked more like a list; six pages of a Google document detailing as many transgressions against my physical and emotional boundaries that I could remember that had happened during my time at my college. This included the brushing and clutching of my body by students, faculty and staff. It included dangerous student interactions that did not have proper intervention when requested. It included the experience of being infantilized and not believed, of ideas stolen and presented as another's. And not to be beyond cliché, it included racist and sexist attacks, while simultaneously using me as the picture of diversity on campus. When I looked at the cumulative list, it was pretty shocking. However, each of these incidents happened almost casually, in my everyday interactions. I normalized these happenings so much that I often did not recognize them until after the fact, realizing that I dissociated in the moment to do whatever needed to be done: finish the class period, make a point in a department meeting, complete the workshop. Those realizations happened in reflections with a few trusted colleagues, questioning my own reality, and sometimes in their responses, questioning their positionality as I wondered, "why do you feel okay saying [and doing] this to me?"²⁷

The second document was the first paragraph of a resignation letter, a few tense sentences full of spite and grief. It reached for overly formal language, armoring up to defend against any familiar accusations of being overly emotional or irrational. Even though part of me knew I would be standing next to the chair of my department in a few hours, half-heartedly smiling as he commended all the "good work in equity" I did on campus, I needed to feel some sort of agency over my future. Really what I felt was resigned to this "good job," to chasing this protection of tenure when I did not actually feel protected, to securing a future even when I lacked physical and emotional well-being. One of my colleagues caught me jokingly mention this task to another person and called me into his office. This colleague was an older Black man who always came to campus dressed up, one of a handful of Black faculty on campus and the only other one in our department, English. "Now why would you go on saying that kind of stuff about quitting," he asked, "I know how hard you've worked. And how hard we've all worked." There was coding in the word we, I understood in his gaze. I bumbled through some of what I was feeling and even though he listened, he eventually straightened his suit jacket and checked his watch, minutes from when we needed to walk over to the Senate room. "And through all this nonsense, you've survived. Don't let them kick you out, don't let them let you give up a good thing. Find a way. Vision it." He motioned for us to get going, standing up to brush the invisible dust off his trousers, checking to make sure he was ready for his ongoing performance of respectable, capital P Professor. He looked at me again with some gravity, down the bridge of his nose. *She was a good child. She could be a better daughter.*²⁸ This moment was not just professional, at this college, (and with all the noise I had made over the year), it was cultural. Political. And just like my home training, I stood up and straightened my skirt, checked my hair. I followed him

²⁷ Rankine, Claudia, *Citizen*

²⁸ Allen, Kendra. *When You Learn the Alphabet*. p145

across campus like a good daughter would. I waited to stand up for my award, for them to take pictures of me.

I came to theory hurting, as hooks says, trying to find a way to stay. Trying to describe what I feeling – or what I was making my way back to feeling after so long of trying to ignore it. Knowing that my pain was not unprecedented by any means, but knowing I needed to find, read and wrap myself in the voices of those who did it before.²⁹ I did what academia had trained me to do; I returned to the site of trauma to define myself. I needed theory to describe, to legitimize, what I feeling. With my years of intellectualizing my bodily and emotional response in classrooms, of succeeding despite low expectations of me, I knew I could physically face the trauma of another program to teach myself new ways of thinking. I could reconnect with the voices who knew what this dissonance is and struggled to find the words. To remember and use my studies to focus on women who wrote through chronic illness and mental distress to articulate their living through it. To use the tremors of my body to map the fault lines of academia for a person like me. Black-biracial, woman, queer, considered young for now. The constraints of academic writing, of academic identity and performance, had largely told me there was not space to be my full self. I did not get to be humanized. My job was always to prove myself, to be good, to be humble, to be helpful. To always know and to always allow myself to be corrected. As something was breaking, I was searching for a way to reveal this systemic pain and to show how it so seamlessly matched the way the way I was raised to be/perform/care anyway that this trauma felt like inheritance, like legacy. And there were always ways it was new, since I (and others of my generation) were not the first, not the path makers. With their hard-work, and bitten tongues, I/we knew it was possible. Perhaps there was/is method here. Perhaps there was/is survival and thrivance here.³⁰ In the spirit of this legacy, I sought out others who were making their self-maps, charting their lives into theory.

Evolving from earlier forms of literary expression that combined autobiography, theory and philosophy, the term autotheory has become more present in the twenty-first century as writers and artists have sought interdisciplinary forms that more directly connect to a performative self-awareness grounded in feminist practices. In her article, “Under the Skin: An Exploration of Autotheory,” Arianne Zwartjes defines “autotheory [as] work that engages in thinking about the self, the body, and the particularities of one’s lived experiences, as processed through or juxtaposed against theory -- or as the basis for theoretical thinking. It strips the pretension of neutrality, of objectivity, away from the theorizing voice.” The theorizing voice referenced here, most often ascribed to the work of canonical white, Western scholars, is used by academics as the standard for research and a measure of scholarship not “interfered” with by emotion or perspective.

The work of the autotheorist is to reject the notion of objectivity, to highlight the reality that “all theory is in fact based in someone else’s experience of their one particular body, though they have conveniently erased it from their theorizing so as to seem like a disembodied brain” (Zwartjes). In fact, to access, connect to and apply such theory

²⁹ Baldwin, James. 1963 interview

³⁰ Definition of thrivance. Thrivance project: <https://thrivancegroup.com/vision>

requires for the reader to participate in this disconnection from their body, to be complicit in the objectification and generalization of the human experience. This approach to theory is particularly limiting to BIPOC scholars whose intersectional experiences and perspectives offer complexity to such theories that are often not welcomed in the classroom or in critical dialogue. The practice of autotheory creates the critical space to “join lived experiences to intertextual references—to the history of art, literature, philosophy, film and pop culture – as part of the development of a theory” (Fournier 149). Carving a space for themselves in a larger academic discourse, the autotheorist uses their experiences as the basis for developing new theories and exploring the complexities of and their connections to other theoretical arguments. This practice of thinking and writing critically about the self beyond the value systems of higher education institutions is rooted in the work of Black and Chicana scholars defining themselves outside of societal stereotypes and claiming space in the academic conversation.

An additional lens into the practice of autotheory is to view it as a citation practice. This includes the *auto*, or citation of the self, alongside other works to illustrate a relationship, connection, or expansion of existing theory. For those whose voices have been consistently silenced or marginalized, autotheory’s use of citation alongside narrative “creates a sense of parallel, rather than hierarchy, between different ways of knowing, thinking and analyzing” (Zwartjes). This form of autotheory in praxis aligns with other interdisciplinary, contemporary feminist movements, such as Cite Black Women, which seek to dismantle the dominant, imperialist workings of the university by “reconfigur[ing] the politics of knowledge production by engaging in a radical praxis of citation that acknowledges and honors Black women’s transnational intellectual production.”

In the mid 2010s, writers like Maggie Nelson, Paul Presciado, and a few others directly labeled their books as autotheory, integrating outside theory into their own narratives, expanding the notion of autotheory as a queer, feminist citation practice. While these works do not necessarily engage with the larger lineage of autotheory as based in Black Feminist practices, they expand the genre by the way they use citation practices. Nelson, who integrates a wide variety of sources, (from western canonical philosophers, to Lorde, to pop culture references), uses autotheory as annotation; her use of theory on the page appears as part of the narrative in italics and as margin notes (in the far left and right columns of the page). Carmen Maria Machado’s *In the Dream House* builds on autotheory’s queer, feminist citation practice by using extensive footnotes on her page to accompany narrative focused vignettes to tell previously untold stories of intimate partner violence and how the intellectualization of love and emotion clouds the ability to see its truth.

While Fournier explains that autotheory in some its recent iterations shows writers “extending the conceit of writing, annotating, and scribbling in the margins in conceptual ways,” this paper seeks to emphasize the deeper work and history of autotheory in as a method of lending credibility and validity to the lived experiences of Black scholars (138). As we consider the history of justice movements in the United States and our current context of being a justice movement lead by the youngest generation, more emerging scholars are seeking to redefine academic writing in ways that

are accessible and align with the history of intersectional scholars that have always sought accountability of the institution.

The Pain Within Me Was So Intense That I Could Not Go On Living

Autotheory is a methodology and form originated, nurtured, and sustained by Black academic tradition, specifically Black Feminist literary practice. By exploring autotheory as method and practice in this work, I intend to honor and analyze this literary tradition, sustained by Black women academics and creative writers who created space for narrative writing in their publications, (including in traditional publishing, academic journals and community-based publishing collectives). These writer-scholars are not writing just for academic credibility or display, rather, they are writing towards a personal and collective healing. This healing becomes a method and praxis, finding a way back to the self as they stand subjugated to/assimilated into/complicit in higher education institutions. Autotheoretical writing thus becomes a mode of survival, particularly in higher education spaces, that fights for the recognition of one's own humanity, persistence and resilience. It serves as to shift the epistemological and ontological center of humanities, sociology, and philosophy studies from its singular focus on white, male European scholars. By using theory as annotation or signposts in their work, (rather than their focus being to completely align their work with others), they asserted that their lives and their experiences were worthy of study.

To trace a brief lineage of autotheory, we can turn to the work of several radical Black writers, many writing to an immediate need for justice in the timeline of civil rights in the United States. Writing both within and outside of academia, these writers began the work to expand the genre of autobiography/memoir in order to understand the dimensions of their oppression from the lens of philosophy. One such example comes from W.E.B. DuBois's *The Souls of Black Folk*. In his chapter, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," DuBois uses stories from his childhood to articulate his first understandings of racial difference and the beliefs associated with them. DuBois's synthesis of this experience unfolds into to his theory of double consciousness and its larger impact for those coming into a racial consciousness in the United States.

I Came to Theory Desperate, Wanting to Comprehend – and Grasp What Was Happening Around and Within Me

W.E.B. Dubois shapes the way I think about autotheory, and his work is why I connect to autotheory as a method that communicates directly with institutional ethnography. In *The Souls of Black Folks*, Dubois seeks to "sketch the spiritual world" in which Black people live, and as he does so, he uses reflective, anecdotal experience to reveal institutional systems and societal patterns that create cycles of discrimination and result in internalized emotional truths. Theorizing inside of his experience, Dubois was writing to understand how to live, how to process his experiences in a way that was communicable to others. In doing so, he formed a theory that is both the foundation of accepting the importance of one's own positionality, but also a map into the practice of antitheoretical writing. Dubois's invitation into autotheory includes two steps: (1) the recognition of the "veil" and (2) articulation of one's own double consciousness.

In the first chapter of his text, titled “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” Dubois recounts the feeling of “being a problem” from early childhood. He moves from the description of an elementary classroom experience into a more complex intellectual analysis, recognizing the influence of an existing, unspoken social system that created specific feelings about his own worth. He recognized that the subtlety of this message meant that he internalized the feelings of it first, way before he would have the foresight to understand the segregation and isolation being established that intended to separate him from his peers. The situation was simple, an exchange of cards between boys and girls, perhaps in the spirit of a Valentine’s day tradition. One girl refused his card, striking down a fantasy of opportunity and communion amongst his peers, opening the reality that many of them held these opportunities alone, and he faced a prison, unless he fought for the chance to wrest these futures for himself. Dubois writes:

Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows.

Dubois creates a metaphor that makes his emotional response tangible and accessible; the image of the veil representing that disconnect from the social world around him. It represented the ways in which these social slights were supposed to cloud his vision, to provide a barrier between what he perceived as achievable for himself and other Black people. It signaled that he was supposed to keep these desires hidden, to be unassuming and always humble in his pursuit of the future. Dubois states he does not desire to remove the veil, as it is the recognition of the veil that gives him the ultimate power, the undeniable perspective, to say the unsayable, to expose a truth that implies everyone. It gives him the ability to analyze the systems many are unconsciously submissive to and complicit in. To recognize the veil is to recognize and reclaim his worth and power of voice. To recognize the veil opens the possibility to also hover above it, to see a wider potential of self.

The concept of double consciousness has persisted as a foundational theory to explore identity formations well as code-switching and assimilationist practices particular to navigating white dominant spaces, such as higher education institutions. DuBois’s theory and presentation of it is connected to the secondary methodology of this research, institutional ethnography, by the way in which it reveals the ruling relations and social coordination space through personal observation. The experience of double consciousness makes visible the textures of power, regard, and value within an institutional space, and the unconscious behaviors that result from how these unspoken agreements or beliefs govern the space. Within community college spaces, the institutional space this work is focused on, the most common ways ruling relations operate are in the relationships between administration and faculty, and the divide between tenured, full-time, and part-time faculty. Demographics and politics, (both social and political-leaning), complicate these dynamics and work to silence discrimination at all levels. As Dubois explains even though his childhood interactions, particularly in school spaces as one is seeking reward, favor, and advancement, many people of color learn to read and anticipate who others expect them to be and shift parts of themselves to

meet those expectations. Upon first encountering the theory of double-consciousness, I shook with the new language to explain how I persisted in educational spaces, from student to newly-tenured professor. I understood how to think about my shifts in both verbal and body language between a classroom and a department meeting; about the unconscious ways I made myself presentable, relatable, respectable. And despite all that internal and external work, it reminded me that any success I achieved would always be unexpected, shocking and even offensive to my majority white, upper-class colleagues.

I entered the staff room around seven in the morning, noticing the overhead lights were not turned on. Rather, the windows were open, letting in the blueish light of fall mornings. It created an eerie chill against my newly hired, full-time professor glow. I placed my bag on the table at the center of the room, and as I turned to the printer to get copies ready for my morning class, I noticed Jason sitting at one of the computers. He and I had been teaching early sessions on the same campus for last few years and had always shared a friendly regard, exchanging pleasantries or venting about student issues. While our schedules stayed the same, today the energy had changed, fresh off the hiring news.

“Good morning,” I said to Jason. He returned a slight nod, not looking up from the computer. I did not think much of it at first, getting into my own groove of making handouts.

“Congratulations by the way,” he said, his eyes moving towards the full-time mailbox slots where a new label with my name had been added.

“I’m definitely grateful, what a process...” I started.

“I’m glad this college finally got their diversity hire,” he said flatly. His eyes shifted to me, daring a response.

“Ha, yeah,” I turned back to the printer. I remember biting my tongue hard enough to taste metallic – a punishment to myself for not arguing, for almost agreeing, for trusting in any sense of camaraderie with colleagues, for not seeing what I should have seen at the start of our interactions when this colleague would offer me unsolicited advice even when I had less complaints than him about classroom dynamics.

Veil lifted.

My double consciousness came fully forward in that moment. I was supposed to agree with him. I was supposed to reflect back to my white, male, middle-aged, middle-class, mediocre colleague that he deserved it more than me. I was supposed to agree that because he was older, knew more people, shared their personal and political beliefs, that I was just a token. That I hadn’t worked harder than him. That my ideas weren’t more innovative. Like DuBois,

gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

The region in which I teach, full-time, tenure track positions are hard to secure. There is a lot of competition, as the local university churns out reliable batches of same-thinking, similarly trained graduate students looking to settle for composition teaching. Many come from the same white, upper middle-class background. The social expectation is that local adjuncts often have to “do their time,” and for most, they remain stuck in the cycle of being the part-timer, the free-flier from college to college to scrabble together a lower-paying, but still full-time load. To Jason, and to many others, I had not done my time. I was not one of them. I broke the rules. By their measurement, there was no way I should have been called before them. I was not supposed to win.

Paired with another experience that I wrote about for the California Acceleration Project teaching blog³¹ about being questioned on my presentation and speech as an English professor, my recognition of the veil not only allowed me to see the code-switching I engaged in that betrayed my sense of self, humanity and worth, but also the compulsory nature with which I engaged in taking care of the feelings of everyone else before myself. This deference, this making myself small, this people pleasing, was all deeply ingrained in my unconscious understanding of how to survive in these spaces and keep the favor of those “in charge.” It was a training that was deepened by my daughterhood and community upbringing, thus, without theory or critical thought, served as a source of pride. *I connect with everyone. I am always there. I am reliable. I am knowledgeable. I care.* What was really happening was: I do the additional emotional work to meet everyone’s spoken and unspoken expectations. I push myself beyond my limits physically to be present so as not to be questioned for not doing enough. I mentally extend myself to learn and observe everything I can to reflect back the standards, expectations, and culture of a space to its participants. I carry the emotional burden when colleagues see me as a safe space to unpack their frustrations, aggressions, and failures.

In this reflection, I also call upon the work of Frantz Fanon, particularly in building the connection between autotheory and institutional ethnography, as well as the critique of institutional systems that perpetuate epistemic violence. Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, does similar work of exploring personal experience while also integrating poetry to model a self-definition that defied the labels he faced under a colonial system. After an epigraph of a poem by Léopold Senghor about messages of the ancestors, Fanon reflects, “I made myself a poet of the world. The white man had found a

³¹ “How do you teach English when you talk like that?” The question, sardonically asked of me by a colleague, was meant to challenge the ideas in a workshop I was co-leading about language justice and narrative writing in composition classes. I remember pausing in my explanation, smiling even, being so familiar with this question and having worked through the imposter syndrome I had long internalized around this assumption about my speech, which is often layered with African American vernacular dialect. As much as I don’t want to admit it, the questioning remains a visceral experience, an attack on my body, belonging, and voice. It was an experience I had in professional contexts that I knew many of my students also had in their classrooms. White supremacist language always put me off from the idea of formal academic writing and propelled me to think about writing in classroom spaces in a new way, particularly for research writing. Moore, “Transforming the Research Paper”
<https://accelerationproject.org/transforming-the-research-paper-using-oral-history-to-center-students-voices-and-communities/>

poetry in which there was nothing poetic...I was told...when the whites feel like they have become too mechanized, they turn to the me of color and ask them for a little human sustenance. ...a white man explained to me...your properties have been exhausted by us...then I had the feeling that I was repeating a cycle” (129). As Fanon explores the ways he is falling in and out of narratives of empowerment and ancestral connection, he uses a connection to the work of Aimé Césaire to reveal that although nothing can take away the humanness he was discovered within himself (which the system of colonization seems to deprive him of), a true reclamation of and freedom within his identity as a Black man is outside of his grasp under colonization. Fanon’s work of autotheory is the fight for the reconstruction of his history and the vision of his own future in order to excavate the soils of white supremacy that colonization had sunk within him. It is through the assembly of memory and the alignment of his narrative with revolutionary philosophers and poets that he expresses: “I took up my negritude, and with tears in my eyes I put its machinery together again. What had been broken to piece was rebuilt, reconstructed by the intuitive lianas of my hands” (138).

Most Importantly, I Wanted to Make the Hurt Go Away

Here is the place where autotheory gives me space to comment on what has happened to me in academia – which I know is not a singular experience. The flexible and adaptive practice of autotheory grounds me in the healing of writing my narrative while staying buoyed to other voices that validate these experiences. Because of course, the trauma of academia has taught me that my voice can not stand alone, that validation is key. I don’t mean to give credence to that point, but rather to reveal that the return to theory and traditional academic practice at all is a trauma response. An effort to try to name the system while still standing inside of it, while still being tied to it. As daughter, as student, as professor, and as colleague, I’ve always had to be the most knowledgeable and innovative person in the room. I’ve always had to know the most to prove my worth. Autotheory gives me the space to do as I’ve been trained without fully sacrificing myself.

Dubois’s double consciousness and Fanon’s self-definitions gave me initial examples of telling my story in the multiple of forms it occurred; these examples provided to me as those vetted by the academy, (the humanities at least), before I searched for and held by the work of Black feminist writers. I had never stopped reading, even when the books inside my classes bored and challenged me. I always kept a practice as a fiction reader, and in my rejection of the western, white canon, I worked to build my own canon of literature of Black and Black-biracial women writers who wrote characters to which I could connect. Before and after these stories, I read their biographical statements, read their acknowledgments (noting the overlap of names, the literary sisterhood), listened to interviews, and wrote out timelines of their lives. Toni Morrison was the only Black woman writer I was handed in high school, thanks to an honors course, so she was the source of my pull towards Black feminism. It was Morrison who I returned to again at the beginning of this research, who said in a 2001 interview with Frank McCourt at the Connecticut Forum, “sometimes you don’t survive whole, you just survive.” This exemplified the kind of burn out I felt returning to theory, working to stay alive in academia, no longer believing in its myths.

Black feminist writers created the space to make theory from their ontological experience, to honor their cultural ways of knowing and being, embodying double consciousness and elaborating on the intersectional aspects of their identities. As Botts-Ward writes, “‘Black girls been theory,’ meaning that we have always theorized about the intersectional complexities of our lives outside the realm of what academia deems legible. We have always understood ancestral truths whispered beneath the bones of our skin. We have always mapped radical epistemologies of liberatory praxis onto concrete corners, city blocks and beauty shops”³². While Audre Lorde’s entire body of work lays the foundation for this practice, her essay, “Poetry is Not A Luxury,” best supports Ward’s point. Writing to survive, this Black girl theory details the path of self-acceptance and self-trust to reveal what their experience in academia tells us is true:

For within structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive. Kept around as unavoidable adjuncts or pleasant pastimes, feelings were meant to kneel to thought as we were meant to kneel to men. But women have survived. As poets. As poets, Lorde says, because how other than poetry “does one bear witness to a kind of suffering that is so intimately tethered to your own body, even as it is at a significant remove?” (Williamson 268). As poets, because it provides the experimentation and freedom of form, the distillation of a moment, a hyperfocus. Poetry serves as both an entry point and a throughline to the Black feminist approach to autotheory, and all of the authors I will share below started in or moved into poetic practice. It serves to emphasize lived experience and body knowledge and to preserve of authentic voice, with the recognition that:

there are no new pains. We have felt them all already. We have hidden that fact in the same place where we have hidden our power. They lie in our dreams, and it is our dreams that point the way to freedom. They are made realizable through our poems that give us the strength and courage to see, to feel, to speak, and to dare. (Lorde, “Poetry is Not a Luxury”).

In her practice of autotheory in “Need that Tastes Like Destruction: Lessons from (the) Lorde on the Occasion of Black Death and Dying,” Terrion L. Williamson details her home-education and orientation into Black feminism as she draws a throughline between her observations of her mothers, her readings of Audre Lorde, and her live, “felt life” of Black feminism. In her integration of Black feminism beyond the performative academic gestures, she writes, “when I began to reckon with care as foundational to black feminism rather than its mere byproduct I began to more readily embrace black feminism not just as a critical scholarly endeavor but as an essential framework for living what Ashton Crawley has beautifully theorized as ‘otherwise possibility’” (270-271). Williamson theorizes that black feminist autotheory practice emerges from the “fugitive lifeworlds of black women, girls, and nonbinary people for whom survival has always been precarious” (271). It is within the practice of Black feminism and its intersection with autotheory that a space of reprieve can be carved, because this work not only holds the

³² Botts-Ward, Reela-violette. “On Self-Making and Black Girl Interiors” ASAP Journal <https://asapjournal.com/transmedial-autotheories-5-healing-at-home-on-self-making-and-black-girl-interiors-ree-botts/>

heaviness of what is at stake (our very livelihood, our aliveness), but also the vision for what a different future could be.

I Saw in Theory Then a Location for Healing

Autotheory is most often intertextual, building connection and meaning to other texts through direct and indirect quotation, commenting on contemporary social analysis. Part of this intertextuality, particularly in Black Feminist practice, is the explicit valuing of citation for a few different reasons; these reasons differing depending on who they are citing. One of these reasons is the academic performance – demonstrating one’s knowledge of the majority academic discourse to establish a sense of credibility for their work, which otherwise would be dismissed or left in obscurity. The primary reason, from my research perspective, is the citation of other Black women engaging in this kind of practice to contribute to and build an emergent academic discourse that centers Black women’s lived experiences. This citation practice not only signals a chorus of “I am not alone” in this kind of academic, literary exploration, but also engages in citation as an ethics of love, as a practice of care and valuation of the work of other Black feminist academics.

Hooks tells us that *embracing love ethic means that we utilize all dimensions of love—‘care, commitment, trust, responsibility, respect and knowledge’—in our everyday lives.*¹ Autotheory and citation is a practice of love because I did not get here alone. These ideas are not mine alone. I needed all these women, who stand as my living and spiritual ancestors. As wisdom holders and truth tellers standing in similar spaces as me, I look to them for the courage to tell the truth I need to tell to make space for the ones after me. And perhaps most immediately, to find a method of personal survival. To cite them in whatever way possible, to make sure their names are on my tongue and others, is to honor all the moments they held me when no others could. To stand in an academic, literary, and cultural legacy. As a first-generation student and professor, this holding could not be done by my family, my partners, my advisors, my colleagues. I was buoyed solely by the texts wherein other women fought word by word to find themselves, name the hurt, and imagine how our *collective healing must be a collective process.*²

The work of women of color feminists pushing the “personal is political” rallying call of the second wave movement to the intersectional imperatives of third wave feminism. Several prominent Black and Chicana feminist leaders, (who wrote for audiences both inside and outside of academia), such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks, published work that sought to interrogate their lived experience, ancestral wisdom, and communal ways of knowing as fodder for survival in academia and other oppressive systems. Each of these scholars have a continued interdisciplinary impact because of the way their autotheoretical work engages in “innate troubling of dominant epistemologies and approaches to philosophizing and theorizing and for its capacity to make space for new ways of theorizing and understanding their lives” (Fournier 2). Each of these writers use personal narrative claim the importance of body knowledge in the context of the higher education classroom that explicitly demands the abandonment of intuitive ways of knowing and being in favor for assimilated, docile bodies, as aligned with Foucault’s theory. Its “capacity,” as Fournier writes, it what differentiates autotheory from other forms situated in disciplinary norms,

such as ethnography, or even biography and memoir. The emergence of autotheory is reaching towards an interdisciplinary possibility, beyond genre, to the in-between space of nepantla that looks to the deeper imagination we are only guided to through our embodied experience.

Rejecting the assimilationist notions of individualism, autotheory as method, “engenders collectivist, rather than individualist, worldviews; it uses theory to recognize the power of shared connection, shared experience, in a fragmented and isolated time... a ‘reaching back out,’ not just exalting the cleverness of theory or the lure of confessional work, but trying to establish connectivity, to cast a net instead of glorifying the self” (Zwartjes). This collectivist goal highlights the epistemological alternatives offered by autotheory as method, including an intentional structuring theory within narrative to create accessible avenues into various scholarship. The writers mentioned above work to create this space to value not only themselves, but their communities, each other, and the growing movement of Black Feminism. In “Keeping Close to Home: Class and Education,” bell hooks models early autotheory, (especially related to higher education), as she describes the experience of leaving her small, Southern, primarily Black hometown to study at Yale. Despite the prestige, she finds an unpassable divide in the values and critical positioning of herself and her peers, as she refuses to leave behind the community she is seeking to lift up with her work. Detailing how she crafts her scholarship and presents herself with this intention, she writes:

If we are to reach our people and all people, if we are to remain connected... we must understand that the telling of ones is personal story provides a meaningful example, a way for folks to identify and connect. Combining personal with critical analysis and theoretical perspectives can engage listeners who might otherwise feel a strange, alienated. To speak simply with language that is accessible to as many folks as possible is also important period speaking about one's personal experience or speaking with simple language is often considered by academics and or intellectuals to be a sign of intellectual weakness or even anti-intellectualism (105).

Chronicling the way she developed her own relationship with theory, hooks demonstrates a self-awareness as a scholar that she prioritizes in every aspect of her academic life. Autotheory provides a methodology that does not ask for a compromise of the self, but rather in its emphasis on the self, engages in “an assertive disregard of genre, category, or boundary;” it is the courage to wrestle with established theory and explore it along a parallel road that also allows a personal wholeness. As autotheory has developed, the ability for contemporary Black and women of color feminists to partake in autotheoretical work while citing these foundational scholars has established a distinct discourse of women of color narratives about survival in higher education that not only validate the importance of the form, but also reveal the continued necessity of centering these experiences as equity gaps remain.

In its logic of inquiry, autotheory rejects dominant epistemologies, instead beginning from a globalist worldview. Seeped in its citation practice, autotheorists not only tend to focus lived experiences, but they situate these experiences in a parallel of knowing, rather than contributing to the hierarchy of knowing perpetuated by mainstream

academia. This includes centering and valuing voices outside of academic spaces, including community wisdom and cultural ways of knowing and being. Emphasizing this kind of knowledge makes traditional academics/academia uncomfortable, perhaps because it demands the dismantling of objectivity and disconnection from the body. Perhaps, (parallel to the revelations of social coordination in institutional ethnography), embracing this lived-body knowledge, exposes the truth and complexity of institutional violence. Perhaps this kind of knowledge exposes academics who made their reputations from creating social classifications as deeply biased and often racist in their construction of theory – which also calls into question the lineage of researchers that branch their research from the canon. Perhaps it lessens the sense of expertise and prestige we obligatorily give to this research, revealing the knowledges they will never have access to in their professional bubbles; that some cultural knowledge, even in academic texts, remains protected and coded knowledge in the efforts of its survival.

As Lorde says, “As we become more in touch with our own ancient, black, non-European view of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and therefore lasting action comes” (Lorde, “Poetry is Not A Luxury”).

Centering narrative writing as part of academic writing practice, autotheory strips the pretense (and falsity) of neutrality in theory construction. All work produced is based in positionality and in its focuses, inclusions and exclusions, and conclusions, reflects the writer’s specific worldview. A common theme of the work of autotheorists, particularly Black women academics, is articulating this positionality in great detail to demonstrate the ways in which their epistemological and ontological locations differ from mainstream academic discourse. This examination of one’s intersectional identities serves not just as the situating of personal history, but also a direct or indirect commentary on social positioning, knowledge access and power in society. (Important to note, that this recognition of power is now deemed important and expected in most human-centered or cultural-analysis centered humanities articles, that many include positionality statements to avoid accusation of appropriation and to acknowledge ethical research practices).

Working towards a definition that defines a specific practice or form of autotheory, Black feminist autotheory engages in theorizing that centers on self-definition in the effort of emphasizing one’s own humanity. As Black feminist autotheory evolves the personal is political feminist positioning, it expands the notion of who is an academic narrator and actively experiments with form to include/exclude/accuse. In its inclusion and exclusion, Black feminist autotheory unapologetically speaks to its audience without white or male gaze, and sometimes in language, codes, or references specific to its desired audience. In its accusation, it rejects epistemic violence and the pretense of neutrality – it proudly situates itself in lived experience and intentional citation practice. Particular to this research, Black feminist autotheory explores identity formation in context of other women of color scholars, community knowledge, and institutional experience. For me, and my invitation to other scholars, is that Black feminist autotheory facilitates both individual and collective healing by revealing our social experiences in harmful institutional cultures and rejecting the individualization of our stories. In a chorus of voices, we find power, agency, and purpose.

To provide example of autotheory that follows this definition, we will briefly analyze the craft of three writers who use autotheory in similar but distinct ways to move fluidly between the personal and theoretical. Though officially published in 2002, this analysis begins with Anzaldúa's *Light in the Dark. Luz in El Oscuro*, a foundational text to the understanding of autotheory, which she was writing during her time in a doctoral program in the 1980s. Anne duCille's article's "The True Occult of Black Womanhood: Critical Demeanor and Black Feminist Studies," models a method of autotheory as passionate as Anzaldúa in its critiques of specific relationships in the academy, but was crafted to assimilate into the style of an academic journal. Lastly, Claudia Rankine's *Citizen*, defies the boundaries between poetry and prose to model an autotheoretical approach that signals to a dual critique of the identities of white academics and the larger cultural trappings of whiteness.

Gloria Anzaldúa's *Light in the Dark/ Luz en el Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality and Reality* provides a model of multi-genre, interdisciplinary writing techniques that exemplify the embodied nature of autotheory as method. *Light in the Dark* collects pieces of her personal narrative, philosophical and spiritual writings, demonstrating the seamless way she integrates these elements together to explain her theory of *conocimiento*. In her auto-history, Anzaldúa interrogates her multiple and fragmented identities – which although they are distinct, she draws knowledge, power and connection from each one from her sense of spirituality and metaphysical resonance. From the connections she builds between her identities, she build a pathway towards spiritual healing and activism, offering the theory of *the stages of conocimiento* as a healer of trauma and resistance to systems of oppression. Anzaldúa call her work autohistoria, which in the context when she was writing, was important to the perspective this project brought to her academic work: writing herself into the history. This is especially true in the intention of writing her history in the institution, as this book was a part of her dissertation as well as an extension of *Borderlands/ La Frontera* (xiv). In this intention, as Fournier points out, "Anzaldúa takes space in her book to recognize her work as work and her poetry as poetry -- a move that brings to mind 'self-care,' in Lorde's sense, according to which it is 'an act of political warfare' for the marginalized—willful survival and self assertion in spaces that have been hostile to them (148-9). One aspect of her approach that makes these assertions clear is her use of the second person singular "you" address throughout the text. The use of "you" feels at some points like an invitation to understand, to step into her perspective, and other times an accusation of what so many fail to understand. To map out this point, Anzaldúa begins her narrative from the personal and then moves to a space of what I understood to be collective instruction – shifting from "I" to "we" as she described the complicity of everyone in systems of oppression and desconocimiento, or avoidance of truth. In these first few chapters, Anzaldúa writes with a sense of a wider audience, of both the women of color scholars seeking answers and other allied academics or community activists. She begins to address the difficulty of surviving oppressive spaces like higher education institutions by describing how, "racialized people, managing the trauma of racism, and other colonial abuse affect[s] our self-conceptions... fragmenting our psyches and pitching us into states of nepantla. During or after any trauma... you lose parts of your soul as an immediate strategy to minimize the pain and to cope--hecho pedazos, you go into a state of susto"

(87). This *susto*, causing those experiencing this oppression to lose connection with their spiritual self, necessitates the claiming, (through some tangible process, such as writing), of their history, spiritual intuition, cultural beliefs, and physical belonging in academia. This claiming of one's work as valid, despite all the ways the institutions want to invalidate it, sets us on the path to *conocimiento*, to a sustainable self-awareness. With this section, Anzaldúa asks us how we build certain belief systems and to embrace the space of *nepantla* through her example of autotheoretical writing, where "you are exposed, open to other perspectives, more readily able to access knowledge derived from inner feelings, imaginal states, and outer events, and to 'see through' them with a mindful, holistic awareness" (544).

As the narrative continues –and perhaps there was more urgency felt by Anzaldúa from her program and her health struggles—the “you” changes. The “you” becomes immersive, more unapologetically self-exploratory, more focused on the imperatives of exploring the body realities of the Coyolxauqui metaphor and personally moving through the stages of *conocimiento* for her healing. The writing is tense and close, including longer, winding sentences that take us into her anxieties about her illness as well as her frustrations with her colleagues and peers. In chapter six, “Now Let us Shift... The Path of *Conocimiento*... Inner Work, Public Acts,” she explicitly asks us to move away from the traditional frameworks of specific disciplines as she considers all the harm created by this system and feels the urgency of the need for healing in her own body. She writes:

Before rewriting the disintegrating, often destructive stories of self-constructed by psychology, sociology, anthropology, biology, and religion, you must first recognize their faulty pronouncements, scrutinize the fruit they've born, and then ritually disengage from them. Reflective awareness and other aspects of *conocimiento* if practice daily, overrule external instructions transmitted by your ethnic and dominant cultures, override the internal mandates of your genes and personal ego... use these new narratives to intervene in the cultures' of existing dehumanizing stories (139)

For Anzaldúa, the practice of autotheoretical writing allows for an avoidance of epistemic violence, which she describes at a feminist academic conference at the end of this chapter. In their space of *desconocimiento*, she critiques white women allies in feminist work, stuck in second wave politics that lack intersectionality. Warning about the traps of victimhood in this fight against epistemic violence, including the importance of staying grounded in a common experience of embodiment, *Light in the Dark* begins the discourse of the importance of leading from the honest perspectives of our bodies through methodology of autotheory.

Whereas Anzaldúa fights for a sense of freedom in each part of her narrative, in Ann duCille's “The True Occult of Black Womanhood: Critical Demeanor and Black Feminist Studies,” the reader can feel the performativity of academic writing and duCille's use of autotheory to actively carve out each inch of space for perspective to be heard. Describing the paradox of being othered as a black woman in academia while also, “within and around the modern academy, racial and gender alterity has become a hot commodity that has claimed black women as its principal,” she reveals the frustration of having the validity and seriousness of her work questioned while non-Black colleagues

gain accolades for writing about Black scholarship. Tracing her own journey in Black Feminist scholarship alongside commentary of what has become popular to contemporary scholars, she asserts the importance of Black women critics and scholars being at the forefront of “reviving” the work of “lost” writers, (such as the renewed interest in the works of Zora Neale Hurston and Nella Larsen). The rules of the academy still value “traditional” studies, with no change of standards for the different kind of work being done by black scholars. duCille questions who should teach African American discourse, a field often treated like a “black ghetto,” for which most universities, if they don’t turn to black faculty to lead these programs, use them to other kinds of tokenizing analysis or representation. There is a lack of understanding of burnout for black colleagues and Black women intellectuals, questioned at every moment, are not supposed to resent “the double standard that propels others forward every as it keeps them back” (605). Questioning the race and culture of who the academy allows to write Black histories is important to the work of Black women scholars and its value.

As duCille experiments with autotheory, she moves between three distinct modes: personal narrative, critique of other scholars, and the revelation of what questions arise between their successes and the lack of recognition her and other Black women receive. In that space of questioning, she writes:

My questions are by no means new... I have a burning need to try to work through on paper my own ambivalence, antipathy, and, at times, animosity over the new-found enthusiasm for these fields that I readily think of as my own hard-won territory. I feel a little like the parent who tells the child she is about to reprimand that "this hurts me more than it hurts you." ...I want to make explicit my own dis-ease with the antagonism to which I have admitted and by which I am myself somewhat baffled (594).

The parent/caregiver metaphor is one that duCille returns to later in the article, to detail the invisible labor Black women scholars do in the service of scholarship as well as the support of students and peers. Although more formalist in her approach, with her mix of narrative and criticism as autotheory, duCille seeks to “create a sense of parallel, rather than hierarchy, between different ways of knowing, thinking and analyzing” (Zwartjes). She validates the questioning of who the academy authorizes to write histories of people of color, specifically Black women, and the necessity to ask that question is situated deeply in the relationships we have with ourselves and our work as scholars of color.

Claudia Rankine’s book, *Citizen: An American Lyric*, was received to critical acclaim, awarded a National Book Award, and assigned in college classroom across the nation shortly after its release. Much commentary around this book, in reviews, interviews, and analyses, centered around its multi-genre, interdisciplinary approach – a continuation of unique form for Rankine after publishing *Don’t Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric*. But *Citizen* was even more...not *just* poetry, and worked to build a critical commentary on the physical experience of racism. In short vignettes broken by verse, Rankine shares moments that detail micro and macro aggressions, experienced by an unnamed narrator, but written in a second person singular “you.” The “you” here is layered here in a way different than Anzaldúa’s personal urgency or duCille’s indictment of academicians. Rather, this “you” serves as a collective signal to those who share the physical experience of these microaggressions, who have felt the stoppage of time and

simultaneous invisibility and hypervisibility of racism in higher ed or professional settings. In the article, “From Performativity to Performance: Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen* and Autotheory,” Kyle Frisina analyzes this use of second person:

The book is marked by differences from its potential autotheoretical peers...

Citizen is narrated not by a character who shares the name of the author, nor by an ‘I’, but by ‘you.’ *Citizen*’s ‘you’ is further characterized by the grammatical plurality of its referent, seeming to offer itself both as a public address to a collective and the inner voice of oneself. These disparities defamiliarize the mechanics of literary works grouped increasingly as part of a genre and facilitate a reconsideration of the possibilities of the form (143).

This collective, public address of the “you,” could be a moment of connection and testimony for Black readers, although Rankine seems intentional in not imbuing any specific message to the anecdotes, rather, she lets them stand alone on the page, devoid of added emotion. In defiance of the claim that autotheory or any autobiographic writing is overtly emotional, Rankine distances her work from any possible stereotyping and uses a logos-based appeal to her reader with this choice. Positioning her use of the second person in this way, the “you” becomes “a rhetorical embodiment of the structural racism her book takes up and her own distanciation from the privileged positioning of the historically whitened ‘I’” (Fournier 34).

In an example of this rhetorical positioning, Rankine describes a moment where the narrator is attending an event where Judith Butler is speaking. Upon Butler being asked about what makes language hurtful, the narrator reflects, “for so long you thought the ambition of racist language was to denigrate and erase you as a person. After considering Butler’s remarks, you begin to understand yourself as rendered hyper visible in the face of such language acts. Language that feels hurtful is intended to exploit all the ways that you are present (Rankine 49). The following pages of the text juxtapose this reflection with a repeated image of Zora Neale Hurston’s famous phrase, “I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background.” Rankine layers these elements that comments on racism and visibility on multiple levels: from the literal visibility of being so often the only Black body in an academic space, to the exploitation of this reality for the service of the people in the room and for the institution, to the intentional break in narrative to interrupt the dialogue of Butler’s work with a graphic, visual answer the question of visibility and language from a Black woman scholar. Hurston’s words interrupt the distancing Rankine creates with the “you” narrator, signaling the performative nature of the vignettes and choosing to refocus and validate the lived experienced of Black women. As Frisina alludes in her article, *Citizen* uses autotheory to show how a “highly theoretical genre is publicly made” (158). Autotheory as method, from Rankine’s perspective, opens the possibility for the reader to expand their notion of narrator and of themselves – to examine a collective experience as a member of a public identity.

Considering the collective understanding of what can both a public and private identity, Venus Evans-Winters uses autotheoretical methods in *Black Feminism in Qualitative Inquiry: A Mosaic for Writing Our Daughter’s Body* to explore the role and lens of the daughter as epistemological insight. She explains that Black Feminism brings forward new possibilities of analysis from its positioning and that a dialogical approach

aligns with Black intellectual traditions of creating shared understanding of social issues. Reconstructing critical moments of her own childhood to examine how the role of daughter prepared her for qualitative inquiry and intellectual activism, Evans-Winters details the complexities of front porch conversations and learned behaviors as experiences that “inform our worldview...daughtering does not require the use of words of epistemology or methodology...[it] implores us to decode such words and tolerate the pain of other people’s interpretations of our tresses, bodies, language, behaviors, dispositions, personalities” (138). As Evans-Winters examines the self-knowledge and collective wisdom that fuels an inner resilience, she uses her experience to propose the theory of daughtering to imagine “the possibilities of knowledge” and embody and ethics of love typically cast out from academic analysis. She argues that “as daughters, out tools of analysis for the de/construction and manipulation/interpretation of social reality will inherently, and conscientiously, require transdisciplinarity” (139). Evans-Winter’s assertion of interdisciplinary methods as the best way to explore the reality of daughtering mirrors the self-into-theory work of Anzaldua, (as well as Audre Lorde’s biomythography in *Zami*), and brings this method of autotheoretical work into a contemporary centering of Black women’s narratives.

To address the limitations of autotheory as methodology and position this work as a mixed method approach, there are several questions that are important to consider that allows for the understanding of why autotheory may be best used in conjunction with other interdisciplinary methods to examine the social and cultural impact of equity and inclusion work, as well as faculty identity. Firstly, although this is somewhat countered by the emergent definitions and historical positioning of autotheory, as a methodology, it will undoubtedly face the criticism of emotionality, subjectivity, and perhaps even narcissism. Secondly, if autotheory as defined here has the intention of emphasizing a collective narrative rather than an individualistic one, the accessibility of the theories used (as well its sociopolitical positioning, such as within intersectional feminism) is important to question. Lastly, autotheory can be framed as a method of claiming voice, Fournier asks, for whom is autotheory a truly reparative practice?

Considering the first and second limitation, the work of Evan-Winters seeks to disrupt this criticism by locating her autotheoretical work in the Black rhetorical tradition of “a narrative voice allows for the acceptance of emotion in knowledge acquisition and counterclaims. An ethics of care and empathy are important in qualitative inquiry and in the assessment of the validity of an exposition” (23). Since not all autotheory situates itself for a specific audience, it is important to critically analyze its rhetorical positioning and potential subjectivity, particularly if it includes analysis about topics or groups beyond the writers’ lived experience. As a methodology shaped by feminism, autotheory must reckon with access and power rather than seeking the approval of academics through assimilationist frameworks.

With the systematic gatekeeping of theory and devaluing of indigenous epistemologies, for whom is autotheory truly reparative? If we are to truly value the lived experiences of Black women and to position them as experts, why is their required to be in dialogue with theories that excluded their perspective. It is important to consider the performance of trauma embedded in and expected of Black women engaging in

autotheory as method. There remains a gap in literary or writing theory (and how it may intersect with critical race theory) to address how this methodology could reinforce certain stereotypes of the role of Black women academics.

In each of the texts examined above, the writers are not only exploring autotheory as method to present critical perspectives and form theory from their lived experience, but for each of them, unpacking the trauma of social relationships in higher education is a core part of their critical inquiry and reclamation of voice and value. As relevant to the larger scope of this research – how autotheory as method can help illustrate the complexities of social relationships and power in higher education – these texts provide a model of how autotheory serves as the kind of counter discourse necessary to making progress on equity and inclusion priorities. Each autotheorist, explicitly or implicitly, asserts the choice of using their narrative to explore theory because they recognize their stories, perspectives, and experiences have not been valued in traditional formats. Particularly for scholars even more contemporary than those examined here, autotheory provides a method for telling these stories on our own terms as they are actively being sought out by institutions to better understand equity issues.

In this discourse, centering women of color experiences provides the most revealing look at the social workings of the institution outside of the student perspective, as every part of the higher education institution and its value system remains in service of the success of white men. As the value systems in higher education condition us to compete for recognition, the work of autotheory who gets overlooked and what gets compromised in that system – these essential questions that prevent us from equitable progress.

Autotheory forces a refocusing on the humanity of those working to survive and thrive within the system and asks us to honor the insights that come from this recognition of humanity, to place worth in reflective narrative work as key to the development of equity policy. Anzaldúa extends this point as she explains, “we compete for control...ignoring the fact that colleagues and academic departments are part of a living ecology, we often overlook how our words and work affect our colleagues, how they deny our interdependence with the world around us. We disregard the fact that we live an intricate relationship with others” (76). In the dismissal of this reality, the reinforcing of white supremacist values in educational settings keep us in a static, hyper-individualized distance from each other, unable to reckon with the necessary shifts in cultural to best serve our selves and our students. Assimilating into the facades of professionalism required of us by the institution, we claim objectivity as king, which not only disconnects the academy from the community, but us (faculty, students) from our personal identities.

As Frisina explains, “autotheory exemplifies what feminists have long insisted: theory and politics are intimate and embodied. And auto theoretical texts make particularly radical interventions when the perspectives they represent have historically been marginalized: it's about me, they insist, once and for all (158). In a moment where the calls for equity and inclusion have exposed the workings of the institution, creating a crack that could open the narrative about this historical marginalization, autotheory can allow us to re-evaluate the values we claim to hold around professionalism and disciplinary and competence. Rather than being subjected to the narrative of the

institution, autotheory allows us to seize the dawning of scholarship in which Black women are “taking ourselves seriously and insisting that we be taken seriously not as objectified subjects in someone else’s histories – as native informants – but as critics and as scholars reading and writing our own literature and history (duCille 603).

Interlude: Gossipin', or What Happened at the Funeral Service

"Gossipin' is a trickster technology. Gossipin' is what we do together against better judgement. ...something in between what Ntozake Shange called a choreopoem and what Audre Lorde named a biomythography. ...It is a story marked into the flesh of the poet, transferred onto the page through a process of distillation shaped by the pedagogy of June Jordan and the interior celebrations of Lucille Clifton. An enactment of Black feminist poetic utterance that tends to the inside parts." Ra Malika Imhotep, *Gossypiin*

And the music begins again, a moment of rest between a prayer for the body and the opening of the spiritual door the service will bring. Folks shift to and from the pulpit. The speakers, Jamie and a church elder, walk back down into the pews, settling somewhere in the middle front row of the sanctuary where the sun casts purple hues through stained glass windows, warming the edges of the seats. A pastor walks to the pulpit to move into the next section of service. Other elders make their way closer, to their regular Sunday seats from which they can signal to the choir or the deacons if something is off. The deacons left living sit in plush chairs arched at the bottom edge of the podium, while pictures of the recently passed are framed at their feet. Children hop in and out of aisles, bumping hips with the aunties rocking back and forth through the tiny space, trying to catch their kin by the end of their braids. Once caught, the children prop themselves up on their knees to see over pews, looking for their neighborhood friends. There's a rustling of paper as folks turn through their programs, looking for the signal that we're about to begin, again.

Fussing at the doors at the back of the sanctuary catches everyone's attention. Something has the ushers fussing. A group of suited white folk trying to walk past the Head Usher who was holding the door during invocation. The room blankets with silence except the piano, its slow rifts tickling its way up the walls, building tension.

"People have to wait during a prayer or set part of service," she says, jaw clenching, "You just can't walk in like that when you're late. There are specific moments to enter."

"Alright, then," a suit answers, flushing with the heat of correction. "Is now that time?"

Head Usher looks to the pulpit, and even Pastor gawks for a moment at the five people huddled tight, walking in unison. Three of them men, one of them a tall tree trunk casting a shadow on the others. Each of them wearing sharp shouldered, dark blue suits, the tall one adjusts the pin on his lapel, while the others grab programs. Two women, also in shades of blue, walk with their hands clasped just below their waists, making their elbows right angles. While the women scan the room, looking for a place to sit, the tall one looks straight ahead with the Head Usher, towards the pulpit. Pastor lifts his arms, gestures – let them in – and the ushers step aside. Murmurs begin, looking for an answer.

Aunties ask, "Is this the people from work?"

Children ask, "Why their suits match like an army? Like police?"

Aunties ask, "Are they gonna sit down or stand there and deliver a sermon?"

Children ask, "Why they look like a fistful of pencils?"

Aunties ask, "Are they scared of facing something they caused?"

Children ask, “Why their necks so pink like vultures?”

With the new arrivals, there is no body that is relaxed. Shoulder blades pinned, eyebrows furrowed, lips pursed and pulled to the side. Everyone can see they are looking for her, looking for a body. The suits shuffle into a back row, hesitant to sit, as they scan the room. They won’t see her from there; Jamie’s laying her head down on her elder’s lap in the front row. The energy is so opposite that those sensitive to it can feel the tilt of the room, the ends of scale. Jamie’s breath so light the front of the room floats upwards towards the ceiling. The suits’ search so greedy, the back of the room sinks.

Jamie floats, the astral projection of her youthful dreams. She looks down at her body, wonders how to get back in. Rankine says, “You are you even before you/ grow into understand you/ are not anyone, worthless, / not worth you. / Even as your own weight insists/ you are here, fighting off/ the weight of inexistence” (139).

“Let us start with our greetings,” the Pastor points to the piano to begin the usual song, “and we’ll all be settled to begin the rest of the program in moment.”

A chorus of shuffling feet warms the air as folks move up and down their pews, nodding and shaking hands with those around them. The ushers walk down the aisles passing out tissues and paper fans with white gloved hands. Most family settles in their normal seats – leaving the first two center pews for the processional – with kids sitting towards the aisle. A little huddle like a cupped hand forms behind the front pew, whispers interlacing like fingers.

Elders whisper, “How they late to their own judgement?”

Elders whisper, “Guilty, guilty, guilty.”

Imhotep says, “gossypiin abandons absolute truths for the Truth of how history wears ~~out~~ the black femme body” (5). The cross out is intentional and present in the text. It is both wears and wears out. But which one are we not supposed to say? Which one is in whispers? Which one accuses best?

The truth of history on the black femme body, as “Black women scholars continue to serve as a critical location to confront the massive loss and exploitation of intellectual workers in the Academy. In them we find the invisibilized body, the sexualized, the gendered body, the racialized body, the underpaid body, the unpaid body, the contingent body, the teaching body, the uninsured body, the radically thinking body the caregiving body, and we find the servant body of both the community and academic institutions. All these locations demand our intervention” (Nzinga-Johnson 17).

Wears out the black femme body as in: is there a body left? As in: why we are gathered here, to catalogue a body missing its spirit, to feed it, to nurture it, rest it, soothe it with how we know to keep living when we are already dead. Lay upon her words of wonder, of accusation, of prayer like a lace white shawl. To remind her of “the incalculable number of breaths expelled from [her] lungs. The tears [her] eyes had shed. The laughter [her] throat has released. ...Black women are learning to tell a new story about their bodies. We do not possess a death wish. We want to live” (Golden, 97, 119).

Our daughter, our daughter, amen.

Wears the black femme body as in present tense, still actively happening, no clear end. Wears “as in the natural flow towards entropy,” as if this is a naturally occurring deterioration (Opata).

Wears as if something causally carried on the body, a choice, like a sweater.

Morrison said in an interview, “sometimes you don’t survive whole, you just survive.” Not survival but survived. Not survived, just not died.

The Suits don’t hear the words, the whispers, the prayers. They get antsy; they’ve got meetings and other places to place. They try to push to the front, grasping towards a microphone, not realizing the conversation was already had. They missed it, late in their arrival, blind to a timing that isn’t their own. Unable to see one of these deaths a priority, unless for a photo opportunity, for a moment to perform respectability.

Suits say, “Hello, sorry. Excuse me.”

Suits say, “From the college. The community college family.”

Suits say, “Pardon us, trying to get through. We can’t see”

Suits say, “We have a statement prepared.”

As they reach the place to speak, no one hears them because it is the wrong time to speak. They take too much time to speak. The ushers speak instead with a gentle hand placed above the elbow of the Suit who is speaking. A signal of move on, hush up. The gentle hand grips when it is not heeded. The unheeded grip pulls them away, back to the door, back to the space behind glass.

Aunties say, “We didn’t ask *you* what happened, did we?”

Children say, “Why they screech like crows?”

Elders say, “What they trying to say that we don’t already know?”

Their breath pushes out against the grasping white hands.

Gossiping, a shield. Gossiping, the shawl.

Jamie sits up, head lifted by the truth of gossiping, asking like Deborah Mouton, “Is it weird to say I too know how to mourn myself? That I need saving? Or at least time to grow back into who I was? A tail snatched off doesn’t regenerate in an instant. Love takes her time, sometimes. Especially when all you want to be is yourself” (44-45). She scans the room to see who is left to be loved, and seeing too many hands, lays her head back down.

Scripture of the Community Colleges

A Reading of the California Community College's Call to Action

Introduction

This chapter dedicated to reading the “scripture” of the community college system – what ideas, legacy, recommendations, actions it asks its practitioners to align with—focused on specific shifts in the California community colleges from 2017 – 2022. Broken into three parts and structured to engage autotheory as methodology, part one uses a quote by Audre Lorde to frame its history, practice, and political and pedagogical interests, revealing a gap in service to its mission in our current social climate. Part two, framed by the words of Dorothy Smith and institutional ethnography as method, examines the community college system’s response to the social political moment. Unsurprisingly aligned with most higher education institutions during the revival of social protest and beginning of a pandemic, the community college system revealed its unpreparedness. By actually engaging in the equity questions of the moment, community colleges risked laying bare the social structures and coordination of their institutions. Part three serves as the “devotional read” of the equity documents seeks to share how the message of these documents serves as a new foundation and battle cry for those already engaged in equity work, and a call to service of those who inherently lead from an equity lens, while also being a reminder of the hollowness of the promises of change that an entrenched system can provide.

This chapter seeks to provide context about the organization, function, social relations, and emergent equity topics of the California community college system as it pertains to this research. Beginning with how community colleges are perceived as well as how they define themselves allows us to understand the social and political context for the unique pressure that community college faculty face in their service to the institution. The chapter then considers the political organization of the college, employing institutional ethnography as methodology to examine the intricate systems of governance, professional decorum, and social expectations that faculty and staff assimilate into to advance their careers. Institutional ethnography is also useful in the analysis of two core texts that changed the discourses of equity in the community college system: the Vision for Success and the Call to Action. With this context, and the inclusion of anecdotal narrative of how these documents have been used as a catalyst to organizational change, this chapter will interpret a new layer of undue pressure placed upon Black and biracial women faculty of community colleges to lead equity movements, stemming from these documents and the institutions’ unpreparedness to adequately address equity.

Part One: Community College Context

For within structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive. Kept around as unavoidable adjuncts or pleasant pastimes, feelings were meant to kneel to thought... And there are no new pains. We have felt them all already. We have hidden that fact in the same place where we have hidden our power. –Audre Lorde, Poetry is Not a Luxury

One of the driving factors in this work is the specific focus on California community colleges and the mandates they continue to work through to meet specific diversity, equity and inclusion standards as outlined by the chancellor. The California community college system historically works to serve educationally underrepresented students achieve degrees, professional certificates and to transfer to universities. A number of new initiatives have shaped the system closer to its visionary goal of “making sure students from all backgrounds succeed in reaching their goals and improving their families and communities, eliminating achievement gaps once and for all.”[1] Some of these initiatives include: the Vision for Success, outlining ambitious goals to close achievement gaps; the California Promise Grant, waiving tuition and fees for most students for their first two years; Guided Pathways, tracking high school students into career pathways that can maximize their educational opportunities at the community college; the passing of Assembly Bill 705, eliminating remedial coursework requirements and mandating new course placement procedures; and the Chancellor’s Call to Action, requiring policy, service, and coursework review with the imperative of racial and ability equity. The series of initiatives necessitated deep structural changes, exposing antiquated and inequitable systems, which has also spurred a lot of social reorganization within many colleges. From the lens of institutional ethnography, the work of revising course outlines, discussing institutional values, and questioning institutional effectiveness in light of the social justice movements in our nation has meant that no one working in the college can position themselves in a space of true neutrality on these issues, breaking down the facade of collegiality many perform in lieu of having meaningful conversations about pedagogical philosophy. Divisions of opinion in policy are cast as social and political divisions, fracturing previously perceived value systems, and leaving institutional groups such as faculty departments in a space that requires a personal re-learning and process of growth where many want to instead embody the status quo and wield personal power.

While the governance structures of each community college slightly differ in relation to the size of the district, most approach policy revision from a participatory governance structure that includes collaboration between mid-level administration, faculty academic senate, and volunteer faculty and staff task forces. For the purposes of this paper, one mid-sized, rural community college district will serve as an example of this structure and as the space of analysis for institutional ethnography in practice below. Examining this college’s response to the Chancellor’s June 2020 “Call to Action” allows for an analysis that, as Dorothy Smith, scholar of institutional ethnography, would say, begins in my own body, situated in the local experience of my positionality and perspective of as a faculty member. Before the personal reflection, context of the history and positioning is important for stepping into my story.

California’s community college system started as an extension of K-12 education, following the philosophy of the University of California that “the first two years of university belonged to the secondary system” (Galizio)¹. In 1910, the Collegiate Department of Fresno High School, later Fresno City College, with classes designed for high school graduates that earned them credits towards their degree. In 1917 with the Ballard Junior College Act, community colleges began to offer trade courses and vocational programs, meant to serve a demographic of students eager to enter the

workforce. As more colleges worked to align with this system, different legislation and accrediting boards emerged to ensure the quality of education and application of courses to higher degrees, including the American Association of Junior Colleges. The California Master Plan, first presented in 1960 and portions adopted by the Legislature, outlined the different sectors of the public higher education system, including community colleges, California State Universities (CSU) and Universities of California (UC). The UC was designated as the research university, with the recommendation of “selecting” admission of the top one-eighth of high schoolers in the state. The CSU was codified as the training ground for professionals, with an emphasis on teachers, and the recommendation of selecting from the top one-third of students. Designed to accept all students, including older adults coming back to higher education, the CA Master Plan defined the community college as having “their primary mission providing academic and vocational instruction for older and younger students through the first two years of undergraduate education (lower division). In addition to this primary mission, the Community Colleges were authorized to provide remedial instruction, English as a Second Language courses, adult noncredit instruction, community service courses, and workforce training services”³² While the Master Plan is no longer one document, (but rather a series of legislative decisions and recommendations), the general purpose, mission and student tracks to specific institution-types remains.

As it stands today, community colleges remain the most visibly mission driven sector of California’s higher education system, serving over 1.8 million students across 116 campuses.³ While the offering of certificate and vocational programs means that the community college is often still portrayed as a “lower” class of college, (implying both the education quality and the socioeconomic status of the students it serves), the discourses around student debt, the economic struggles of a larger section of the population, and the high success rates of student transfers in the CSU and UC systems has made community college a more attractive option for students. Community colleges play a particularly important role in rural areas where trade jobs are the most plentiful, but career training is hard to obtain. Once they began offering vocational training, community colleges saw huge surges in enrollment. These offerings position the community college to hold up to the community in its name, boosting economic development, while also providing space for career advancement or career change. This makes the community college a little more impervious to negative economic effects; in fact, it is a place people return to in economic downturn as they seek options for their personal and professional lives. In fact, according to Cal Matters, “the state’s 116 community colleges saw an 11% increase in students over the age of 50 compared to the previous year [2022]” and immigrant adult students make up a considerable amount of the system’s growth.³³

However, as technological advancements and other factors have continued to change employment demands and the Bachelor’s degree is more common entry-level requirement, many California community colleges have redirected their focus (and

³³ <https://calmatters.org/education/higher-education/2023/11/community-college-enrollment-4/#:~:text=While%20the%20growth%20is%20uneven,the%20start%20of%20the%20pandemic.>

funding) towards student transfer to four-institutions and preparedness for higher degrees. While the community college system is less studied because of the historical focus on vocational programs, there is a new interest in understanding the impact and influence of this system, especially considering their slight insulation or imperviousness to the impacts of the economy as linked to student enrollment that four-year institutions deal with. (Not to mention the more ample funding and career potential within CA community colleges, especially for early career academics). Building on the points above about community college an increasingly favorable choice, students get access to smaller class sizes, major-specific transfer pathways and guaranteed admission plans, better access to student support services and their professors, and for most students, (under the California College Promise Program), the first two years for free.

Considering the recent context of the Covid-19 pandemic, community college may also be a stepping stone into the college experience for a socially traumatized generation of students living in an economic reality that makes it increasingly difficult to afford the traditional college experience. While it is continuing to be studied, it is already clear that “many students whose last years of high school were disrupted by the pandemic are struggling academically in the foundational college courses they need to succeed later in their academic and professional careers... trying to learn while grappling with health, financial and family stressors.”³⁴ As community colleges consider how to meet their missions, strategic plans and student success goals, administrators, faculty, staff recognize their students face a different combination of stressors. These stressors are not entirely new to the general profile of a community college student – often non-traditional students who are also balancing school with other responsibilities such as work and/or parenting – the mental health burden, particularly on younger students, mixed with economic pressures, has changed the prioritization of college for many, and the persistence rates of all.

With its historical focus on remedial education, there has been, (and continues to be), an equity crisis within community college academic programs. Remedial courses defined the community college experience for many students until recently. Flawed placement tests funneled students into courses one, two or even three steps below transfer-level courses that qualify towards their associates and bachelor's degrees. Remedial courses could delay a student's timeline to graduation by years, stretching a traditional four-year degree into a six- or seven-year journey. Many studies over the years demonstrated that remedial courses were not effective in preparing students for further education and in fact, they “actually hinder degree completion: just over 30 percent of community college students placed in remedial courses completed a degree, certificate, or transfer in six years, compared to 70 percent of students placed directly in college-level courses” (“Racial Equity in Remedial Education”). The hindering of academic progress also had a specific racial and economic effect, with a disproportionate amount of students of color being placed in remedial courses, (sometimes even by self-selection because of the lack of academic counseling, by default for lack of placement test or ineffective, biased academic counseling, or lack of availability in required courses). According to

³⁴ <https://hechingerreport.org/after-the-pandemic-disrupted-their-high-school-educations-students-are-arriving-at-college-unprepared/>

research by Education Trust-West, “almost 90 percent of Black and Latinx students were enrolled in at least one remedial course across California Community College campuses (CCC) in 2009” (“Racial Equity in Remedial Education”).

Assembly Bill 705, passed by the California governor Gavin Newsom in 2017, finally addressed this fundamental course placement inequity, forcing the California community colleges to create accelerated pathways to transfer courses, change course placement measures, and in most cases, eliminate remedial courses altogether, providing universal access to transfer level course with optional support labs. While compliance with this new law has taken time and looked different at each campus, in 2020, the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) proclaimed, “One of the most immediate and notable outcomes of AB 705 has been the dramatic improvement in equitable access to college composition” (Cuellar Mejia). As the California community college navigated this change, we experienced huge shifts in the nation, marked most significantly in 2019 and 2020. The California community college chancellor’s office released the Call to Action in June 2020 as a result of the sociopolitical moment – answering the call to higher education institutions to respond to the increase of police brutality upon and murders of Black and brown youth as well as the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. The call to Action will be discussed in detail below as a pivotal document in shifting the social atmosphere and faculty pressures within community colleges. This work was followed by a revised diversity, equity and inclusion plan as well as the updated Vision for Success, a “framework for making the Chancellor’s Office and the California Community Colleges as a whole truly student ready” (CCCCO, “Vision for Success”).

To enforce these new measures and to further the restrictions on offering remedial courses, a follow-up bill, Assembly Bill 1705 was passed on 2022, to “ensure that all students with an academic goal of certificate, degree or transfer begin English and math in an appropriate gateway transfer-level course that satisfies course requirements for the intended goal” (“AB 1705 Implementation Guide”). At the time of this writing, AB 1705 is continuing to shift / correct placement measures and course offerings across the California community college system. From a faculty perspective, these legislative changes not only mean shifts in literal course offerings, but indicate a shift in how we are thinking about and defining a successful community college student, including how we meet, support, and retain these students in our classes. Aligning all of these documents together – to fully embrace the equity imperative of our moment – means tangible curricular reform, especially reform that centers the perspective, needs and assets of historically excluded students, such as students of color and disabled students.

With the expectation of serving every student at the core of the mission of all community colleges, the system is in a moment of public reckoning as they realize this is not what they have been doing. This reckoning includes an important self-awareness assessment and critique of faculty and student services staff within community colleges who, (most untrained as teachers from graduate programs), must realize and remedy the fact that they do not know how to best serve historically excluded students. While many white faculty and student service professionals continue to rely on connecting students to faculty and staff of color to provide deeper-level support, the entire community college system is turning to its historically marginalized faculty to step into leadership roles to foster

change (even as the system is not built for, and perhaps unwilling to meaningfully enact lasting change).

This brief historical overview of the California community college system serves to provide this context: to understand the pressure and significance of this social, political, and legal moment in these institutions and how this moment uniquely positions faculty of color (especially Black women) to take on an undue amount of equity work (willingly or unwillingly). The system's admittance of its own equity gaps provides the space to do authentic institutional ethnography of the community college in a way that has not been available before; with the community college already being a vastly understudied sector of higher education. As this chapter moves forward to explore institutional ethnography as methodology, it aims to spotlight the precarious professional location of Black women faculty in community colleges: culturally competent practitioners whose perspectives are necessary to equitable change, but in their historical and ongoing experiences of silencing, may risk their personal and professional wellness by in leadership positions. In the community-focused service of these college, the family metaphor serves as an important trigger and catalyst of this work, reasserting and shifting power dynamics in every interaction.

Examining A Specific Campus Culture

Building from the anecdotes above, as I move deeper into the methodology, I will be focusing on the experience on a midsize, rural community college. The personal, local experience of this college district allows for a clearer identification of the intersections of social-political pressure, course policies, and the atmosphere of the campus community, (such as its location in a conservative county making it more susceptible to social and political influence from a board of directors that aim to please a voter base that do not often engage with the issues of equity or diversity in a meaningful way, or in fact, see it as superfluous). In this local context, it is important to know that many who work in the college district are from the area and attended local colleges; their social and political ties entrenched in the surrounding communities. At this institution, the many of faculty and staff serving in the participatory governance roles have a deeper stake in institutional change, how the institution defines itself, and what that means for their personal and professional identity. Additionally, from the administrative side, the social and political pressure to conform means that institutional changes that are specifically tied to policy are easily buried, stripped of their vigor, and have limited consequences for faculty and staff groups to face if not in compliance. Too consumed with the perceived social penalty of being at the lead of an equity movement in a very visible political moment, leaders from the top and from the middle actively encourage the least amount of change as possible in institutional policy to appease as many people as possible.

In a lecture about her methodology, Dorothy Smith describes a larger goal of institutional ethnography to be “understanding how things [are] put together so we can understand how to make a change.”³⁵ Spurred to action by a generation that is both more invested in social action around justice issues and is less likely to tie their ideas of

³⁵ Dalla Lana School of Public Health, “An Introduction to Institutional Ethnography and the work of Dorothy Smith” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOO9fLT9r-Q>

success to college degree, critically engaging with the results of institutional ethnographic study has the potential to guide the college to towards action that addresses the gaps this methodology makes clear. The space of the community college is one of the most potent spaces for this shift to happen because of its investment in the everyday, diverse learner and its emphasis on transforming local communities. The California Community College Chancellor's Office identifies its vision as, "to the point: making sure students from all backgrounds succeed in reaching their goals and improving their families and communities, eliminating achievement gaps once and for all." Institutional ethnography has the potential to reveal how institutions of higher education like the community college can step to the front of the movement and regain the trust of the community. For rural community colleges, they are positioned as a space of social and political unification for students, faculty, staff and stakeholders. The ability to understand and actively shape the narrative of the college's action gives it the power to renew a sense value in the investment in education in an area of California notorious for losing its best scholars. And also, which seems more aligned with the current reality, IE can also reveal the failings of higher education to take up the task of DEI in a meaningful way. It reveals the equity structures and policies of the institution to be performative, empty, and lacking definable action or impact. The institution, caught checking boxes for their funding, must make a choice of accountability to its community or blatant disregard of the needs of its population. It must reckon with its public image and its internal identity, choosing to push its community into difficult and continuous work or shallowly managing equity crises as they arise. In the specific context of the community college, institutional ethnography not only shows us the working of the college but also tells us about decision making in a shared governance system, allowing us to see whose voices are visible in policy reform.

As I've begun to explain above, while policy revisions and institutional planning are often discussed and much performance is created around them, there is even less focus on how these changes, (and often lack of changes even after rigorous discussion or the performance of change), cause a major impact on the social realities of these colleges and the shaping of the professional identities of those who exist within them. As this chapter will more concretely define and put in practice below, Smith uses institutional ethnography to describe the institutionalization of daily interaction, behaviors and professional practices as coded by the documents that create a specific culture and value system at an institution. The culture and value systems of the college are hardly ever given a space to be discussed, and if so, are limited to the perspective of the cultural impact on the student population. While students should always remain a priority, a dearth of equity in any aspect of an institution will affect the entire institution. In the larger scope of my research focus, a particular look at how the culture and value systems of the community college affect women faculty of color reveal an ever-thinning tightrope of equity many have had to balance to best serve their students and also survive the social norms of the institution. Additionally, women faculty of color, often tasked with leading equity efforts on campus, (by choice or by social pressure from their department or administration to serve as visible diversity in these roles), have been recently thrust into equity positions to "solve" equity problems of the college. In this process, while trying to achieve this visionary potential of the community college, many of these women of color

(WOC) faculty are positioned to be scapegoated by the college for its equity failings, which also heightens the social tensions on campus.

Attempting Equity Change: Two Examples

In this section, I want to present two anecdotal examples that provide insight to attempts at faculty-driven equity changes that exemplify the social tensions described above. The first example demonstrates an organic effort by a faculty member to gather colleagues and respond to the political moment of the nation by forming an informal summer reading group to respond to the social inequities in the campus community. The second example shares an early attempt at faculty-led curricular change that had the potential to also effect larger systemic change in curricular processes. In sharing these two anecdotes, I hope to not only provide a fuller picture of the positioning of women of color on campus and the tension in all equity conversations, but also to provide more context to understand the personal-to-political scope of institutional ethnography.

As incoming chair to the campus's equity committee, (combined with my positionality as described above), I was uniquely affected by the intersections of the national anti-racist organizing and the equity movement in community college curriculum and student support, especially in response to AB 705. What was clear is that many of my colleagues were unprepared to teach and support students of color, whether consciously or not. Because of their familiarity with my course content and previous advocacy work on campus, I was tapped by my campus's administrative and communication offices to create an anti-racist resource guide. This eight-page guide was filled with links to readings, podcasts, videos, and curricular suggestions, framed by the most popular book at the time, *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi, and his philosophy that "being an antiracist requires persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism and regular self-examination" (21). This resource guide (see Appendix) was sent to the entire district along with an overly balanced, overly cautious, all-lives-matter leaning statement from the president's office. Based on enough positive feedback on the guide, and with resources from the equity committee, I developed the guide into a four-week professional development course that faculty could elect to take with me before the following fall semester started. I was able to secure stipends for course completion and put out the call for participants. While about forty people signed up to participate, my inbox also received messages asking what this program was for, why I was wasting college funds, and claiming the creation of the virtual space was racist. Of course, these messages were sent directly to me, rather than being public criticism because these colleagues did not want to expose their beliefs to the district and perhaps assumed I did not have the social capital or emotional / mental bandwidth to respond or challenge them.

At the time, these assumptions were correct. Victoria Reyes adds to this discourse in her work *Academic Outsiders: Stories of Exclusion and Hope*, by explaining "the academic workplace is a world unto itself, with its own insiders and outsider. Its own rules. Where people fight for resources and status for themselves and those like them, leaving others on the margins" (28). To many of the naysayers in my district, I was not only drawing attention to the existing insider / outsider culture that they worked hard to maintain with relative silence, but I was also creating a new (in their eyes) "politically correct" insider / outsider culture that they felt outside of. With the ongoing directives for

equity revisions of policies, procedures, and curriculum, being on the outside of these conversations meant they might not be perceived as the educational experts they prided themselves to be. At the same time, they were unwilling to do the work or engage in conversation that questioned their beliefs. They did not want to expose their unwillingness to “[take their students] seriously as learners and actual humans – and who did not take [them]selves so seriously as to prevent that” (Gannon 135).

The summer course was anchored in Resmaa Menakem’s book *My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* in the effort to appeal to humanity, trauma and healing of my mostly white colleagues, rather than a politically-centered discussion that would cause automatic defense reactions. Menakem, focusing on the internalized trauma that racism and white body supremacy has enacted on all bodies, also teaches us about the importance of caring for ourselves so that we can serve the collective (240). We discussed questions grounded in the personal, such as: what allows your body to feel belonging or safety? How do you find yourself comforting your body? What does a more inclusive / belonging space look like? What happens when we do not know how to move through our discomfort? With that foundation, we tried to move to the pedagogy with questions such as: how might Menakem’s strategies help us in our interactions with students? How might these strategies help us navigate difficult classroom conversations? Can you recall an instance of trauma or trauma response happening in your classroom and how might you reshape that experience with the tools you have now?

These questions aimed to nurture that self-awareness and self-criticism from Kendi’s philosophy above, imbuing a personal responsibility, I believed colleagues should feel for their racial education. This belief, however, was again grounded in my own positionality, cultural training, imposter syndrome and personal response to our campus culture – a symptom of the internalized expectations of being entrusted in leadership positions as the college’s “accessible diversity” token and care-taker. While there some productive conversations that happened, particularly in the small group Zoom discussions, a larger crack in the professional identity development of many of my white colleagues was beginning to emerge – the beginnings of a defense mode that would continue to develop over the next year. The initial stages of this consisted of these colleagues sending me long emails detailing their fears, traumas, and family histories, directly or indirectly asking for validation. They asked if they were good white people, if they were antiracist for at least trying to show up.

The second example that I want to share here details an attempt and partial success at one department’s curricular reform of one course outline of record to better align with the directives of the chancellor’s Call to Action, new DEI initiatives that followed, and the goals the district can codified in their strategic plan based on these statewide documents. This department assembled a small, voluntary committee that projected this work would take about three months to complete, but due to conflicts in understanding of equity-mindedness and inclusive curriculum, took the whole academic year. The experience of this committee is described in full in a brief for the University of Southern California’s Race and Equity Center, titled “Post AB705, How Do We Do the Hard Work of Engaging in Racially-Equitable Curricular Reform: Humanizing, Caring,

and Supporting People's Identities," co-authored by Jamie Moore and Erik Armstrong, and will be a core reference for this section.

The curriculum revision committee consisted of a group of instructors from various faculty status within the same department who also had a varying level of investment in institutional equity-based change. While many ideas were brought to the committee, "we reached an impasse based on personal philosophy, pedagogical approach, and defense of past curricular practices. We lacked the tools to look at our practices through a critical lens together, and more importantly, personal pedagogical difference conflicted with what was best for students, charging our conversation with distrust and resistance" (Moore and Armstrong 5). After months of push and pull, the course outline revision was completed and passed by the department, but specific social and political and equity divisions had been made clear in the process – divisions that disrupted the complicity culture this department had held on to for years. After the passing of the course outline, "harassment complaints were filed against supporters of the revisions; grievances were filed about the resolution process; and generally, department cohesion and trust remains damaged" (Moore and Armstrong 5). The writers argue for more professional spaces to unpack identity and bias from a personal lens, proposing a framework for these spaces based on two tools from Sherry K. Watts. The Privilege Identity Model allows for personal interrogation of eight defensive mindsets, including denial, minimization and intellectualization (among others), that allowed certain faculty to dismiss the ideas of others, particularly the perspective of faculty of color (Watts 40). The writers also explored Watts's AAFES method as a structure for collaboration, (particularly in conjunction with or after a collective exploration of the Privilege Identity Model), and instituting lasting, transformative change (Watts 40). AAFES is an acronym for Authentic, Action-Oriented and Framing for Environmental Shifts. A challenge present at the start of the AAFES is the "Authentic" piece – as noted above, the motivations for each faculty were not in the spirit of change, and defenses remained high. A lack of acknowledgement of the personal, social and structural influences at play meant that any change proposed or codified might not be agreeable, lasting, reflective of student needs, or fully meeting the call of equitable revision at the core of this work.

Reflecting on the failures and successes of this committee, the writers acknowledge the messiness and importance of equity work. While deeming it necessary work, they admit that, "in our pursuit of equity, we have been called bullies, shills, racists, and "woke jihadists."³⁶ We have been yelled at, cursed, and ignored. We have been accused of lowering standards and harassment" (Moore and Armstrong 14). The personal nature of these attacks, revealing a crack in the professional façade of the

³⁶ While these comments were repeated over time, in spaces private and public, the specific inclusion of these comments comes from the experience of a union meeting where faculty were surveyed about their perspective on including equity narratives in evaluations. While the actual results of the survey were mixed, a majority of the meeting was spent going over vague negative comments, allowing union leadership to build a case that they should not focus on this issue in upcoming negotiations. This also meant that positive comments were not given focus, and extremely negative comments were not called out for their problematic nature. The negative comments called out specific groups and departments for their liberal mindsets, vaguely veiling harsh and racially charged critiques towards several faculty, including me.

college – the “everyone gets along” family atmosphere that administration insists exists – gives the opportunity to analyze the social coordination of the college with honesty, and from the positionality of whom it affects most.

As institutional ethnography will help us reveal in the next part of this chapter, these examples clarify the social coordination of this community college, including an administration and majority faculty base that want to address equity in an artificial way that does not challenge the institutional culture within which their fragile professional identities can remain intact.

Part Two: Understanding Institutional Ethnography

“The aim of the sociology we call institutional ethnography is to reorganize the social relations of knowledge of the social so that people can take that knowledge up as an extension of our ordinary knowledge of the local actuality of our lives. ... Like a map, it aims to be through and through indexical to the local sites of people's experience making visible how we are connected into the extended social relations of ruling an economy and their intersections,” Dorothy Smith, Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for the People

Without understanding the identity performance we demand of faculty, and particularly the way we develop language and communicative practices with each other, we risk losing women of color faculty. We face this risk because of the constant pressure and the resulting fatigue placed upon women of color faculty to translate a hidden curriculum embedded in the interactions between colleagues, students and administration. In my perspective, this mirrors the hidden curriculum we ask nontraditional students to navigate in gatekeeper courses— a system of behaviors, specific languages, and expectations of understanding bureaucratic processes that have little to do with their purpose of being in the educational space. Just as students face a sense of dejection and lack of resiliency to difficult moments, women of color face the risk of their careers, a stunted career trajectory and social isolation from their colleagues.

I want to break down what might be a part of this hidden curriculum for WOC faculty, as well as what current external pressures are causing this conversation to more urgent than usual. When I first started as adjunct faculty at a rural California community college, I understood I had to do two things to succeed there: make myself as visible as possible to full time faculty and to learn the culture of communication between them. This campus-specific cultural competency did not come from a studied, conscious place of understanding. There were undiscussed hidden social norms I had to learn and adapt to in order to survive, however, I understood how to assimilate from my experience navigating the world as a biracial woman, constantly working through the psychological and sociological processes of double consciousness. I had conditioned myself, from the time I was young, to observe how people reacted to me and to code switch in order to fit what I could interpret about their expectations. Placed with the unfortunate schedule of both a morning and evening class in one day, I planted myself in the staff break room (literally next to the microwave and water cooler) and spread out my grading for the week on table. I would be there for hours waiting for my next class session, as other FT faculty walked in and out with lunches, checking their mail boxes, etc. Some, upon

seeing me week after week, took it upon themselves to introduce themselves to me and share pleasantries. I'd ask them about their classes and tried to remember the difficulties they shared to follow up on them later. With other faculty, I introduced myself and solicited their advice about course issues, intuiting that those who were a bit more cold in their reception of me loved to feel like experts. Through these interactions, I learned the unofficial culture of the college, beyond the mission statements and course outlines; I learned how faculty thought about themselves and their students as well as what they were willing to admit was difficult and what they kept close for fear of judgement. Those Monday afternoons, I was blessed with the privilege of time, the fact I was only teaching at one college, and I had no urgent familial obligations. This was a luxury I realized many of the other women of color adjuncts did not have—the time (consciously or not) to study the folks we had to eventually impress in our interviews. As I learned the concerns and patterns of communication with other faculty, I began to parrot the language of the full-time faculty and things I heard in department meetings—from acronyms to outcomes to problematic evaluations of student performance without considering what I was actually saying. This is perhaps the first part of this hidden curriculum: the social expectation that you will “fit” into the culture of the college, which in my observation is an amalgamation of pedagogical philosophy, sociopolitical positioning, (who is favorable in the faculty and admin and who is not), and modification of professional behaviors. It is catering to the social expectations of others, which as a racially ambiguous woman of color, meant I was both positioned to make people feel better about their choices in racial and cultural presentation (social interaction and in curriculum) and hold a space for others emotional baggage, constantly expressing empathy to those who felt vulnerable enough to share issues with me because I was so “easy to talk to.”

Many other WOC faculty lacked the actual time and bandwidth to engage in navigation of these social games with the full-time faculty, and thus struggled more in application processes and interviews. At a college such as mine, the culture was so insular, it was essential that each person evaluating you (formally or not) saw themselves not only as a part in your career development, but in your social placement in the community as well.

And that watching us never really ended either. The expectation that we had the time for others feelings or could provide (a majority white faculty) with advice about how to understand their growing population of students of color never ceased. The expectation that we would adopt their languages and mirror their behaviors, to reconstruct our social habitus with theirs, was a constant roadblock to building a more productive and supportive environment to WOC faculty.

Institutional Ethnography

Institutional ethnography allows us to understand and analyze the creation of value systems that shape our academic and social expectations in higher education. As these value systems are most often coded in the guiding documents of our institutions, (such as vision statements, strategic goals, student service and equity plans, and course outlines), decoding these documents through the lens of institutional ethnography reveals the inner workings of an institution's governance system, hierarchical social politics, and interpersonal relationships. There is a current imperative for higher education institutions

to respond to the increased political and social uprising of young people in response to racial and systemic injustices, specifically police brutality and anti-Black racism. As the lenses of equity, diversity and inclusion guide the revision of campus policies, institutional ethnography can serve a particularly important role in the explication of power dynamics and oppressive social structures that inhibit the equity development of an institution. Using institutional ethnography as a methodology for this work also provides an important positioning for change from the perspective of those situated within the institution and are thus controlled by and complicit to these policies, such as the faculty.

To move closer to the analysis of institutional ethnography in practice, it is important to establish a clear positioning, history, definition, and terminology of this methodology in relation to higher education. Institutional ethnography as defined for the purposes of this research is a methodology that examines the social and power relationships of an institution as coded through their institution documents and value systems. In practice, institutional ethnography centers the voice of the researcher working within the institution to most precisely and intimately reveal how daily practices construct a larger system of norms that go unquestioned by those within it. The foundational knowledge of institutional ethnography as methodology for this paper comes from the work of two primary scholars in the field, Dorothy Smith and Michelle LaFrance.

While Smith's earlier books introduced key terms for this theory, it was her text, *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for the People*, that presented it as a fully developed, alternative qualitative methodology. Positioning herself in the movement of second-wave feminism and inspired by Marxist ideologies, Smith explains about institutional ethnography that she was driven to create an academic space to speak about what happened to women and to be able to locate themselves in their bodies. In a lecture to the Dala Lana School of Public Health, she mentions that she recognized deep problems with sociology that prevented the real change in institutions. Part of this was due to this falsely objective stance that sociologists had to perform in their work and the expectation that analysis must be devoid of a complex examination of some of the "stickier" social politics at play, such as sexism. Smith recognized that an analysis devoid of the local, personal context of the people moving through it missed the revelation of the existing power structures within the institution. This was especially important to her in the inclusion of women's voices and the establishment of standpoint theory as a foundational lens to engage in feminist sociology. She writes:

the project of inquiry from women's standpoint begins in the local actuality of people's lives. In a sense it reverses the traditional relationship between mind and body wherein mind may examine, explore, and reflect on what is of the body. Body isn't something to be looked at or even theorized. It is rather the state of consciousness, mind, thought, subjectivity, and agency as a particular people's local doings. By pulling mind back into body comma phenomena of mind and discourse are recognized as themselves the doings of actual people situated in particular local sites at particular times (Smith 25).

For Smith, the story of the institution's "ruling relations," or the complex systems of power relationships that coordinate the everyday social relations in an institution, is most

authentically told by one who is immersed in these social politics and can map the complexity of local effects of each policy or system. The process of institutional ethnography uncovers the unconscious participation in these social relations in the effort to meet undiscussed professional standards. With Smith's feminist positioning, this is of particular interest to women in the workplace, of whom the professional expectations include a lot of invisible labor that is not a part of the embedded value system. Interestingly to this research's focus on the perspective of women of color faculty, while Smith was working in the same time as other women of color feminists and the emergence of third wave feminism that called for a focus on the intersectional issues of women of color, Smith's scholarship did not engage with these important voices, (though it is important to note her work inspired others, such as Patricia Hill Collins). This gap foreshadows potential limitations, the necessity for LaFrance's more nuanced take on institutional ethnography in the context of higher education, and the potential for an interdisciplinary take on institutional ethnography.

Using Smith's work as the foundation, LaFrance's work provides the model to put this methodology into practice. LaFrance's *Institutional Ethnography: A Theory of Practice for Writing Studies Researchers*, situates the methodology in higher education, with specific consideration to how reviews of institutional policies, programs and curriculum impact the social organization of faculty. LaFrance introduces institutional ethnography as a way "to systemically study the hierarchical systems of labor, professional systems of value and motions of expertise and prestige that structure the realm of higher education, the field itself and our local actualities as these manifest in, around, and through writing" (12). This framing and praxis are necessary to examine the current landscape of networked changes (from state to local levels) at higher education institutions in light of equity imperatives, as these changes serve to challenge past value systems and introduce new priorities that require pedagogical innovation. Two specific concepts that LaFrance breaks down in her examination of institutional ethnography are the most relevant to this study: Boss Texts and Social Coordination. Boss Texts are institutional documents that "exemplify the ideals of accountability, professionalism and disciplinarity;" they are institutional texts that create a standardization of the college culture (LaFrance 43). These can include strategic plans, equity plans, course outlines, etc. In the Boss Texts of a higher education institution, certain phrases, acronyms, or jargon are repeated throughout these texts and become a specific language of that institution. Since the participants of the institution are so wrapped up in it, it can be difficult to see how they organize us and create biased thinking. Thus, institutional ethnography provides a framework to read these texts differently for the purposes of mapping their influence on power. Social Coordination refers to the common forms of social organization that legitimize specific institutional practices and notions of labor and/value. Among faculty, which is the focus of this research, this may look like organization into departments, committees, leadership positions, affinity groups, and other social factors.

While the second half of this chapter will focus specifically on a Boss Text and its influence, I want to unpack Social Coordination a bit more, borrowing from the discipline of sociology to get a greater sense of how influence works in relationship to institutional governance, organization and behavior when putting a Boss Text in action. Examining the

social coordination of the department is of particular interest because “English departments in two-year colleges are exceptionally vulnerable to influences [such as Guided pathways, AB 705, the Call to Action, etc.], due to the complex history and economic responsiveness of the two-year college mission” (Griffiths and Jenson 301). Literature about general English faculty “suggest a low perceived self-efficacy,” affecting their resilience, despite the important one they play in higher ed, “conduct[ing] approximately half of the work of the profession of postsecondary English instruction,” as their teaching and scholarship is overlooked in education reform (Griffiths and Jenson 302). In their research, Griffiths and Jenson argue that while some professors found a sense of agency in their departments by sharing stories with like-minded colleagues,

Where teaching philosophies diverged, collaborations disappeared almost entirely, and instructors immersed themselves in their internally agreed upon norms, avoiding both the critical deliberations necessary to foster professional autonomy and the programmatic engagement necessary to develop departmental or programmatic resilience. ...this self filtered collaboration seemed to insulate faculty from institutional pressures and to reinforce group norms. ...in such a culture, critique is perceived as a threat to individual authority rather than evolution and regulation that improve the profession (309).

This concept is clear in the examples above, where the social coordination of specific “old guard” practitioners in a department reinforce the ways it has always been done and remain resistance to change. This created a complex conflict when large system-wide changes require collaboration, revision and response, but members of the department fight to make those changes as superficial as possible.

Additionally if Griffiths and Jenson’s research regards a general community college faculty experience, with the breadth of literature about the onerous experience of faculty of color at universities, we can posit that faculty of color experience at community colleges has parallels, which add to the difficulty of collaboration. Often, they face conditions that work to exclude them from sense of belonging in departments and other participation in social coordination on their campus. Levin et.al. argue that “the current conditions for faculty of color, based on their expressed experiences at the community colleges, are deleterious to their professional performance, positive self-image and to their contributions at their institutions” (852). Before describing the specific conditions, Levin shares a principle of organization change theory relevant to practices within community college systems. First order change occurs when a policy or structure of the organization changes and second order change occurs when there is a fundamental shift to the values and principles of an organization. They argue that second-order change is rare, and yet, this is the space in which organizational-wide behaviors change, specifically those that would mean social coordination that is equitable. Instead, for survival and professional advancement, Levin explains that “social identity theory suggests that in a given organizational setting an individual may develop several identities depending on the existence of relevant categorizes for group formation” (855). This could take the form of participation in various committees, and doing the work of code-switching to meet the expectations of that social space, particularly gate-keeping positions such as hiring or working with administration. The main roadblock to second level change is member resistance, including “behavioral patterns [that] are set and

alterations or deviations to these patterns do not become institutionalized” as well as the “unwillingness of members to accede their positions of power” (Levin et al. 860). As evidenced by the curriculum reform anecdote, there is a personal level resistance to change, motivated by a personal fear of reflecting on sensitive topics such as race (Levin et al 860). While Levin suggests spaces for courageous conversations by faculty, there exists no institutionally supported and protected structures within the community college system for such conversations to happen that can also affect larger change.

Due to the lack of systemic structural supports, it calls into question “how readily the members of stigmatized groups acknowledge that they have been the victims of discrimination,” which again is an impediment to that second-level change (Carvallo and Pelham 94). Carvallo and Pelham argue that “the reason is that acknowledging discrimination represents a threat to people’s need to belong” (95). When a Boss Text like the Call to Action begins to reveal two important factors: (1) that systems of social coordination that rule the institutional culture and (2) that these systems of social coordination are inequitable, exclusionary, and resistant to change, the college faces a organizational crisis. Considering the equity-based nature of the recent changes to the California community colleges system-wide policies, this awareness relied on faculty of color, particularly Black women, to lead institutional conversations, thus putting them as targets of social exclusion, demonization and resistance that diminishes their sense of self-efficacy, self-worth, and belonging.³⁷

Thus, in consideration of the current systems of social coordination in the community college system and faculty social organization: what is the community college’s ability to react to change with the fractured and socially dangerous nature of its social conditions? Whose professional and social livelihood is risked in organizing, leading, and advocating for changes? In the positioning of this research, it is clear that “individual resistance without a larger designed structure is ineffective” and there exists a gap in literature that while recognizing this issue, resists a prescription of individualized focus on curating professional behaviors that allow us to adapt and be resilient (Griffiths and Jenson 311, 315).

That is not the work that keeps us alive. That work, the undue amount of that work that is set by the example of the “adaptation” of faculty of color, by the example of Black women performing care/work in any circles of social coordination they participate in, is killing us.

Boss Text: “The Call to Action”

On June 5th, 2020, as the nation marched in protest of the murder of George Floyd and countless hours at the hands of police violence, the California Community College Chancellor’s Office released a document they named the Call to Action, which was accompanied by a webinar of the same title. A short, five-page document, the Call to Action begins with an introduction that addresses the responsibility of the California community college system to “use [their] positions of privilege, influence and power to

³⁷ While Carvallo and Pelham argue that “the need to belong increases following rejection and decreases following social inclusion or acceptance,” this work aims to argue that the social and cultural upbringing of Black daughterhood resists this internal sense of rejection because of the conditioning in homes and community spaces of having to be both effective and invisible.

make a difference.” Following this, it outlines six steps of action for each college to engage in to meet this call. Bold and ambitious in its language, these action steps created a specific vocabulary around equity work. This section aims to analyze aspects of the Call to Action as it served to shift the ruling relations of campuses across the state and in the reinvigoration of equity work at several campuses, became a boss text that shifted the language of equity and its sociocultural impact. Focusing on the rural community college described above, I will analyze how this document sought to shift and continue to challenge the everyday practices of governance and communication between faculty and staff leaders.

Previous to the Call to Action, the community college’s ruling relations were constituted by the participatory governance structure and the documents produced by institutional review processes such as the “Master Plan.” The Master Plan consists of several goals and objectives for the college district to work on each year, with review of the progress evaluated by volunteer committees every few years. In the introduction, the Call to Action seeks to address the failures of this process as, “our system and our students are hurting and they are outraged because of the systemic racial injustices that still exist.” By putting the embodied experiences of students (and implying the struggle of others in the system, as well as the structural issues of the system itself), the document situates the context and future of the equity movement at community colleges in standpoint theory—particularly in the “local actuality of people’s lives” (Smith 25). As LaFrance explains, “standpoint helps the ethnographer to uncover the disjunctions, divergences, and distinctions experienced by individuals within [specific] groups” (35). This framing, paired with the acknowledgement of the college system’s privileges and power to influence deep change in our culture serves as an important invitation to engage in institutional ethnography that “focuses the researcher on what people do in the everyday--the practices they engage in, the decisions they make about those practices, and how their negotiations of policy, procedure, hierarchies, and the systems of value take on a particular shape,” while holding the lived experiences of those experiencing injustices at the center of the analysis (LaFrance 25). The Call to Action demanded the immediate review of passive institutional processes and how they coordinate our complicity. Tracing the ways this document frames how the community college system should approach equity work reveals its status as a Boss Text and how it functions as a catalyst to recognize the influence of other Boss Texts. In the case of the specific community college of my study, the Call to Action’s equity focus required a huge shift in thinking from the framework of “student success” to “student equity.”

One of the key points in the Call to Action is the instruction to pair open dialogue with the revision of core documents, (such as Student Equity Plans and/or Faculty Hiring Procedures). In its introduction, the statement is very clear about identifying the California Community Colleges as leaders in equity, which emphasizes the imperative to take action. To begin the correlation of these two actions, the document asserts that “we cannot say that we are equity champions and be afraid to have open dialogue about structural racism.” However, in the acknowledgement that this is the very thing most faculty, staff, and admin are both afraid to do, (professionally and personally), and lack the training to do successfully, this point is given more detail as its own action item – item two of the six actions. The Call to Action bolds the action item, “campus leaders

must host open dialogue and address campus climate,” and proceeds to directly cite the murder of George Floyd as well as growing rates of unemployment and poverty among students to illustrate the larger community impact of the current moment. The open dialogue about how the community works together to create inclusive environments, the Call to Action tell us, is how we fulfill the need for everyone in the institution “to feel a sense of agency,” which is implied as part of the definition of equitable conditions for all. Campus presidents are named as the leaders of this work, with the stated expectation that it is also collaborative between the stakeholders on campus. Implied here is a consistent, visible support for equitable dialogues from several points of leadership, which remains an area of growth for many districts and an impediment to those conversations. At the rural community college, this action item placed the silence of administration under a new spotlight as faculty leaders sought to create more spaces for dialogue; spaces that gained little traction because of the fear the majority of the faculty had about speaking up. Without the visible and consistent support, difficult dialogue was quickly labeled as “toxic” by those unwilling to engage or those adverse to change.

The following three actions items in the Call to Action demonstrate the necessity of campus dialogue to the review of institutional documents – the Call to Action as a Boss Text itself, asking us to see and name other Boss Texts for what they are, perhaps for the first time. These actions name course curriculum (specifically the course outline), the district Equity Plan, and the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) plan as three of these texts that set the campus culture and that need equitable reform. Action three targets class climate and the creation of “inclusive classrooms and anti-racist curriculum.” Despite the political charge lent to the term “anti-racist” by conservative outlets, the Call to Action claims it here as part of the vocabulary of equity, which is further defined in terms of curricular materials as a “diversity of representation and culturally relevant content.” Recognizing that campuses are missing this collective understanding of inclusivity and cultural competency, the Call to Action also asks for faculty to embrace the processes feedback as a “productive learning tool rather than a tool wielded to impose judgment and power,” as an approach into difficult review processes. The wording here anticipates the pushback to review processes that may ask senior faculty to revise their curriculum, (while perhaps also acknowledging the systemic inequities in the tenure processes of faculty of color). While again emphasizing that this action should be a collaborative process of admin, faculty, instructional officers, senate, and student leaders, the Call to Action provides an empty frame that leaves all the stakeholders scrambling inside as they try to organize a response. At the rural community college, curricular reform is left to department groups, each subject to their own perceptions of equity based on disciplinary expectations and personal positioning. This has meant that cultural competency and anti-racist curriculum do not have district wide definitions in relation to curriculum and these discrepancies have increased apprehension in collaborative equity work spaces such as Academic Senate.

The through line of dialogue to action is reasserted in actions four and five from a specific lens: if we shifted our practices in response to COVID-19, we have the ability and resources to act on equity. The language remains direct in the necessity for “candid conversations about the limitations and barriers to pushing [each college’s] equity plans and agenda further, and where there are opportunities and support to accelerate the

work.” In the examination of the Call to Action, it is compelling to consider its function as a Boss Text, specifically in the second half where it becomes clearer of how intentional the language use is in the attempt to coerce campus communities into meaningful work, (or at least the performance of some kind of accountability to it). The final actions show how the college system has done “what was previously considered impossible,” and the Chancellor’s Office follows that up by naming their specific actions as well as the resources they built to support these transitions. The conclusion of the Call to Action ends with the sentiment that the work has just begun, which is apparent in its positioning as a Boss Text for a college system unprepared to fully reckon with how the ways it may have failed to achieve equity, (such as remedial course systems and an over-emphasis on rigor), are deeply embedded in its institutional identity and the professional identity of its faculty. In the next section, I will be using autotheory to further examine the Call to Action to demonstrate a mixed methods approach to understanding the personal and professional effect of this document.

Limitations

While institutional ethnography as method can help us decode the value systems of institutions and reveal their networks of social oppression and power dynamics, it ends at the discovery of these systems without an approach to meaningful change. Smith’s work highlights the unique and careful reading of documents that is specific to institutional ethnography, however, while concerned with the voice of women and their duties of care, historically this perspective has lacked an intersectional lens that is important to this framing of the method in an equity and inclusion context. While allowing for the centering of narrative, work in institutional ethnography has felt absent of race and class as important factors in the oppression of people within institutions and as a major factor in the social coordination of these spaces. Much of the recent work in institutional ethnography is still limited to broad understanding and generalizations of the work or rhetorical patterns of the field based on those who have the privilege of telling the story of the institution, primarily white men and women. This is important to note because women of color faculty often lack the freedom, political autonomy and emotional bandwidth to engage in institutional ethnography and/or may face social consequences for telling the truth of systemic injustices on their campuses in a way that is not true for high-ranking white women academics.

As previously mentioned, Smith’s work in Standpoint Theory and institutional ethnography is grounded in the second wave feminist movement, which made significant process in the recognition of women’s voices and scholarship, making space for discourse about labor and the embodied experience of it from a women’s perspective. However, in a contemporary equity and inclusion context, it is important to ask who has historically and who is currently doing the work of institutional ethnography? Aligned with its origins, it is primarily a method used by white women researchers, often in the fields of sociology or public health, to examine methods of care. This limits the research I am able to be in dialogue with connected to higher education and inclusion. Interestingly, (and key to the larger scope of this research project), there is a body of work by women of color in academia that has not been recognized as impactful to the development of institutional ethnography but is informative to institutional practices and understandings.

Coming from an intersectional lens usually grounded in critical race theory, the work of these scholars of color is often labeled “too narrative” or “too accessible” to be valued in the same way as Smith’s theories, even in a modern context. While Smith’s work influenced Black Feminists and other Black women working in the same time period, Smith and other researchers in institutional ethnography were not convinced to use this method to push beyond the analysis to action.

In this moment of social and political accountability for our higher education institutions, it is critical to see the potential for institutional ethnography to work in conjunction with other interdisciplinary methods to advocate for change. Smith tells us that “institutional ethnography does not have a pre given theoretical destination; indeed, it doesn’t have a theoretical destination at all” (38). The opportunity remains to meet this limitation with a secondary method that allows us have a detailed, intersectional understanding of the social coordination. A method such as autotheory gives institutional ethnography a destination, using narrative to situate us in the lived experiences of those in the academy and inviting personal transformation through critical listening, the fostering of agency for those historically silenced, and the prioritization of the concerns of those consistently marginalized within our institutions.

In July 2020, the Academic Senate of the California Community College released a special issue of their newsletter, the Senate Rostrum, that presented research and personal essays from Black faculty across the state. The Senate Rostrum primarily exists as a twice-yearly newsletter or series of articles published by the Academic Senate of the California Community Colleges (ASCCC). While the collaborators vary, most faculty who contribute to the Rostrum currently serve or have served on their local academic senates and have a demonstrated engagement with the politics of the statewide academic senate. I provide this context to say that those typically writing for and reading the Senate Rostrum understand their audience; an audience typically limited to others associated with Senate activities. As a politically involved full-time faculty members, many of my colleagues and I were not aware of or regular readers of the Senate Rostrum previous to the July 2020 issue. Part of this may be because upon viewing the archives, prior to June 2020, the Rostrum was not a space where a lot of racial equity and social justice discussion was happening, perhaps with the exception of articles that mention it in regard to the recent accelerated courses movement. The July 2020 issue of the Senate Rostrum signaled a shift in the topics and anticipated reach of the newsletter in specific response to the Chancellor’s Call to Action. Among the articles, there is a clear consensus about the invisible labor performed by Black faculty, the lack of cultural competency among their peers, and the pressure to engage in a very personal level of educating beyond the classroom through leadership work. A general feeling of exhaustion and messages of self-care are embedded in several articles, with the shared understanding from these collaborators that there is much work to be done on both the individual and institutional levels. In her reflection, “Gitcho Mind Right: Why Confronting Unconscious Bias Must Become an Actionable Item” Katrina Taylor writes, “James Baldwin once mused that it is easier for people to cry than it is for them to change. Yet, what if we were brave enough to challenge that notion? What I propose is that in addition to the political: increasing funding, providing equitable programming, diversifying spaces of leadership, etc., that

there are also personal commitments and action plans put forth which require people to do the internal work” (22).

As much the Chancellor’s Office, and often with bolder language around racial inequities, the ASCCC has worked since June 2020 to pass new resolutions that outline their commitment to addressing equity and inclusion in the realms they have influence, such as educational resources, policies around hiring procedures and providing leadership opportunities to diverse faculty. Upon the release of the Call to Action, as many of the California community college struggled to organize their approach to this work, the Senate Rostrum’s intentional solicitation, organization and publication of Black faculty voices provided important ethnographic perspective to the equity movements across the colleges. As very few colleges have dedicated spaces to talk about campus culture and faculty experience, (not to mention only six percent of community college faculty are Black¹), the Rostrum provided a formal space to gain insight on the perspectives of Black faculty and how they viewed the colleges’ failings not only in service to them as well as our students. Some revelations from the Rostrum include direct connections to the imperatives of the Call to Action, allowing the personal and professional experiences of these faculty to serve as important insight on how to begin to have equity conversations on individual campuses. One example of this is the article “Curriculum Trauma” by Buul, Turner, and Tyree, which defines the concept of CT and how it is relevant to our instructional choices, particularly in writing courses. This speaks directly to the second action of the Call to Action document, which calls for “campuses [to] audit classroom climate and create an action plan to create inclusive classrooms and anti-racism curriculum.”² A second article, “How I Have Taught Lessons on Issues of Race” by Lance Heard, articulates an example of what inclusive practices described by the Call to Action look like in practice.

Arguably, the July 2020 Senate Rostrum pushes the Call to Action further, reminding us that to achieve equity, we must consider what equity means for everyone in the institution, including faculty and staff. Articles like Foster’s “Can You See Me? The Realities of a Life of a Black Educator and Charlens’ “The Black Superwoman and Socially Consciousness Self Care,” provide insight to the lack of cultural competency among colleagues at the community college and the resulting psychological toll on Black faculty. However, even in this push for inclusiveness it is important to note what is missing in this effort – gaps in intention and understanding that do not make the Senate Rostrum a Boss Text in the same way as the Call to Action. The ASCCC makes it clear that the Rostrum is not meant to express a particular social or political position by the inclusion of this statement at the end of each article: “The articles published in the Rostrum do not necessarily represent the adopted positions of the academic senate. For adopted positions and recommendations, please browse this website.” With a history of speaking mostly to campus data and presenting solution-based articles, the Rostrum continues to serve a reading audience of primarily white educators who are invested in the institution working in ways familiar and beneficial to them; educators often not willing to be engaged in uncomfortable conversations for long. The ASCCC works to propose solutions rather than invite educators into a process of re-education, which is apparent in the (possible editing) and presentation of the articles in the July 2020 issue. Each article works to present some sort of product or solution. Senate Rostrum as a

response to the Call to Action demonstrates the continued responsibility on Black faculty to led conversations and the lack of spaces for them to express. It demonstratives an administrative performativity of listening to these voices in ways that can be catalogued, but are often not used as texts that drive action.

While the community college system asks for equitable reforms, it is less apparent to those who have not experienced systemic oppression to understand that these changes are intertwined with our sense of identity (as an institution and as individuals working within it). Without that internal work or the personal commitment, there is no teeth to these policies around equity and inclusion; there is no consequence when the culture of the campus does not demand the change.

Institutional ethnography as methodology allows us to see that the developments made in response to the Call to Action and other equity directives look good on paper, perhaps even parroting back the new language of equity in revised institutional plans. However, the social narrative of many campuses/districts does not match the stated goals of these equity plans. Institutional ethnography reveals that we have not done the work on personal transformation. On an episode on Revisionist History with Malcolm Gladwell titled “Miss Buchanan’s Period of Adjustment,” Gladwell interviews primary and secondary school teachers about school desegregation in the 1960s and 1970s. One teacher reflects that the problem of desegregation is that students were moved from school to school, but teachers remained in place, given no additional training or incentive to serve a multiracial body of students. The complexity of desegregation, of solving the problem of racial integration, was left to students. Without any process of reckoning with the institution’s history of inequities on faculty and staff, without the explicit recognition of the social norms of the campus, without the racial reconciliation of faculty who have been complicit in this system of oppression for the entirety of their careers, there remains a stopgap of inclusion process and identity development for faculty. Without these developments, there remains an undue burden of invisible labor on women faculty of color and a scapegoating of those who point out equity gaps. Moving forward with institutional ethnography, and considering its potential to combine with other methodologies, we must question how we’ve attempted to approach equity without the campus culture shift or personal reconciliation that is required for meaningful work.

Part Three: The Scripture of the Community College

As referenced above, just over a week following the nationwide spread of protests in response to the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, on June 5th, 2020, the executive office of the California Community College Chancellor released a statement that is referred to as the Call to Action. The letter was released as pressure was mounting for educational institutions to release equity and/or diversity statements addressing the ongoing killing and harassment of Black and brown youth at the hands of police, including on (or around) college campuses. The Covid pandemic also created emotional and cognitive dissonance, not only for students from school and their peers, but all faculty and staff as well. The physical distance away from these spaces highlighted the daily macro and micro-aggressions of their communities – particularly those claiming to be inclusive. Following, I’d like to examine the California Community College

Chancellor's Office's Call to Action, with the above context in mind, moving between the narrative academic voice, anecdotal experience, and cultural commentary.

Dear Community College Family

The call begins this way, addressing us as family. It's the language of folks who don't know your name but want you to feel the responsibility of kin towards them. It's a signaling to a deeper allegiance than is necessary to have for a place of work. It has me looking around wondering who I can actually say has my back. It has me remembering how much taking care of I've done for others. I'm remembering the time my college president said that he would know if there were any racial aggression issues on campus because we were a college family; that all the Black people on campus were his friends. I'm remembering the ways I've swallowed that metaphor and twisted it around in my belly before bringing it back up into words that make him, and all of them, feel safe.³⁸ The family metaphor pulls at the conscience of faculty, staff, and students who grow up in interdependent cultural spaces, who learn that the survival of all is important to the survival of the individual. Yet in this call, and in the ask of this service, that is not the mission of the institution. Instead, Black women (and other women of color) are often relegated to mothering or daughtering roles³⁹ in the support and invisible labor they are expected to perform for students, colleagues, and even administration.

I am your daughter, but you are not my family.⁴⁰

This initial bid for connection, this signaling of extra responsibility we should feel to our campuses, to the system, implies a sense of connection and trust with each other, particularly a line of trust from faculty to administrators. A message coming from the chancellor's office, positioned in this way, was met with inevitable defense, as "the further the administrator was removed from the faculty, the less trust in him or her" (Osburn and Gocial 910). From this perspective of questioning, from the feeling of

³⁸ A former president often put me in a family / friends box, although we did not know each other outside of campus. During a hiring committee, my first major one serving as a representative of the faculty in front of my dean, this president closed our meeting cheerily, thanking the men in the room for their time and dedication to the committee. As we walked out the door of the meeting room, he swung his arm around my neck, catching me in a way that almost made me lose my balance. He ruffled my hair, like an older sibling to would do to a younger sibling. "Good to see you here lil' sista," he said, emphasizing the use of AAVE that was not his own as a Chicano man. While infantilizing me and touching me without consent in front of my dean, he was also the president, so I smiled and chuckled until he let me go.

³⁹ While this will be explained in detail, here I do want to note that Black women often feel both of these roles simultaneously; often shifting between who the interaction is with. The feeling of being seen a "mother" figure versus a "daughter" figure can also be related to age and tenure with the college and is also generational depending on other faculty on campus.

⁴⁰ Levins et al. explain that "faculty of color have to deal with both how they view themselves and how the institution and its constituents view them, affecting self-definitions and understanding of personal and professional identities" (313). There is a constant negotiation of self and internal evaluation of how people see me, as the treatment varies depending on the context and who else is in the room. In a room full of administrators, I might be ignored, yet individually each of those administrators will reveal personal information and expect emotional labor from me. I am supposed to be expert when called on in a meeting, but the familial kin when they want to unload the complexities of their feigned professional identities on someone.

disconnect with higher administration, “the negative impact of low or no trust can impact faculty job performance because faculty relegate themselves to passive roles, experience higher stress, or engage in dysfunctional behaviors when they believe they cannot trust their administrative supervisors” (Osburn and Gocial 899).

To invoke family, particular for faculty of color who have a stronger cultural response to that metaphor (both in personal culture and the professional culture that asks them to take care of students), not only adds to the belief that administrators are unaware of this care/work, but a red flag that they are about to ask more of it.

We serve the most diverse student populations in all of higher education

A point of pride for the California community college is the diverse student body, with one example of this being that “92% of California’s 116 community colleges are considered Hispanic-serving institutions” (Cuellar et. Al “Building Capacity”). For a system that serves the most diverse students, our faculty and staff demographics do not match our student demographics. This metric is an important one to consider when thinking about who is providing students with the culturally competent care that is critical to the success of historically excluded students. While serving such a diverse student body, I wonder: what are the differences in demographics at a specific college? How do their district and/or campus goals reflect serving these demographics, specifically their most underserved or struggling student population? What professional development is being offered that is equity-focused?

In the California community college system, 57% of tenured or tenure-tracked faculty are white, 19% are Hispanic, 12% Asian and 5% are Black, (with some unspecified and others under 1%) (“Faculty and Staff Demographics Report”). The temporary or adjunct staff demographics mirror the full-time faculty demographics. At the rural community college referenced above, Hispanic students make up 71% percent of the student body, but only 23% of the full-time faculty. What does this look like in the day-to-day interactions of Black and other POC women faculty?

Jay was a young Black male student I had in a pre-transfer English course who was initially a very difficult student. He was loud, disruptive, and carried an arrogance that came from his student athlete status and belief that I would not hold him to anything other than major assignments because of pressure from his coaches. However, after building rapport with him, including challenging him in class when he tried dismiss certain activities, I asked Jay to meet me in office hours. I asked him about his hesitancy in class and with assignments, noting that it was clear how intelligent he was because of his wit and quick come backs in discussion. He explained that he was feeling a lot of pressure and losing sleep over his financial aid status, and that after not receiving adequate help from two different academic counselors and a financial aid office clerk, he had given up and was just waiting to be dropped from his courses, (which would also result in him losing his athletic scholarship). As a Black student with a history of being overlooked and mistreated by staff and faculty, he did not feel the agency to push the issue. We scheduled another office hour time and I sat with him to make calls to different offices until we got a small paperwork issue resolved. A few weeks after, Jay began to refer friends, mostly Black and Latinx students, to visit me for help and advice. Most of these students shared the same experience of feeling dismissed or disrespected by other

faculty and staff. Word of mouth quickly spread between students when a helpful, patient faculty or staff was identified.⁴¹

This is not an unusual experience to any Black and POC women in academia, but that diversity in community college system is also often intersectional and deeply affecting in a way that is different than average university freshman, including other demographic markers such as low-income status, adult re-entry students, foster child status, military status, disability status, etc. Said plainly, these students tend to have more needs, more barriers to college success, and are at the community college to receive a more integrated and involved level of support than they would receive at a four-year university. Thus, the pressure on Black and POC faculty to provide this specialized support is high – both in the classroom and at the interpersonal level. More often than not, as a Black biracial woman, I am the only Black identified professor my students will have in their undergraduate journey. I’ve had students take multiple class levels with me because of this, (calling “looping” in the K12 educational space, and studied to benefit students of color) (Iasevoli).

In her reflection about starting as community college faculty, Tokeya Graham reveals, “what I did not realize then was that in my new role as a Community College professor, I would be called to operate as a surrogate Mama to many of my black students. Early on I had no idea of the many ways that race, gender, and class would complicate my professorship” (112). As she adjusts and sets clearer boundaries with students, she also realizes the lack of resources, especially for Black students, and her sense of commitment to them. She writes, “the current reality is that if a black professor is not available to serve as translator or guide, then many black students can get lost in the halls of the Academy. Having black faculty mentor black students often vital to their academic success. ... This shared cultural legacy can lead to feelings of connection and kinship. ... this motivation is often the only encouragement black students receive” (Graham 115). In the effort of service, of actually serving the most diverse student population, it is more often than not Black and POC women doing this care/work, which is undervalued because it is thought of as “natural” (Graham 118).

We cannot say that we are equity champions and be afraid of have open dialogue about structural racism

During summer 2020, the administration of my college, in line with many other campuses, released a statement that generally denounced racism, almost in line with the messaging of all lives matter. It was a move based in strategy and fear of backlash, which could come from the Board of Trustee (reporting back from their conservative community constituents). However, this wasn’t a moment for hiding behind political strategy, and as faculty being asked to do extra work of leading many equity conversation on campus, I felt a greater risk than I thought the president of the district should feel. I provided feedback, requesting a stronger message, giving more context to why the

⁴¹ Also of note, that it is not only the students who do these peer-to-peer referrals, but also other faculty who would refer their BIPOC students to me (or other Black and POC faculty) for support and encouragement, adding to my workload. They not only lacked the competency and empathy to figure out how to best support these students, but also found it “outside of their job requirements” to seek out and complete professional development that would help them be better allies to their BIPOC students.

specific phrasing of Black Lives Matter was important to this moment, and for our campus community to understand. His response indicated that he did not believe it was important that the message came from him or that people would be willing to listen. It baffled me, this sudden lack of self-importance from the president, a person who had staked most of his career at this very institution and had long lines of professional and personal influence. This posturing also asked me to do the work of saving face for the district and to also be the scapegoat of any institutional failure towards our “equity projects.” When I failed to accept this response, we called a meeting to discuss options on a stronger message from our district leaders. This meeting then turned into a larger meeting that also included two other vice presidents and the college’s media manager. I asked to have a union representative with me, (another faculty member, and one I knew had rapport with admin), to join this meeting in which I realized I suddenly was informally (and in an unpaid manner) being asked to serve as an equity and diversity consultant for the district. We met throughout the summer, working together to plan several steps of campus response to the social justice movements of the summer, culminating in our new equity committee and the webinar I describe in the following section. Part of what is supposed to be unspoken is that there was a lot of time spent in these meetings doing the teeter-totter of reassuring and challenging the personal emotional response of our administration of feeling like they had worked really hard to have a “happy” “peaceful” campus and feeling slighted that people might not be telling them the truth of what they experienced.

On the same timeline, and extended beyond the work of the summer meetings, I also became involved with revising the hiring procedures and redesigning equal employment opportunity training for the district. This work has been started by a previous administrator who left the district. Our human resources team was painfully short-staffed and in the piles of their workload, operated in ways to not upset people or cause any complaints that added to their workloads. Because of the conditions, they were also increasingly unavailable for faculty conversations about possibly discriminatory experiences and conditions. After almost a year of training, I became an equal employment opportunity lead for the campus which had formal and informal duties, which aligned with how I was perceived by others on campus. The formal aspect of this work included designing and delivering new trainings, reviewing strategies around recruitment and serving as an EEO representative for hiring committees across the district. The informal aspect of this work was receiving calls and request for personal support from folks across campus roles, about hiring and beyond. I became an informal repository for worries, complaints, fears, and transgressions, particularly those that these members of the campus community felt would not be handled in a timely manner by human resources or administration. Some even felt disempowered to speak up on certain issues because of their part-time or classified status and asked me to not to share. While honoring this request to the best of my ability and desiring to be a safe space, especially for faculty and staff of color, holding all of this information was a major contributor to my burn out and once again evidence that at several levels, our campus was unequipped to meet this call to have open dialogue.

Campus leaders must host open dialogue and address campus climate

As the chair of the equity committee, among other roles, I found myself at the center of starting several of these conversations, two of which I share in the reaction to this line. Being the face (or even one of the faces) of these conversations meant being the target of a lot of vitriol from other faculty and staff, despite the balanced framing and intentional care of the comments during these conversation. This came in form of emails, snide comments in the hall, or prolonged/delayed campus services.

Before our Fall 2020 semester start, I helped to organize a district wide webinar to kick off our campus conversations about equity and our response to the Call to Action. I still felt the pulse of “family,” the sense of responsibility, the call to be the oldest daughter holding out my hand to help. I drafted some notes, trying to write from the place of hope and empathy, from a place of carrying this charge in a heartfelt way. I wrote thinking of my students of color who said my classroom space had made them feel validated, and in the hope that I could help foster more safe classrooms. I drafted feeling the weight of change solidly on my shoulders and trying to reach the sea of white faces that luckily, I wouldn’t have to see rolling their eyes on the other end of the Zoom screen. I shared the draft with a male colleague who said, “it sounds like you. Good luck.” I said the following to my district in a closed-dialogue webinar titled “A Call to Consciousness”:

It is from my privilege and from my experience of unresolved hurt from my work in this district that I come to you today with a charge that I want to state as clearly as possible because so many have been afraid for too long. My journey through higher ed has been violent at each step. What I refuse to do is to move any further with fear. Fear is not in service of our mission, the legacy of my ancestors, the value of the work I’ve already put in, the vision of my future or of my pride in my students.

It’s been time to listen, to understand, to heal your trauma that keeps you from change, and to act. It’s time to re-educate yourselves and make literal, physical space: on your bookshelves, in your curriculum, on our campuses for these stories to be held with the same regard and respect our institution has socialized us to have for mainstream, normative whiteness. Today I come with a charge: a challenge I present to you moving forward with our work, the motivation and spirit to push us where we need to go. I charge you to lead with heart, maybe firstly because my heart strains from the anxiety of survival, but also because I know my heart mirrors the heart of so many students we’ve taught. And we need to care about their hearts, in literal and relational ways. I charge with your support; for white allies to place their bodies and voices in these conversations that you’ve asked us to carry for years and years. Don’t wait until after the meeting. Lead the meeting from an equity lens. Silence has worked as casual violence for far too long. I charge you with your vulnerability. With your willingness to unlearn processes that don’t work. With your ability to say you don’t know what you don’t know. That good intentions don’t always equal equity. With the power to ask critical questions. With the imperative to see the story behind the data. With the necessity to even hold the outliers in our outstretched arms.

So many of you have told me your stories of pain and hurt,⁴² within our careers, and hurts we bring into them. Our fears are coded into our interactions with each other

⁴² All of the emotional labor folks have asked me to perform; to daughter for them.

and what we feel we have to prove. And those department arguments that are sometimes really about questioning if the work we've done and the ways we've defined who we are as educators, as people, may be obsolete in a changing sociopolitical landscape. If perhaps the fears we have about integrating different material, about having new leaders, is really a fear of challenging what we believe to be our personal, essential truths, which are often stories about the people around us that are incomplete. We ask our students to change who they are to assimilate into the culture of higher education and refuse to shift ourselves. We all deserve more. Fear and courage do not have to be mutually exclusive. It can give us courage, like its giving me in this moment, to try to tell the best truth I know. How can fear propel you?

From the work of Resmaa Menakem, whom we read in our EDAC Reading Group, I offer this brief meditation: "Can you sense hope in your body? Where? How does your body experience that hope? Is it a release or expansion?...Do you experience any fear in your body? If so, where? How does it manifest? As tightness? As a painful radiance? ...What worries accompany the fear? Are you afraid your life will be different in ways you can't predict? Are you afraid of facing...pain? Do you feel the raw, wordless fear---and, perhaps, excitement--that heralds change? What pictures appear in your mind as you experience that fear? If your body feels both hopeful and afraid, congratulations. You're just where you need to be for what comes next (24)."

And what a time to ask you to step away from fear, to remake who we are and how we see ourselves, when our world is burdened with uncertainty. But what an emergent possibility. The work is within each of us first, then with each other, then with the system, and at every step, in service of our students. The president reminded us, "our college has the potential to influence our entire region." Can you imagine what a collective healing looks like? Can you imagine a community that thrives in celebration of adaptation and growth? That reckons with its history and changes its future? What does this action look like? It looks like doing the research and educate yourself. And it's hard, and we all have a lot of work to do, and we still have to do this. It looks like engaging in the messaging from the chancellor's office and creating clear actionable goals that speak to that call. It means creating collective definitions for terms like "antiracist" that will guide what we do. This is our collective charge.

This energy, hope, and sense of responsibility carried into Fall 2022 in my role as student at my university. At that time, I was also asked to speak as part of a panel of students, faculty, and staff addressing the experience of and demands of the Black Alliance group on campus. I shared the following comments:

I come to you as an educator first, as a professor and equity chair in the community college system that has worked through and is weary from the roadblocks our institutions of higher ed places as a barrier to direct action. We must not waste this moment, be afraid, or tip-toe around fragility of the professionals who missed the critical education of cultural competency in their decision to work in education. We must be critical and innovative in supporting and celebrating our Black students; we must do despite our past complicity in an institution that is designed to do the opposite.

As a PhD student studying pedagogy, I am struggling to find mentors, to find women on color on our campus to support this work, women of color not burdened by an

anxiety-ridden, often unfair tenure process that limits their effectiveness in the university. I struggle to build community with a cohort of students of color who are trying to engage in research but are plagued by self-doubt, which has a particular history of being insidiously embedded in the messaging to Black students and women of color.

The wounds of our community are deep. I stand firmly with the demands of the Black Student Union, of the Black Graduate Scholars, of the critical race and ethnic studies faculty, and remind us all that this is a time we need humanities more than ever. Our university prides itself on our diversity, on our first-gen population, and I found myself after one semester here with a collection of experienced aggressions and because of this, even though I returned to grad school with my own teaching experience, found myself suited with enough imposter syndrome to face the same question of belonging I watch my undergrads face each semester. We must listen and actively dismantle the inequalities and privileges embedded in our university at each level. We need clear expression of the plans for direct action from each level. We need to believe in each other.

Our students, faculty, staff and administrators need to feel a sense of agency and must have open and honest conversations about how we come together as an educational community

Let us start with students, and consider the lack of agency they feel on campus. Again, this is best examined in anecdote. I looked at my class of almost entirely all men of color, all athletes, except for one woman student. These students were primarily Black and Latinx, most of the football team and a few basketball players. They were all in my course, an accelerated pre-transfer English course that my campus was trying out before the state passed Assembly Bill 705, because they were enrolled late by their academic counselor. This course had open enrollment without requiring a placement test, and was a quicker pathway to completing required units for the students who would've tested below transfer. We were mid-semester in the Unicorn Class, which was my nickname for having a such a specific demographic of students in this session. We'd made some headway in connection, had established a level of rapport that allowed me to speak frankly with them (though not enough for them to feel responsibility for completing course work). Though I had shifted a lot of assignments and approaches with this class, I had to get them through at least two traditional essays, the first one incorporating research. For many, it was their first time doing academic research and the way I had been trained to teach it to them was completely disengaging. Standing in front of the class on the first draft due date with no drafts received meant something needed to change.

I surveyed the class, what was going on? What support did they need? What prevented them from getting the draft in? My students expressed they felt like they didn't understand the process, the material. They did not get the library website, the confusing academic databases. I had offered them extra credit to visit the library and request help from the reference librarians, but none of my students had taken me up on that. Internalizing the issue as a gap in my teaching strategies, I figured one solution would be to be more direct in our connection to the library. I told the students I would extend the deadline of the draft and take more time to talk about the research element of the paper. I knew the librarians offered guided sessions where they would lead your class through the

ins and outs of the research tools available to them. I scheduled one of these sessions for the following week, during which our class was to meet in one of the lab rooms in our campus library instead of our regular space.

I was excited to learn along with them, hoping with their knowledge and experience speaking to so many classes each semester, that the librarians would have a more engaging approach, and tips to help the students feel more empowered in the research process. The morning of our session, only a third of the students were present (about ten students from my normal group of twenty-seven). This confused me, as I thought this was going to be an opportunity for them to get their questions answered. I asked one of my students who was present, one of the most involved and talkative students who was on the football team with many of his peers, where everyone was. He smirked, “they didn’t want to be here, Professor. I don’t know what to say.” I could tell he was holding back, but the librarian wanted to start, so I didn’t ask further.

“Is this your whole class,” she asked me.

“We have an unusual amount of absences, but we’ll work with who’ve we’ve got,” I replied, trying to remain as cheerful as possible.

“Unusual, huh?” she paused, surveying my students in a way that also felt like something was unsaid.

The librarian handed me a stack of packets to pass out to my class, which I scanned after making sure each student had one. The packet had step by step instructions on how to conduct basic searches on two of our academic databases, with blank spaces for them to fill in answers to specific searches as they followed along with the presentation. The hope of better engagement with the topic drained from me turning the page of this seven-page document, but I still hoped for some tips that would unlock some of this process of this topic.

It turned out worse than I anticipated, as the librarian presented the topic dryly, asking the students to follow her exact steps on each of their lab computers, fill in each answer and wait as she checked the correctness of each individual student before moving forward. While most of them stayed on task for the first page of fill-in answers, as the lesson began monotonous, they became distracted. While none of them were doing anything inappropriate at the computers, some began searching their own topics, or just using Google search. By the middle of page two, where the handout was asking them to pause for instruction after each part of setting tabs of an advanced search, the librarian was flustered and was moving between trying to get the students’ attention and directing frustrated comments at me.

I don’t understand why your students can’t follow directions.

I heard you were a good teacher, but you have some of those difficult students.

Can’t you get them under control?

I don’t know what you’re going to do with students as disruptive as this.

All of this she said in front of the students, in a voice loud enough for them to hear. Some ignored her completely at this point, some chuckled and started talking to each other, continuing with their Google searches. I gently encouraged them to follow along, though I was silently happy they were doing any research at all. At the height of her frustration, the librarian turned on a feature that locked the students’ computers and froze all them to a screen that only followed her movements through the rest of the

tutorial. At the end of the session, I dismissed my students, reminding them of the extended deadline draft and the library resources available to them.

As I helped the librarian tidy up the lab space, I collected several unfinished packets my students had left behind, stuffing them in my bag before the librarian made a comment about them. She began debriefing the session with me, reiterating what she had said in front of my students and mostly disparaging their effort. She momentarily questioned the structure of the session, quickly discounting her own critique because she had run so many of these sessions where the students were “polite and respectful,” “asked useful questions,” and “seemed to be interested in their own learning.” What a difficult time I must be having, she explained to me, with students like that. What did it say about these so-called acceleration classes, she thought aloud, when sometimes students like this were not ready for serious learning.

Still a new teacher, full-time but untenured, I felt like everyone was watching me on campus – studying my interactions with my students, my ability to maintain “discipline” with my students, my assessment practices, my often “too successful” pass rates. I felt myself pause in my response to her. Was this a moment to defend or deflect? Was this a moment to seek an ally or take up a cause? And at the core of my experience being liked and trusted on campus: was it a moment to take care of someone’s feelings or share my own? In this moment, I placated her feelings of defeat and validated the difficulty of the overall course.

Next week in class, I got a few drafts. Some were just a page long, some were more like outlines than drafts. As he handed me a single printed sheet, one of my students said, “I didn’t want to not turn in anything and make you upset, Professor. Sorry it’s not enough, but I wanted to show you I started.” I thanked him getting something in. Bringing the stack up to my table at the front of the room, I turned to whole class, who was all in attendance as we had returned our regular classroom space.

“What happened last week?” I asked them. “Why were so many of you absent? I’m sure you heard it wasn’t the most exciting session ever, but my hope was to get you more connected to the library resources.”

Several students shifted in their seats, looking around at each other. I heard some murmuring in the back, then some laughter. I pushed them again, asked what was the deal.

“We don’t go to the library” one of my students finally said aloud, his arms crossed.

“We don’t go to the campus library,” a second student specified.

“Why?” I asked.

“We’ve been told not to go there,” the first student started. As I asked for more information, he shared that it was advice given by his peers, other Black and Latinx athletes about to graduate. They had been told the librarians did not want them in there because they were “too much.” Another student picked up the story, explaining they heard of an incident several years ago, where a few of the librarians had called police on students they decided were being too rowdy. The situation had escalated to the point where a Black student was handcuffed, and others were escorted out. This happened in front of another group of peers and student athletes, creating tension and embarrassment for them.

“So why would we go there, for whatever reason,” the second student finished. “Nobody from there has ever said anything nice to us. Library, writing center, all of that.”

I didn’t disagree with him. I thanked them for the information and proceeded with the lesson. I wondered why, in my more than two years working with an equity team on campus, I had never heard this story. Instead, I only heard the story of student resistance to attend tutorial services. After much advocating, finding a small pocket of funding and a supportive administrator, we established a specific tutorial hour for the athletes, outside of the library space. Institutionally, we remained unable to have the conversation about bias – we just created another separate space. Even that, an unsatisfactory, level one change, took hours and hours of labor from me, from rapport-building with students, to building rapport with administration to leverage a sense of connection to me and the experience of my students against how they measure their success.

If we aren’t ready to have honest conversations about what creates a lack of agency for students, can we do it for faculty, who have more tangible power over physical spaces? Levin et al. describe the lack of agency faculty of color feel by borrowing from Dubois’s theory of double consciousness:

Faculty of color experience double consciousness when they choose groups for personal identification. On one hand faculty of color are socialized into their group based identities -- members of the department are program, members of the institution, and members of subgroups, (e.g. committees). On the other hand, Faculty can go through a process of acculturation where they ‘adapt their socialized worldviews to function in a culture different than their primary one.

These two consciousnesses can create conflict and identities and thus constrain faculty of color in the execution of their professional duties (Levin et al. 314).

To assert a sense of belonging, faculty will prioritize parts of their identities or roles that are positively supported by the institution – often sacrificing cultural beliefs in favor of what’s dominant or to neatly participate in social coordination. They depersonalize, adopting a professional façade that also affect their effectiveness in connecting with students in an authentic way. Levin explains, “depersonalization can be viewed as a defense against both minority status and explicit forms of racism. White faculty may be not only unaware of the conditions of but also insensitive to the feelings of faculty of color as minority populations” (322). Faculty narratives on their social and professional identities reveal that there is often a greater campus illusion that folks get along, but deep divides by ethnicity, status and organization of social coordination roles continues to exist.

It is equally critical that faculty leaders engage in a comprehensive review of all courses and programs...to look comprehensively at inclusive curriculum

In a previous section of this chapter, I explained the curricular revision process of an English department committee attempting to meet the call to action in the course outline revision of a composition class. The resulting challenges in the collaboration forced many to rethink their social, personal, and professional relationships to each other and their sense of belonging in the department. At the same time, it was imperative for

those who believed in the new changes to find ways to garner support and meet curriculum revision submission guidelines to make these changes actionable in the next year. The chairs and equity leaders of that committee realized that “innovation and social change depend[ed] on the efforts by active minorities⁴³ to challenge the prevailing order that is frequently safeguarded by the majority” (Crano and Seyranian 336). Despite the impulse to reduce conflict, the minority voices leaned into it, and while it created tension, “minorities persuade by stimulating curiosity,” causing moderate faculty to ask questions and form individual opinions on the proposed changes (Crano and Seyranian 337). This in between space is where researchers Crano and Seyranian signal to the “distinction between attitude formation and attitude change” – in which attitude formation change that is requesting a revision that does not go against a previously strongly held belief should be unlikely to receive substantial resistance (338). This was true for additions to curriculum, such as new ideas around teaching argumentation, source integration and the effect of artificial intelligence models. In cases where folks had low vested interest, “people may be convinced by the minority because they have weakly formed attitudes” (339). Revisions to established processes evoke attitude change, which elicited cognitive defenses, but also encourage “heuristic processing,” asking folks to learn about these new ideas for themselves. The willingness to do that, particularly as related to serving students of color, was held by primarily other faculty of color, emphasizing another aspect of care/work on a white-dominated campus.

⁴³ In this context, I want to be clear that active minorities is not only non-white faculty, but also included untenured faculty and part-time faculty who faced fear of retaliation for speaking up or voting against the majority.

Interlude: I Liked the Taste of Grudge

The mood shifts at an internment. Perhaps it is the fresh air, breaking the spell of the sanctuary, of the gentle hold of hopes and prayers and miracles and music. The breeze chilled their throats and the edges of their nostrils as they huddled around freshly dug dirt. The Suits were long gone, having given their statement, taking too long before the final choir selection. The organ finally just started playing under the speaker until they finished, while another Suit tried to take a phone camera picture over/ beneath/ between the hive of community buzzing around her. Having what they needed, they exited together, and quickly. The ones closest, immediate friends and family, made it to the plot.

Jamie walked up to the place designated for whatever parts of her she planned to bury. She grabbed a handful of dirt at the edge of the hole and shoved it in her mouth. She moved her tongue around for any familiar tastes: for the salt of tears she's shed over the years, for the metal of blood from biting her tongue, for the acrid turn of lies she was blamed for. Nothing familiar there. This dirt didn't match what her body had endured. She leaned over the hole and spit the dirt to the bottom, blowing the last muddy dribble out with a flick of tongue behind pursed lips. She didn't like the taste of the dirt, but looking up at the audience, she felt the tingle of want from everyone around her, a slight chewing, the acidic bite of pineapple on the inside flesh of your cheeks. She didn't like the taste of dirt, but she liked the taste of grudge.

As she stood at the precipice of the hole, the whole of her, she asked for others to fill it. With the canonized books she felt silenced by. With emails that accused. With all those review papers. Essays, her own, past classes, and whatever was left to grade. Heck, they threw in the computer. That phone with the work email. The hole filled with the whole of her professional academic life. When she bent down to push the pile of papers down, the sharp, wet smell of grass seemed to promise something.

She still wanted to see the service through. She asked her elder to read Walker's grudge poem, giving her the space to respond.

*Do not fight
the despair
of
harming
me.⁴⁴*

I think it's funny that Walker assumes despair in the initial harming.
I think the harming is the easiest, impulse almost.
like the old adage, they tend to do the harm,
and look for apology in the wreckage.

*I
slip
from
grace.*

I sent an email to the campus faculty, as new chair

⁴⁴ All of the verses aligned on the left are from "The Taste of Grudge" by Alice Walker

Promoting a brown bag luncheon for faculty of color.
My emails lit up, little bursts like the pull of flame
from a cigarette lighter. At first I was excited,
then saw the contents,
felt that raw burn that comes from the thumb moving
the metal wheel, trying to make a spark.
trying to hold it tight so the fire lasts.
“After all your good work, turns out you’re a racist?!”
“What colors are invited, then?”
“We don’t need this here. Or you.”

I wasn’t even providing free sandwiches.

*I do not
relish
perfection
or sainthood.*

At the ceremony for my tenure
my chair read a speech, relating me
to a character in a TV show who was
trapped in a basement
cranking a wheel under false pretenses of keeping
energy moving.
He said, she will give of herself
deeply, intensely, no matter what it costs
to keep the world from ending.

He said, Jamie always shows up.
Absolute Relentlessness.

Then Jamie found a window,
air that tasted like truth.
Jamie left, in as many ways
as she could.

*I honor
all the
fierce
edge
I have made
for myself
&
the conundrums
I have
made
for you.*

It never as if I was an uncontroversial figure,
as if my presence wasn't always in question
as if I wasn't told, "oh you've gotten
comfortable
haven't you."

It was never as if people didn't already think of me
as exception
hoping for a palatable diversity checkbox
of a girl whose proper home training
they could smell a mile away.

Imposter
a term to where with pride
instead of the way they try
to feed it back to you
to individualize your pain.

Imposter
like fugitive
like staying alive
when I wasn't expected to.

*Beyond
anger
beyond
blame
but
not
beyond
the peace*

Black feminists whispered to me,
joined hands with ancestors
in my dreams,
said, keep searching for yourself
as you've always done
in books.

Sung to me, Daughter:
"I love you with a love of screams.
I love you with a love of witness.
I love with a love so old and deep, so complicated, I can't name it.
Oh love, if I could live inside my name

...my name is love.
I want to live in love as home.

*I may die
tonight
perhaps you
are killing me.*

I want to live in it” (Gumbs, *Undrowned* 75.)
Live in it, Daughter.

“How to care for the injured body,
the kind of body that can’t hold
the content it is living?

And where is that safe place when that place
must be someplace other than in the body.

...
wait with me
through the waiting, wait up,
might take until nothing whatsoever was done.

To be left, not alone, the wish —
to call you out, to call out you”
(Rankine 143-145)

*You did
your
part.
I did
mine.*

I did mine.

Daughtering: The Care/Work of Black Women Faculty at Community Colleges

As I settled on exploring the concept of “daughtering” as a way to an entry point to institutional ethnography that honored my positionality and to explain the way I approached my expressions of care, it was puzzling to me why I felt connected to term that is easily associated with nuclear family, with institution, with patriarchy even. Its dictionary definition is “a female offspring,” and “a female descendent.” There is a little more to be found in the word’s etymology: a “woman viewed in some analogous relationship (to her native country, church, culture, etc.), evolved from the old English *dóhtor*. I found it compelling, considering the positioning of this work that this role/behavior is shaped by culture and professional settings, that in old English the first half of the word – *dóh* – means dough, something we literally mold and shape into what we want it to be. And often, dough is shaped to be consumed. As I considered how I found myself in the position of daughtering, and the effects of performing care work in multiple kinds of spaces, this metaphor became resonant for me and affirmed the use of the term as important to the theorizing I wanted to do about Black women in faculty roles. Additionally, there is a significance to the signaling towards legacy, heritage and cultural upbringing that is specific to Black daughterhood that I needed to explore through the Black feminist perspective. As explored in the Black feminist origins of autotheory, there is resonance, inspiration, motivation and vision in the rejection of being shaped by Western, hierarchical institutions and systems, and rather, being shaped by the devotional study of and citation of Black feminist writers and academics. This positionality, this shaping, means the creation of a self that will not be validated by any institution or system, but is also a self that that is inextricable from the function and survival of your cultural community and the legacy of Black feminist work. In her book *Feelin’: Creative Practice, Pleasure and Black Feminist Thought*, Bettina Judd explains to us her positionality as a daughter in relation to her many mothers – the many mothers of our communities, cultural upbringings, and indigenous knowledges. She says of her role, “what I really do is try to be a good daughter. While I do not purport to think exactly as all of them do, I do wish to attempt to ‘complete [her and their] thought.’ My interest is in understanding who they are and the subtle tether between us that connects experience, knowledge, survival strategies, and strategies for thriving” (Judd 21).

This etymology is embedded in my understanding of daughtering, as an ontology deeply informed by learned and adaptive behaviors for survival and care/work. Thus, I was interested not just in what it meant to be a daughter, but specifically what it meant to grow up in and embody Black daughterhood. What is it to be a Black / Black-biracial daughter? Who shapes or molds Black daughterhood? How does this molding happen? What relationships and core beliefs are built into this molding, (and does the active recognition of the process/action of daughtering lead one to reject these beliefs and relationships)? How are daughters consumed by this work, by the dehumanizing perception of the role? To trace this sense of daughterhood and to define the verb “daughtering” as it applies to this research, I have looked to research and literature, as explored in the previous chapter, and also Black feminist epistemology. In *Black Feminist Epistemology, Research and Praxis: Narratives in and through the Academy*, Porter et. al. pull from the work of Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks to describe Black feminist

epistemology as “how one makes sense of, understands, and embodies their ways of knowing...created not only to center the lived experiences of black women but also to capture the situatedness of Black women's sociohistorical positioning within the US society” (2). Answering the above questions requires a creativity than is inherent to Black feminist epistemology – a process of creation and synthesis that is guided by love, care, heritage, cultural context, and belief practices that persist despite threats to one’s livelihood and safety. Subjectivity is fully embraced as “it is an exploration steeped in the cultural traditions, concrete experiences, and perspectives of the researcher. Research is a spiritual endeavor to engender healing and transformation” (Porter et al. 3). From the opening of this dissertation, and the grounding of my academic spirit death in Black church traditions, this work (and its selected methods and guiding theories) means to signal a pathway of personal healing and professional “not dying.” (Again, not dying in opposition to survival, which I do not believe is possible in the whole self, whole spirit way). To reject being shaped or molded by any of these institutions (academia, and often related to Black identity formation in the US, the institution of the church), the centering of the visionary imagination of daughters provides a pathway to this healing. I see the positionality of the daughter – the articulation and honoring of the Black/ Black-biracial daughter’s epistemology and ontology -- as a theoretical exploration of restoring epistemic agency. While Porter et al. explains that Black women writers and academics have always resisted epistemic violence by writing their stories, there continues to be a gap in recognition of these stories. Black women in California community colleges have not been studied in significant ways, their narratives lumped into brief articles about the plight of “diverse faculty” generally at these institutions. This restoration of “epistemic agency requires surfacing our knowledge and valid realities, as well as our practices as valuable possibility models for ideological, cultural, and structural shifts in the Academy and beyond. A kind of epistemic agency in action” (Porter et al. 7).

My approach and practice of Black feminist epistemology also intersects with Williamson’s argument about the necessity of centering the “felt life of black feminism” rather than “recitation [that] comes to stand in for critical engagement” (Williamson 260). Williamson details her training as a feminist happening in the home, through the study of her mothers, (biological, chosen family, church community), her sense of daughterhood to them, and their understanding and ordering of the world based on their experiences and “firmly held notions of self-regard” (262). In her practice of autotheory, feeling Black feminism and exploration of dying from a Black feminist perspective, she discards the often imposed barrier between personal and professional in order to “attest to a black feminist practice rooted in an experiential relationship to communal care and kinship that has the potential to disrupt what are, too often, the destructive needs of the university” (264). Autotheory, story, and interview material in this chapter serves to do what Williamson describes – to trace the knowing of the self as a Black girl, a daughter, a woman, a teacher-professor in the world embedded in the unfiltered emotional, living context from which it emerges.

This chapter will first introduce the concept of care/work as a contextualizing factor that connects community college faculty work to the theory of daughtering, including the analysis of interview material with faculty. Next, personal narrative work will provide a foundation to build a detailed definition of daughtering from a Black and

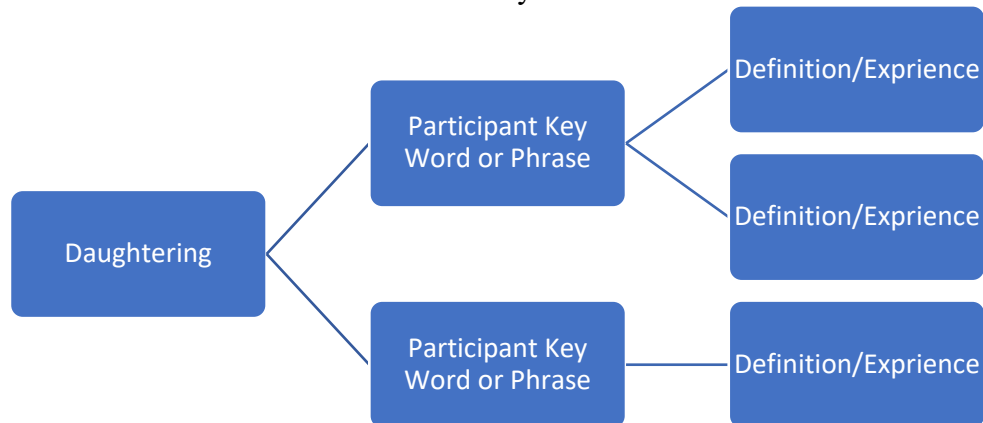
Black-biracial feminist lens. I will connect this to Evan-Winter's theory of daughtering as methodology to illustrate what daughtering looks like in action, specific to Black community and family spaces. Next, this chapter will move towards the analysis of visionary daughtering, analyzing the work of Alexis Pauline Gumbs and map how it is being applied to the community college faculty context.

Notes on the Interview Protocol

Throughout this chapter, excerpts from my interviews with thirteen Black and Black-biracial faculty will be integrated into the analysis. A few of these interviews will be presented as fuller testimonies in a following chapter. These interviews were conducted virtually via the Zoom video platform from August 2022 to January 2023. During the interview process, each participant was presented with a working definition of daughtering and two reflection questions:

1. Can you describe an experience in which you provided emotional or mental support (beyond your job requirements) to someone in your campus community (student, colleague, or administration)? What did that support look like?
2. What motivated to provide that support (Was it voluntary? Felt coerced? Did you have an external goal?)

These questions were intended to jumpstart thinking on each individual's experiencing of providing care to multiple kinds of folks and how they intersect with the demands of their workplace. The questions were also intended to begin an inquiry about the complex nature of this work and, depending on the personal context and work situation of each individual, to inquire about the potential agency to enacted in the giving of this care. After fifteen minutes of writing, interviewees shared their responses with me and we began the verbal interview process. Before working with the writing material, participants were asked to verbally summarize their response, why the moment(s) they chose to write about felt resonant for them, and initial thoughts on how this moment(s) might be representative of the care/work they provided on campus. Next, participants were invited to participate in a concept mapping activity which included looking at their writing sample together and highlighting key words or phrases that felt the most important to them in defining their experience of care/work or daughtering. We used these key phrases to create bubble maps that intended to expand the definitions and experiences of care/work, daughtering. While the maps varied slightly, the image below provides an idea of this collaborative activity:



Following this, we moved to the next section of the interview, more focused on oral history and providing context for their patterns of care-giving in their work lives.

Participants were asked the following questions:

1. Do you find that the care work you provide is acknowledged in any way by students, colleagues or admin?
2. What do you see as the potential impact of your care work/ Daughtering for yourself? For your campus community?
3. What do you understand about daughtering that doesn't fit into the framework we have here?
4. How do you see your experience helping to define this concept in the community college faculty experience?
5. How does your experience challenge this concept?

These responses were recorded and transcribed to produce the interview material, and participants were informed of my intention to keep sections of their responses as intact as possible in quotation to preserve their voice and perspective. While each interview was scheduled to take about seventy-five minutes, many of them took over two hours, as participants shared their experiences and the deep effects of their emotional labor in their positions. All participants noted the necessity of the space to share their professional experiences, particularly with another person who had similar care/work experiences and shared aspects of their identity. Several noted the lack of other Black faculty, let alone Black women, in any positions on their campus, which created a sense of isolation and loneliness. Each interviewee expressed a desire to be connected with more Black women faculty, formally and informally, to build spaces of connection, expression and support.

It took me a year to process these interviews. This was not only the typical process of coding and analyzing for themes, but also the necessity for me to take space from working with the material because of its emotional charge and relation to my (current) lived experience. I had to return to literature and research to soothe the ache that these interviews opened within me, especially considering my own position of being one of two Black women academic teaching faculty in my entire college district (the other being part-time and based online at the time of this research). Their experiences of isolation were also mine, and the shared trauma re-activated my feelings of burn-out and post-traumatic stress disorder. Parallel to my growth as a qualitative researcher was a necessary journey of personal therapy and mental wellness that allowed for this work to be healing and motivating, rather than heavying.

With this in mind, it is clear to me that an intersectional, interdisciplinary approach (the combined/overlapping methods of autotheory and institutional ethnography), is necessary to fully honor this "research...for the embodied practice that it is" (Esposito and Evans Winters 10). In chapter one of *Introduction to Intersectional Qualitative Research*, "(R)evolution of Qualitative Inquiry," Esposito and Evans Winters write:

Intersectional methodologies are an intentional interruption to Western, Eurocentric, male-centered knowledge claims and productions because intersectional methodologies attempt to center the cultural experiences, values,

and beliefs of the research participants including the researcher herself. ... Therefore, intersectional methodologies challenge authoritarian (and majoritarian) conceptualizations of credibility and validity intersectional critical race feminist methodologies pursue research relationships and experiences that “educate” (Akbar, 1999) Authentic representations of people, places, emotions, stories, texts, and the sacred (21).

The embodied practice of this research and integration of the interview material demands the rejection of neutrality as it relates to the exertion of power, the acceptance of “our own lived experience and how it shapes our critical consciousness and approach to the research process” and the centering of the alternate ontologies expressed in these interviews (Esposito and Evans Winters 13). Presenting these interview excerpts alongside my personal narrative, Black church allegory, and literary analysis emphasizes, as all my source material does, that “embodied knowing is real knowledge,” that theory-making from our experiences is valid, rigorous and academic, and that “you become a theorist by citing other theorists that cite other theorists” (Esposito and Winters 31-32). I intend for this citational train to not only happen in my academic context of institutional ethnography and autotheory, but to share these voices as theory necessary to cite, trust, and study.

Care/Work

Before diving deeper into the concept of daughtering, it is important to also define a term that I use throughout this work that is presented and intended in a distinct way. In reference to both mothering and daughtering I use the term “care/work” to describe the relationship to and acts of service for anyone outside of the self, but especially for people outside of the homeplace. I use this term to do two things. First, to signal the tenderness of the word care, often saved for the service for the ones we love, or to even just express an aspect of love. Embedded in care is not only (gaining and exerting) the knowledge of what is needed to provide the circumstances for someone’s well-being, but also the attentiveness and intention of doing something right to mitigate harm. It is the upmost duty of a daughter to care – and that that care be driven beyond just the heart space, but to be able to have quietly and without complaint learned what it is to provide the correct care for each individual or unit demanding it. Secondly, to bring up the obligation and responsibility of the word “work,” which is primarily meant to refer to the physical, emotional, and mental toll that providing care can take, but also to remind the reader that work is not optional for most. Existing in a work place, having to provide for the self and family, means exposure to spaces that are not only the site of racial aggression, but become spaces where care is required of us because of stereotypes Black and Black-biracial women face. My usage of these words together comes from the Disability Justice movement, and in particular, the work of Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha who aims to shift thoughts about “access and care...to a collective responsibility” and acknowledges the acts of giving and receiving care as part of resistance (33). They recognize the “complexities of receiving care” from a disabled point of view, emphasizing its power when it is organically and meaningfully given, rather than manipulated and regulated by the state (132). For Piepzna-Samarasinha, care work is radical in dismantling individualistic, capitalist, ableist culture and leaning into the

interdependent practices that have bolstered queer communities and communities of color for generations. It is this work and others of the Disability Justice movement that allowed me to see care as the complex, inherent, and legacy-driven skill that it is and to imagine how the reclamation and reframing of this skill can make daughtering, (a role that feels assigned), visionary.

To place these words together, to use the slash and write as care/work is meant to signal the ways in which these two concepts are deeply intertwined in the role of teacher-professor, especially as reflected in my interviews with Black and Black-biracial community college faculty. From these voices, and my own experience, a deep sense of authentic care guides all interactions, particularly with students. For every faculty I interviewed, there was a difficulty in separating care and work, even when discussing setting boundaries, as many realize they are safe spaces or main resource center for their students. For many, it is knowing the care-focused impact of their work that motivates them to continue in their roles, even considering the toll on their cognitive and emotional load. The faculty interviews provide more insight to what this care/work looks like in action.

From the interviews, two main themes emerged, the first of which is taking care of students. There was some complexity to this theme, as the interviewees did not feel resentful about the care that they provided to students, rather, they took pride and felt connected to the students they were able to create bonds with. However, there is a sense of hesitation and/or questioning when that care is the expectation, (especially when students are recommended to them by other colleagues), and when it's clear students don't receive that level of care elsewhere. One example of this come from the interview with Apryl Lewis, who is a professor at a large college in central California. Apryl is a full-time, tenure-track faculty who was new to her campus at the time of the interview. She shared:

I've been told on multiple occasions by multiple faculty and students that I'm too nice. I find that very mind boggling. I think to myself: do y'all want me to be mean? Is there something in my persona that on the one hand [says] we want you to coddle our students and bend over backwards, but at the same time you're too nice? I said if y'all want me to be less nice, then tell me exactly where I can cut corners to where it does not reflect poorly on me. I just wonder if the kind of care work that I do that translates into having high passing rates, higher retention from my classes...honestly why isn't anyone picking my brain and trying to figure out what I'm doing over here and how they can implement some of that, while also giving credit?

While Apryl had generally positive feelings about her interactions with her colleagues, this line of questioning made her wonder why she was constantly being sent students (both by colleague recommendation, and also peer word of mouth). She felt connected and motivated by her student engagement and her positive impact not only on campus culture, but student completion. While Apryl expressed a desire to be in conversation with her colleagues about her techniques, as an early career teacher and one that was new to the community college system, she was not approaching those conversations from a sense of arrogance or expertise, but rather as a bid for connection with her colleagues and an opportunity to share what to her felt like inherent knowledge. Her care work came

from a place of deeply understanding and caring about her students, especially students of color, and she questioned if her colleagues shared that depth. This questioning signaled that wonder of whether she would be credited for what she shared because while there was a rapport among colleagues, there did not seem to be a sense of intentional community building with students, which is exactly what she was trying to establish.

Kisha Quesada Turner, a full time, tenured faculty member at a midsize college in the East Bay Area, shared a similar theme of caring for students and also noticed the disconnect in community building from her colleagues, even in her own relationships with them:

I see connection in the word “fam,” that’s probably the word I would use. And once students become fam, then I’m personally all in because I’d do anything for my family. I feel it mostly with my students. I don’t see it, I don’t feel it too much with other faculty members just because I think I still kind of view myself as a student, so fam is the kind of easy to draw this connection. I would like to see all my students as fam, but it doesn’t always work out like that.

Kisha strongly connects to a responsibility of care/work for the students that she builds community with, and some of this feeling comes from teaching in a transfer-readiness cohort program designed specifically to foster that community. While it is clear that students who became fam in Kisha’s life primarily came from this program, it wasn’t exclusive to it, and she described multiple instances of supporting students beyond work hours, including mentoring and helping them navigate local and campus resources. Not only were most her colleagues not doing that work, but they were also not building community with Kisha, leading to this disconnect with them. As a younger professor, generationally and culturally, Kisha felt more connected to students and kinship to their experiences – including stretching the daughtering metaphor to introduce a word that felt more resonant to her, which was auntie.

Camille Tomlin, a part-time faculty member with twenty years of experience teaching at a midsize Central California college, shared the movement between recognition of mothering and daughtering roles in her care/work. Speaking from a different generation, she didn’t feel the age-level connection to students that Kisha shared, and she had to do some of the pioneering work on her campus as the first and only Black woman in her department. However, coming from generations of family who worked in education, Camille’s care/work was an expression of her being a daughter to this legacy. She shared the personal impact of the work from this perspective:

It’s hard because sometimes I feel like I overstep and become more involved with people than I need to be. I have a pro and cons [about my care/work] —I feel like I’m creating better opportunities for [students] and in my life I feel fulfilled in terms of what I’ve accomplished. Like, in terms of being able to touch all these different generations of people – I always get mom and sisters and brothers and cousins and boyfriends saying, “oh yeah I want to take your class.” So I feel like I have a following and a commitment from the students, but I don’t get a big head about it, because there’s always work to be done. I’m not like “this is it, I don’t need to change,” I always think I can change this or that. ...I feel excited, but also am always thinking about how I can do more and change things. It’s an evolving. As a teacher, you evolve like your students. Your work is never really done.

Her care/work and commitment to her students manifests in several ways, including being involved in many service roles on campus (so that she can always point students to the right resources as well as help develop new ones), being available for students beyond class time (when part-time adjuncts are only compensated for a few office hours a semester, depending on budget), and being engaged in continuous learning. Even as she fluctuates between feeling like mother and daughter in her professional spaces, Camille demonstrates the service-oriented perspective of daughter in her active engagement in all campus activities and feeling unfinished in her work.

The second major theme that helps define the care/work of daughtering is taking care of colleagues. This care can look many ways, including, but not limited to: personal emotional support typically reserved for students, (such as listening to personal stories), comforting them when they feel attacked, (often as they are committing a microaggression against you), and performing professional service that advances others. A brief example of this in my experience is being appointed chair to a hiring committee, (as many faculty had to recuse themselves because of family members applying), being harassed and formally questioned by the department about the committee processes, and being asked by the faculty who recused themselves to be personally comforted when it did not go the way they wanted. In “Hot Commodities, Cheap Labor: Women of Color in the Academy,” Patti Duncan argues that part of these requests for care/work and the performative allyship from colleagues stems from a desire to control us. This includes exploiting our knowledge, being used as a scapegoat, and claiming our successes. Duncan describes being “expected to help the director and other faculty members address the charges of racism leveled at them [by students],” “managing the students of color protesting the program,” and as students refused to take classes with certain professors, “charged with helping [these professors] to ‘diversify’ their course offerings and syllabi, involving the tedious task of reviewing numerous syllabi and course materials and offering helpful suggestions for inclusion of women of color and issue of race,” and “take the lead in organizing [antiracism] workshops and securing funding for them” (43). After engaging in this additional work, Duncan still found herself in a thankless and exclusionary role in the department. Her own projects were not given attention or funding. Duncan concludes, “we were offered the possibility of inclusion only on the terms defined and controlled by others, which specifically discounted our experience as women of color” (52).

Kalisha Spomer, who works as a part-time professor at a midsize community college and as an articulation officer at a large community college, both in Central California, shared a building pressure on her as she is still early in her career. She is highly aware of the stereotypes of Black women in academia, and perhaps because of her mixed employment status, reflected on doing a lot of work to actively disprove stereotypes, even at a personal health cost. She explains:

It's easy to lose yourself. You begin not to say no. You just take things on, even if it's overwhelming or you know you're burning the candle at both ends. I don't want to always be the center voice or that person that everybody goes to, but it seems that even if I don't want to do it, I'll end up doing it. That's where [balancing needs to come in]. There's a balance between trying to say no and

taking on stuff, taking on assignments. I would say I'm doing my job but I'm also trying to help someone else do their job too. I think my theme is that I'll continue to overextend myself. I'll overextend until there's literally nothing left of me and I go home exhausted dreading the next day.

Kalisha did not feel like she had the agency in either of her positions to assert boundaries or not perform extra duties. Particularly in her roles as articulation officer, she found herself forced into extra work by colleagues who did not follow procedures she shared, or she had to make herself constantly available to explain things and fix things for them. As an early career professional, as Duncan relates in her article, opportunities often feel tied to this performance of perfection.

With about thirty years of experience in higher education, and the last twenty of those working in community colleges, Andrea Phillips felt intimately familiar with struggling to be seen in her departments while also being asked to perform labor for colleagues and administration. Her reflection provides insight to her understanding of the hot and cold receptions Black women professors receive from colleagues. After many years of feeling like the “village caretaker” she argued:

Sometimes people think that we are super women and that we don't struggle or that we don't need the space. [As if] we don't need some one to listen to us and it's kind of like, “yeah, they don't worry about that, you know.” I'm gonna say people do not understand black women or or biracial black women struggles period. [They are] not equipped to deal with it. Because then that means that they have to pay attention to how they relate to us, and a lot of times people don't want to.

I really don't think that they, (that folks who are not black women), know how to really listen to us when we are begging for help. And so, as a black woman who is hearing warning signs here in the bells go off, then that means I have to pay closer attention. ...and as black women at the community college, especially in leadership positions, they make their own assumptions of us, and it could be based on how you look, how you carry yourself. ...They don't understand that black women are really about helping everybody and that does not come across at the community college system at all. At my community college we are very invisible or if we are in a position of leadership, people do not want us to be successful, and they do everything that they can to [challenge us].

Andrea shared staying late at work on a regular basis and feeling like her care/work was never acknowledged by her colleagues. An important thing that Andrea pointed out in her interview is that during the Covid-19 pandemic, when virtual meetings with students and colleagues entered her home space, she felt like she had no safe space from performing this care work other than her bedroom. Rather, as Botts-Ward says in her autotheory practice, “we learn that these bodies are the safest homes we’ve ever known, even in all of their precarity.” Now as she begins to reassert boundaries, she must also work to reclaim the spaces where she feels like she gets reprieve from these expectations.

Daughtering as Theory

In *Black Feminist Qualitative Inquiry*, Venus Evans-Winters explains, “Daughtering implores us to decode words and tolerate the pain of other people’s interpretations of our tresses, bodies, language, behaviors, dispositions, [and] personalities,” and argues that “daughtering is not passive. In fact it is quite subversive, watchful, and clandestine for the sake of survival. We are socialized to read in between the lines” (138). Daughtering as theory in relationship to faculty roles asserts that Black and biracial women, (often socialized into caregiving by family, communities and society at large), are often subject to and actively aware of persistent stereotypes and their labor is no longer “invisible.” While still existing in oppressive institutions that often demand this labor for access to professional privileges, the increased visibility and discourse of this labor provides the opportunity for faculty in daughtering roles to be strategic in the ways care is acknowledged, critically discussed, and used as a catalyst for change. It is in the role of daughtering that love, (love as resistance, love as questioning and deconstructing “truth”), holds the key to imagining the radical and liberatory possibilities of the communities within our colleges.

For the purposes of this research, my definition of daughtering borrows from Venus Evans-Winters, who explains that, “much of our understandings of the social world are shaped by our experiences as daughters in an anti-black and anti-girl world. Daughtering influences our approaches to data theory, analysis, and representations of our observations and lived experiences” (27). Daughtering is a set of social survival skills that inform one’s point of view and positionality. These survival skills can vary depending on the atmosphere someone grew up in, but most often manifest as acts of intentional or unintentional care/work. Specific to a Black and Black-biracial context, my definition of daughtering includes the cultural training to be secret-keepers and supplanters in their family units and communities, which then replicates in the workplace. These skills enable a kind of care work that positions the daughter to be perceived as highly trusted, especially adept or flexible, responsible, highly intelligent and uniquely qualified.

My work in this dissertation is to not only expand and build the definition of daughtering from Evan-Winter’s work, but to align this work with Alexis Pauline Gumbs’s research to present an original definition of *visionary daughtering* that can provide a roadmap of not dying and intentional choice for Black and Black-biracial women faculty in community colleges. Visionary daughtering is the recognition of the skillset of cultural daughtering and the active transformation and/or reframing of these skills to restore agency, belonging and humanity to the daughtering person. From the above definition of Black and Black-biracial daughtering as centered on secret-keeping and supplanting, the practice of visionary daughtering transforms the nature of secret-keeping to storytelling and reframes the nature of supplanting to sustaining.

This chapter will break down what each of these roles of daughtering mean in the faculty context and share the interview participants experience with them. In the interview process, I found that as participants explored the theory of daughtering in their own lives, many reached back into their own childhoods and early adulthoods to trace the beginnings of performing care/work, both at home and in school spaces. A coming back into themselves and their interiority. A naming of the folks who raised them and how they were raised. A question of what the gaps of care they experienced and

how they've developed the trauma response of filling those gaps for other people before themselves.

Reflections of Child Daughterhood

As each interviewee began to make the connections to the theory of daughterhood, there was a process of recall, a pause as they returned to the internal landscapes of girlhood. It took that moment of memory to briefly abandon the performance of professor – to reach the word daughter in the way we are initially introduced to it, as children. Then, the mental cataloguing of lessons. The constellation of connected behaviors stretches across their mind, the internalization of specific trauma responses that are not just individual, but tied to a cultural role we share. In her process of Blackgirl autoethnography, Botts-Wards describes a similar process, adapted from Morrison, in which:

A Poetics of Blackgirl Autoethnography lets me talk freely about rememory and all that was lost, lets me read multiple time periods as one, and allows me to map spaces and times on top of each other in all the ways they occur simultaneously in me. This poetics of transparency, rooted in Black feminist care, opens up new modes of telling these stories that must be told with delicacy. ... We have always understood ancestral truths whispered beneath the bones of our skin. We have always mapped radical epistemologies of liberatory praxis onto concrete corners, city blocks and beauty shops. We, them everyday round the way Blackgirls who academia forgot, have always been legible to ourselves, between hopscotch lines, within swinging double dutch rope, from the earliest years of our Blackgirlhoods (Botts-Ward).

Entering the space of rememory and engaging the mental layering of time periods (for someone with spatial synesthesia like me, to imagine time not as a linear, forward-moving line, but as years that stack vertically upon each other, so that a line can be drawn down through the layers of time), allows us to access the reverberations of the messages of daughterhood across our lives.

For several of the interviewees, sharing this process of realization was helpful in building their connection to daughterhood in their professional lives. Corrie Morgan works at a large Central California college as a librarian and instructor. She shared:

In my family, growing up as the only daughter, I really felt like I needed to support everyone. There were expectations too for me as the girl and the only girl in my family that, (whenever we had guests or family), I was the one helping everyone. I was making sure they were comfortable even at my own expense; even when I didn't want to. My brothers could do whatever they wanted. I guess I felt this expectation of being the support. Honestly, it could be I'm realizing too – [this is connected to] folks coming to me. I'm a friendly person, but I did feel like a lot of people came to me and felt comfortable speaking and talking to me and laying out their issues that were and were not related to work and asking for my feedback. And so when you have multiple team members that are doing this it becomes draining. I think going back to that feeling of expectation of me not only to bring people together but to be a kind of force coming in there taking care of things. To be a hammer, in a way.

I take personal responsibility a lot of things I read and opens my eyes and makes me realize I didn't need to do all that I need to work on that but it's also hard to navigate in spaces where there's still an undercurrent of expectation with the work that I do.

Corrie is creating that mental, temporal landscape of daughtering throughout time, tracing the connections she can see between her childhood role of supplanting care for the adults, and recognizing she becomes that stand-in for friends, therapists and partners in the way they constantly request support.

Kathleen Schock, an instructor at a large college in the Central Valley, experienced a similar mental-mapping process as Corrie, connecting her to emotional memories of her relationship with her white mother. She shared:

A lot of this goes back to my actual mom. ... it's feeling like I have to give 100% to be accepted. There's something more though, it's also like. Like there's no room for error. And to push back felt like I was making an error. ... It I think it it brings up familiar familial feelings of conditional love.

My mom and I had a very complicated relationship. She was an alcoholic and she had undiagnosed mental health issues and so we had a very codependent relationship. I found myself professionally in many situations, particularly with white women, where I'm fixing their mistakes. I'm covering for them. Protecting them. And I do it without even realiz[ing] I'm doing it until I reflect back on it.

And it's like, why was I bending over backwards to help this woman? She's done nothing for me, ever. But yeah, it comes up all the time.

Kathleen too found herself engaging in an unconscious support role that she could identify clearly when placed in the frame of daughtering. Her childhood impulse to please, perhaps related to the fawning trauma response, the child tasked with making everything okay for everything around them, takes precedent to in an attempt to protect her from experiencing crisis.

Daughters are Secret-Keepers

The first element of daughtering that I have identified as essential to understanding the theory of daughtering in the community college faculty context is the act of and training as secret-keepers. To be a secret-keeper is to not tell anyone something you are told or something you observe. To be a secret-keeper, a daughter must develop the skills of observation, often to even be invisible, in order to learn the truths of a situation. In my home this might have looked like cleaning the kitchen as my mother and aunties chatted at the table or braiding my sister's hair as I listened in to my mom's end of a phone conversation. In the workplace this looked like planting myself at the staff table for hours on end, working on grading papers, but really doing the work of observing the interactions of other faculty with each other – especially the full-time faculty I was trying to impress as a young adjunct. I listened in for the secret languages, the acronyms they used to talk about institutional policies and teaching practices. I knew the insider knowledge would be helpful in building rapport with them, with demonstrating the ways I “fit” into the institutional culture if I needed to prove my belonging.

To be a secret-keeper meant to keep information hidden from other people. This can mean not revealing the information you have learned through observation, or to keep silent on information directly revealed to you, such as gossip or the personal issues of colleagues. I found myself secret-keeper to tense interactions between our chair and dean. When they both realized I was aware of this tension, I became confidant to each of them separately, trying to find a way to hold the emotional baggage of two people who ranked above me. To be secret-keeper is to perform your ignorance of these circumstance, but also to balance a subtle care-taking of those who position themselves as emotionally vulnerable despite any power imbalance. To be a secret-keeper is to protect oneself by performing this care/work for them to avoid any backlash of hurt feelings from grown folks who expect you to be their nanny/therapist.

To be a secret-keeper is to learn discernment, to be strategic to your benefit of when to position yourself to receive, observe and be forced to keep information. The daughter as secret-keeper does hold power in this way – the potential of revealing something that could harm another. There is an addictive thrill of keeping secrets, but one that leads to a field of landmines of tenuous, delicate, un-reciprocal relationships.

The tension of the secret-keeper is the internal effect, the having to carry this secret, observation, trauma, to live with it in your own thoughts. To carry with that responsibility the burden of trust, commitment, communication and boundaries. The space of tension beyond secret-keeping reaches towards story-telling – the release of protected information, hidden curriculum, patterns of abuse that can serve to create systems of accountability and enact change.

In her reflection of her daughtering as a secret-keeper, Apryl recognized the emotional burden of doing the emotional lifting for others, and how deeply it is intertwined for her with keeping folks calm and happy:

I feel as though I have come a long way, while at the same time recognizing I have some of the people pleasing tendencies within me and they have manifested [as] mostly people pleasing. Not quite to the level of resentment, [since] I see it as just another extension of the job.

I work to alleviate worries and putting people at ease or making them laugh at alleviating worries is me providing constant reassurance and that can also look like being agreeable. I would say that along with the constant reassurance it can sometimes look like overextending myself emotionally.

Even as she observed issues in equity, microaggressions at different levels, and inadequate support for students, Apryl realizing her role, particularly until she received tenure, was to hold most of this in and focus on her classroom performance. Of course she recognized how it affected her ability to show up for her students, even in the aspect of being knowledgeable about campus services, as she did not want to send students through processes she heard about and observed were not beneficial.

Kathleen daughtering as secret-keeper balanced a performance of Blackness and signaling allegiance to Blackness as a Black biracial woman:

I was expected to be a certain kind of perfect black person in this professional environment it was like I was having to perform something that was not in

genuine to me but I just stopped wanting to play that role at a certain point and it caused tension.

I was in the bathroom and there was another faculty member in there and she's white. As I was going into the stall, she said how's the move going and I was like what is she talking about? She's like, "yeah aren't you buying a house" and I was like, "no you're thinking of Alena, who's another biracial faculty member who looks nothing like me."⁴⁵ My white colleagues can't even recognize or tell two black women apart.

Following this moment, Kathleen describes holding the emotional embarrassment of this woman, swallowing the aggression and internalizing it in order to use her secret-keeping skills to preserve the relationship with another faculty member, (realizing also this tendency to secret-keep and soothe others comes from her relationship with her mother, as described above).

Kiandra, an English instructor at a medium sized college in the Inland Empire, focused on how she used her daughter-training as strategy to persist and resist in spaces that made her feel like an imposter:

I have to know how these things are operating, so that I can anticipate it, so that I can mitigate it before it comes, or steal myself – literally physically steal myself away. I do the same for students; I have to prep them.

When [I was] in other spaces [like classrooms] and let them [I] was a smart black girl...black girl, don't expect for your ideas to always be celebrated in class. You [might be] told to shut up just like I have been told. And the thing is sometimes is that it's [not exclusive to white people]. Sometimes it'd be our own, because we've been colonized ourselves, and sometimes we do the harm, too.

Kiandra summons the hardening that happens in community, sometimes as an act of protection, sometimes as an act of aggression – projections onto students as a result of the harm of being assimilated into colonial ways of being. In her secret-keeping, she observes and hold important survival information for her students as a form of protection and care/work towards them.

In an interview with author Kendra Allen, (explored in more detail in the following chapter), she recalls, "watching girl cousins grow up and becoming adapted to fear, to secret-keeping. [This included] changing what they about themselves, and participating in that manipulation." She found herself participating in the secret-keeping of her mother's behavior, who wanted her to hide behind Kendra as a shield of "one things I did right." Kendra, developing her observation skills in these interactions, realized, "I knew everything about [my mother], but she didn't know everything [about me]." Similar to her relationship to her mother, she realized as a secret-keeper and observer, folks did not think that she had feelings or emotions. They forgot she was

⁴⁵ This calls to an experience shared by Claudia Rankine in *Citizen*. She explains: "when a woman you work with calls you by the name of another woman you work with, it is too much of a cliché not to laugh out loud with the friend beside you who says, ohh no she didn't. Still, in the end, so what, who cares. She had a fifty-fifty chance of getting it right. Apparently your own invisibility is the real problem causing her confusion. This is how the apparatus she propels you into begins to multiply its meaning" (43).

another human with ears and eyes and perceptive in the room; “they never asked me how I felt.” In considering the layers of power and tension in this role, Kendra posited, “being invisible allows us to see people’s full selves that they reveal in front of us because they don’t see us; they think we won’t tell.” This is space, she argues, that the question of the daughter’s humanity must be considered. We can see this in the faculty reflections above also – being seen as a repository for emotionally-charged information, but not feeling like they are able to reveal their true experience with the same people confiding in them.

Daughters are Supplanters

Coincidentally, supplanter is a word that I have a deep connection with, as beyond the derivative of the male name of James, it is the additional definition associated with my first name. Daughtering as supplanting something that I believe is particularly felt by, but not exclusive to, oldest and only daughters. This because supplanting is defined as replacing another, (as oldest daughters often serve as a secondary parent and/or are parentified children. They observe and adapt to additional responsibilities of the care of the household and are expected to pick up the duties of the parent as needed). The daughter as supplanter is not allowed her own identity, as her primary role is that of caretaker. She is denied her autonomy, her dreaming self, her own story, because she does not exist as her own being, she exists in service to others. As above, the question of humanity is present here. In the tension away from supplanting, towards sustaining, the social danger of boundary setting, being seen as selfish, and/or insert any stereotype of “unsatisfactory,” confident choices from Black women.

As shared in an interview with I. Adeficha, (writer, educational consultant and equity trainer), daughtering as supplanting is so easy to lean in to, because it has this entanglement with the daughter’s self-definition.⁴⁶ The daughter as supplanter may not have had the opportunity to develop her own sense of self or power. And in its complexity, the supplanter role can be one that has its own power, voice or influence (even as it’s not the daughter’s own). There is an important relationship between daughters as supplanters and this role transforming into an educational service job, as the space of classroom may be the first and only space that the daughter as supplanter is encouraged to develop her voice.

Inherent to the daughter as supplanter is the desire to be perfect. In order to feel success in the role of supplanter, one must be good in the replacing of whatever role they are assuming. This nurtures a people pleasing and conflict avoidant trauma response, tied to how the daughter as supplanter thinks other people view them, their usefulness, and their worth.

⁴⁶ In a session, my therapist asked me, “are you really a good caretaker?” This sent me into a spiral. I immediately thought, of course I am! My whole life has been caretaking, as the oldest daughter of six siblings. I am especially skilled, I know how to do this role. My therapist pushed that that was exactly the problem. That perhaps I could not have my own insight on being a good caretaker or liking taking care of people because it was so integrated with my sense of self. This mini identity crisis has helped me consider how daughter as supplanter effects my relationship with colleagues and the resentment that quickly builds with certain care/work requests because they conflict with the caretaking that I actually want to be doing (for myself first, then for others).

In the context of a faculty role, daughter as supplanter can take many forms, including the “replacing” of another in emotional care/work performed, being asked to literally step in/ complete another person’s work, or, in a leadership role, being asked to assume the voice of a reporting body (such as administration). In one of my supplanting roles, I found myself working with our human resources office to support equitable hiring processes. For many faculty and staff, they viewed me as supplanting the rest of HR, while also being more accessible. This resulted in a multi-layered supplanting of receiving reports of micro and macro aggressions, particularly in the hiring context, while also being asked to take care of people’s feelings about the incident, (as their managers should, let alone personal support systems). As a chair of a committee on campus, I found myself doing the direct translation of administrative procedures to antsy committee members. When I was given a different assignment that required me to step away from both leadership positions (by choice), I was reluctant despite how taxing both roles were. My reluctance stemmed from the realization of the power, influence, and space of voice that I felt these roles gave to me – I did not always feel the agency to develop that on my own within my institutional space.

Kisha described her supplanting as requests for extra work, or the duplication of her work, often requiring her to step into a different teaching role – to educate other faculty about the service she provides for her students or the curriculum she designs:

There's some level of recognition like, “oh, Kisha has expertise, let's see if we can ask her. We're trying to do a similar thing. Let's see if we can bring in Kisha to just kind of see how she did it or see if she'll join the movement or whatever the project is. Recognition [for the care/work I did] was the invitation to [do more work] in certain spaces.”

Kisha’s innovations were “rewarded” with more requests on her time and for her care, as others found her a worthy collaborator.

Kalisha, who was working through stereotypes as an early career instructor, describes how daughtering through supplanting provided a way to prove her exceptionality, her worthiness:

In general, we have to prove ourselves. I think that's just the stereotype, that black women aren't very helpful and rude and mean. I just want people to see that I do want to help I do want to help them I want everyone to succeed and feel supported.

I have to provide care to my team and help everybody out. ... I don't want to have the reputation of not being a team player but that I'm not willing to help anyone and I'll give myself a reputation on campus of being one of those very harsh individuals.

From her previous reflection, we understand that Kalisha’s supplanting comes in the form of requests explicitly not following directions she gives. So not only does she have to do extra educating, she faces the constant pressure of perfection to meet procedural standards. By reaching to her for help, with perhaps their assumed incompetence, it creates the space for others to blame Kalisha for their incorrect articulation work.

Kathleen’s reflection as related to daughter as supplanter provides insight to the emotional stress of the perfectionist/ people-pleasing role of supplanting:

[I ask myself] why didn't I handle [certain situations] differently. Why did I have to handle it better? Why do I have to handle it at all? I think there's a second guessing about my work and my worthiness to be in the spaces.

There's all of these unspoken expectations. You know you're walking on egg shells trying. Sometimes it's like I get reverted back to a little girl just trying to not get in trouble.

Corrie: add my new institution I to guide everyone working online and communicating online I really enjoyed working from home at that time because I didn't feel the pressure to be on and available to everyone I was going through my own stuff and in the last part figuring myself out from the burnout things are much better now but I'm still having the trauma and it's informing how I operate now

Daughtering at the Community College

To close this section and the definition of daughtering as theory, it was important for me to ask all my participants why this theory was resonant in the specific context of community college teaching. As described in the community college context chapter, there is a specific mission driven, teaching focused student readiness that drives the service expectations of the community college as compared to a research university. But how does this affect daughtering, or what does it require? I feel that the most insightful response to this question came from Camille, who shared:

Even though at a 4 year [institution], you are getting accolades for research, at the community college you can a hands-on experience; you are multi-tasking. If I want to be on senate I can do that, if I want to be on equity I can do that, if I want to be the tech committee, I can. In terms of what you can do as a professional and how you can make a difference — I can work [with everyone].

Some peoples emotional make up, their mental make up, it's not exciting for them or fulfilling for them. It's not something that they want to deal with. In order for you to be at a community college, you have to really love it. ...it's so much more multi-tasking, and it's not a place where you get bored.

I want to have that feeling at the end of the day that I knew my students were in good hands, I had done what I had to do to help, they were not anxious about anything, they were not concerned about anything, they had their idea about how they were going to plan. And that's it, that all there was because technically we are the bridge for somebody to something else. Whether it's a job or a certification or another degree, it's a bridge. ...[students have said to me] you are the only person I feel comfortable talking to , and I'm like "really?" They say, "yeah some of these professors are really standoffish and they don't want to help me. I feel so relieved [by the way you do things]". I had enough bad teachers in my life that I learned there's ways I don't want to do things. I had this psychological thing [with

some teachers] that made me feel like I couldn't do it. I couldn't do it they way they wanted me to do it, how they liked to do it. Faculty don't think about the way people are impacted by the way you present yourself. ...sometimes if you get one person to take you through it, that's all [they need].

As a trained daughter as supplanter, Camille finds value in being able to fulfill a multitude of roles successfully, which can create a more complex identity for her and her professional servingness.

Interlude: A Daughter, A Mother, An Auntie

Memory moves in at the edges of your life.

When I was sitting between my auntie's legs on hair braiding day, I knew it was ritual. I knew I was being inducted. I knew I had to show my momma could raise polite and speak-when-spoken-to children. Cause she wasn't one of *those white people* who didn't know how to handle her children and teach them respect. I also knew I couldn't be tenderheaded that day cause tenderheads and lightskins were too synonymous and I wanted more than anything to not be either of those things.

I was daughter. My mom was sister and daughter.⁴⁷ My mom was student, her permission slip was not only my hand in hers but also my black curls unraveling in another woman's lap. My auntie came from church community, spiritual kinfolk by word and bond and empathy. My mom knew I needed Black folks and hymns and white stockings and neatly folded hands and ushers pointing the way. She learned I needed grease on my scalp and straight parts and tamed edges and bright colored knockers that would clatter with each step.⁴⁸ I needed my mom, but my mom was learning how she needed help in handling how the world would see me.

When I daughtered here, it was sitting still on a pillow between her legs, my own limbs folded to the side, tucked around or beneath auntie's. It was the bend of neck with whatever side of my auntie was parting. It was laying my cheek against the musky sweat of her thigh, sticky together in Bay Area summer heat. It was biting my tongue metallic when my follicles screamed because I was a good girl who didn't fuss. It was that quiet hush, waiting for the talk to begin, waiting to horde secrets passed between two almost-grown women.

It was homeplace, like bell hooks says⁴⁹. A safe space of cultural rebellion—of a Black woman making space for sharing social currency, drawing a map for my mom's survival with lines of gossip. It was caretaking for a Black biracial kid like me who

⁴⁷ I use this anecdote to begin to deepen this discourse because I believe it demonstrates the eagerness – from both me and my mother – to take on the role of daughter in this situation, especially because it is inextricably linked to a sense of belonging.

⁴⁸ As Savala Nolan writes in the essay “White Doll,” “my white mom understood, that it was her duty to teach my about race, to get out of her own way as a white woman and find Black spaces for me. ...It was my white mom who ensured I had the vocabulary to feel, express and describe Blackness” (45).

⁴⁹ While there is certainly obligation and responsibility in daughtering, there is also the creation of *homeplace*, which “was not simply a matter of Black women providing service; it was about the construction of a safe place where Black people could affirm one another and by doing so heal many of the wounds inflicted by racial domination” (hooks 384). In this anecdote, while my auntie is providing the service of braiding my hair, there is an exchange and/ or offering of community and kinship with my mother (and me, by extension) through the act of gossiping. While in the essay *Homeplace: a site of resistance*, bell hooks focuses on the community of the exclusively Black home, as a Black biracial daughter, I experienced many of these exchanges and participated in the creation of several homeplaces with my white mother present. Thus, the second part of hooks's quote takes on a more complex meaning, with my mother both being my literal mother, but also serving as a sister/daughter to my auntie, relying on her expert knowledge to help take care of me and learn to navigate existence in Black spaces because it was important for my upbringing and cultural knowledge.

needed a momma-auntie-sister while her mom was becoming daughter-sister for the first time.⁵⁰

Did you see how Ms. Jones had her kids up in church during bible study, auntie started. The pause was heavy, as was the comb sliding a few inches above my ear, starting my first row. My eyes searched my mom, who wasn't tuned to the pain I felt at my curls being pulled apart. Rather, she searching the wall for the right answer, aware of gossiping as a method of connection, as an olive branch, and her job was to affirm, build, and ensure she was trust-worthy of holding these judgements.

*All I seen was the little one with no sweater and his nose running, no tissue. Mom looked back up as auntie set the comb down on the tv stand next to her, a reprieve for me.*⁵¹

Hold this part, auntie instructed, guiding my hand to hold down the part of my hair she wasn't working on. Auntie's fingers split the section into three with tight pulls. Bring under, scoop the next, bring under, scoop the next. Mom touched her own fingertips as she watched now, subtly rehearsing. Right like where's that baby's coat? It might be May but it's cool by nighttime. Hell, we had a coat drive if she in need. Don't make them go without.

I wanted to say I knew that runny-nose boy from my Sunday school class, wild and free and unencumbered by any rules. He wouldn't even listen to the deacon who sometimes hit a switch against the table during our lessons, so I'm sure he wasn't listening to his momma even if she had a sweater for him. But if I said something, I'd be the *peanut gallery*, as mom would say. *Ear hustlin* auntie would say. The only part of me that was supposed to be present were the strands sliding between auntie's full set. Those phrases taught me that my job was to be invisible, especially if I wanted to hear the good stuff, the important stuff. In this moment, I was only a body for to give reason for their connection. I begin to acknowledge the ways in my Black daughtering that I become "the bridge for everybody," and in this particular instance, something "to make [my mother] legitimate" to participate in this homeplace.⁵²

⁵⁰ As hooks tells us, "Black women have resisted white supremacist domination by working to establish homeplace. It does not matter that sexism assigned them this role. It is more important that they took this conventional role and expanded it to include caring for one another" (385).

⁵¹ The timid kinship budding between my mother and my auntie was a beginning of healing for the both of them – healing from the racist realities of the world and the social limitations they perceived from these messages. Through the exchange of gossip, through the necessity of providing me care, they "recognized the subversive value of homeplace" to build a new kind of family, a new "looking out for each other," connection. For my mother it was also a lifeline into an entirely new form of daughtering that she would then attempt to pass to me, facilitated by these learnings.

⁵² Donna Kate Rushin, "The Bridge Poem," initially published in *This Bridge Called My Back*, edited by Gloria Anzaldua and Cherrie Moraga. In the poem, Rushin laments the role of being a bridge and having to explain her existence (and everyone else's existence) to them. Describing her role as "translating," she proceeds in the poem to reject this role to help others discover their worth and connections to the world. Instead she asserts her own humanity and the importance of mediating her emotional responses to the world. By invoking "The Bridge Poem" here, I mean to both reflect on Rushin's frustrations of feeling that she does not have access to her own sense of self and humanity, which means that others do not see it other, using her as a pawn for their own, but also, I mean to consider ways to reframe that role as one of care/work which, intentionally chosen, can instill a sense of connection, belonging, and lineage.

But also, if I could stay quiet, I'd learn the currency of connection. I'd learn how to care for your children, or least, how people would analyze your visible care-giving of your children. I knew my family had lots of children, and even young as I was, as the oldest daughter, I was also care-giver. I was also in a place to be judged.

A good daughter was listening but not listening. Listening enough to learn how to act and speak around the people your people didn't like. Not listening enough to tell other people your people's business. Whether said so or not, a good daughter knew everything, every rule of the homeplace space. And braiding time/ kitchen time/ soap opera time/ weeding time/ shopping time/ cleaning time/ babysitting time/ cooking time was all learning time. A good daughter was always student.

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Tithes to Black Feminist Literature

Much of my personal understanding and theoretical development of the concept of daughterhood comes from being an avid reader of Black feminist literature. As a young reader, I searched for belonging, which I described in a blog post for *Book Riot*:

I was searching for some kinky-haired kid who felt as ‘other’ as I did. My mother, fresh from college, handed me books that she hoped would help me feel more connected to my black heritage, from Mildred Taylor to Maya Angelou. ...I wanted to know it was okay to question. I wanted to read about the tension between cultures and watch a character navigate the gray spaces between the parts of their identity. I wanted to see how they dealt with the question “what are you” over and over again (Moore, “Building A Better Canon”).

Perhaps throughout my entire academic journey, and certainly my personal reading journey, I have worked to build my own canon of literature that explored the tensions of identity that I felt myself stuck between. Much like Farah Jasmine Griffin describes in genre-defying, autobiographical literary history text, “under the careful guidance of my mother, I lost myself in the pages and sounds my father left behind. This was my inheritance, my legacy. Little did I know, it would also become my life’s work” (6). I sought stories that stretched my imagination of self: both situated in the reality of traditions of world like mine, but also where oldest daughters used all they knew to also be inventors and adventurers. Where Black and Black-biracial girls were the intellectuals and prize-winners. Where kids like me were not weighted by anxiety, chores, and heavy expectations. And also, in my secret reading spaces, (from childhood reading under the covers, to my student/professional/adult self sneaking fiction behind textbooks), where these characters called out what was wrong, said the hardest truths, stood up for justice, and sparked a change in their worlds. In addition to the strong cultural location in the black communities I grew up in, I was also raised by Black feminist literature, which deeply informs my academic positionality. This strong current of influence is part of what lead me back to academia when I experienced teaching burnout – back to the reference of bell hooks and searching for theory that would make a way forward possible. As a part of this influence, which is what connects me to the language of daughterhood, is the sense of legacy. In her exploration of becoming a poet, Remica Bingham-Risher describes this feeling and sense of duty: “when asked during an interview about the implications of history, culture, and how I think of success, I explained, ‘I am asking myself and my poems each day, what do we have to live up to?’” (Bingham-Risher, *Soul Culture*). As I developed this theory of daughterhood from the academic lens, I knew from not only my training as a writer, but my self-taught experience as reader, that the most critical and complex social analysis would be found in the very books I prized on my personal shelves.

In this chapter, I will share some of the core Black feminist titles I want to “pay tithes” to for not only grounding my understanding of Black daughterhood, but also for creating a visionary landscape for visionary Black daughters that allowed me to see a way forward in both my personal and professional life. These titles span a few genres, including fiction, poetry, and memoir – particularly memoir that I would categorize as autotheoretical works. The texts that I have chosen provide insight to the elements of

daughtering I have outlined in the previous chapter, often situated in coming of age narratives, and the tensions of the role of daughter. I have also worked to pair classic works with contemporary counterparts in parts of this discussion, with the intention of highlighting parallels and generational divides in identity development and how it is shaped by the intersecting factors of family, community, social politics and more. This analysis seeks to zoom in on key messages from parents, family figures, community members, and society to find initial moments of the definition and internalization of what “daughter” means and to interrogate moments where these writers and/or their characters stand at the edges of those definitions to either transgress them or assert power within them to change the possibilities ascribed to them and their communities. To give insight to this approach, I turn back to Farah Jasmine Griffin’s and her article “That the Mothers May Soar and the Daughters May Know Their Names: A Retrospective of Black Feminist Literary Criticism,” in which Griffin lifts up the voices of Carol Boyce Davies who describes Black feminist criticism as “a subversion and counter-articulation to the terms of both Black and feminist criticism,” and “should be read as a series of boundary crossings and not as fixed...category of writing” (494). And while Griffin explains that Davies finds limitations in Black feminist criticism’s “tentativeness” and geographically broad consciousness, Griffin turns to the work of Kevin Quashie, who emphasizes the transgressive-ness of this work. She summarizes Quashie’s argument that Black feminists have always known, “that race and gender identities have always been socially constructed, that black feminists’ project is one of developing an alternative subjectivity to the one that has been imposed on them in order to challenge and dismantle the ideological structures that undergird their oppression” (495). The texts shared in this chapter do the work of revealing what is imposed upon Black daughters, sometimes with the tentativeness of telling cultural secrets, and other times with the boldness of shouting for freedom. Each help to understand the tension space between secret-keeping and storytelling, between supplanting and sustaining, where one has the opportunity to take hold of her own agency and walk forward in the spirit of self-preservation.

In the introduction to the anthology *Double Stitch: Black Women Write about Mothers and Daughters*, co-editor Johnetta Cole explains that so little has been written about Black mother-daughter relationships that insights about this dynamic and about daughterhood are often hinted at or implied – there for those who have the cultural knowledge to read between the lines if they are looking for it. I interpret the reason for this is both the complexity of describing these relationships and the limitation of publishing options available to most Black women writers, (this anthology was published in 1991, although this issue still persists). Cole makes a point to highlight that the range of experiences shared is diverse based on variable such as class and age, but they share a connectedness in how they are “shaped by the commonality of Blackness in a White world...Black mothers and daughters share a collective history” (xiii). Part of this commonality, which is thematically tied to hooks’s memoir and daughtering identity, is the learned behavior of, reckoning with and/or active rejection of sexism. Of special interest to this work is Cole’s comment on “women who care for our young and fill in for mothers who cannot be there. This means that many young African-American girls have multiple modes of ‘mother’” (xv). Daughters are supplanters, stepping in on behalf of

their mothers, care-taking for their siblings, cousins and neighbors while the adults balance long work hours. It is in the supplanter role that daughters are conditioned for the kind of care-taking that allows them to be flexible and adapt to different circumstances, as they sort out how to parent on their own. This mode of existence, of mothering others before they themselves are cared for, is one that feeds the inclination towards putting others before themselves in the workplace and through professional service. It is this training, (perhaps labeled as the parentified child in psychology), that makes them so skillful at reading people, meeting needs, and providing support, whether they are doing this of their own choice or by expectation.

The anthology is organized into several sections that represent specific themes around mothering and daughtering, such as “Piecing Blocks: Identities,” “Stitching Memories: Herstories,” and “Fraying Edges: Tensions.” The inclusion of multi-genre works from poetry to academic essays makes this an essential introduction to the topic. I will highlight a few selections that have an impact on how I read other texts for this research. Each of the included texts highlight the complexities of these relationships, but ultimately honor the sense of purpose and legacy that comes with Black daughterhood. This daughtering identity is not only tied to singular relationships, but “

within African-American communities, this psychic bond frequently transcends the personal relationship between a mother and her daughter. A nurturing female community of grandmothers, aunts, and friends often encircles their ‘daughters’ in order to ensure some familiarity in their journey into a world characterized by uncertainty or even hostility (Guy-Sheftall 61-62).

This encirclement, this cultural location, bond and training, is what keeps so many tied to the title and care/work of daughter despite difficult familial relationships.

The first of these is “Dear Mama,” written by Sonia Sanchez, a meditative reflection of the impact of Sanchez’s grandmother’s legacy on her despite her death early in her life. Sanchez recalls the gathering of women on Saturday mornings in their home and as she hid from folks behind the sofa, still doing the work of observing and learning how to be. Sanchez tells us, “history began once again. I received it and let it circulate in my blood. I learned on those Saturday afternoons about women rooted in themselves, raising themselves in dark America, discharging their pain without ever stopping. ... And I crept into my eyes. Alone with my daydreams of being woman. Adult. Powerful. Loving. Like them” (24-25). Sanchez witnesses stories of trauma and abuse, but primarily internalizes the resilience of the women in her community, understanding that the communal care (even by the witness of each other’s stories), is the core of this ability to keep going.

Patricia Hill Collins gives a social learning theory perspective on such experiences in her include essay, “The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture and Black Mother-Daughter Relationships.” She argues that while Black mothers are often portrayed as over-protective, they raise self-reliant daughters and socialize them to be independent. This can be observed in “Black women’s autobiographies and fiction...revealing the multiple strategies Black mother employ in preparing their daughters for the demands of being Black women in oppressive conditions” (55). This effort creates an emotional intensity in the relationships between mothers and daughters, particularly a pressure on daughters to recognize and honor that care. Collins explains,

“for daughter, growing up means developing a better understanding that offering physical care and protection is an act of maternal love” (56). Because this grown-up kind of care is shown beyond the dyad of the mother-daughter and is also supported by their larger community of “othermothers” and friends, care/work becomes a default approach of relationship building and gaining favor.

In *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood*, bell hooks describes her young self as “always standing in the background listening” (21). *Bone Black* is a studying of daughterhood, hooks as a budding writer and creative whose perspective, perception and sensitivity create conflict for her assimilation into her family and community life in the rural South. She is specific to label this work as “not an ordinary tale. It is the story of a girlhood rebellion, of my struggle to create self and identity distinct from and yet inclusive of the world around me” (xi). This work is an invention of self, recognizing how she navigated to the role of writer from and through her other cultural teachings of woman, daughter, and Black. In vignettes, hooks switches between first person and third person as she observes the cultural roles of men and women, and the embedded messages of worth/worthlessness of women. A voracious reader primarily for the method of escape of a reality that did not make sense to her, hooks was regarded by family and community as highly intelligent. Since this led to asking questions and challenging authority figures, this intelligence and “book knowledge” was problematized and she learned that the best methods of survival were silence and secret-keeping.

In the scenes that hooks most explicitly describes her daughterhood – including the limits of what power she believes she holds in the moment – she is bearing witness to domestic abuse from her father to her mother. She loves her mother unconditionally, exalts her power and influence in her life, but in these difficult moments she examines how deeply embedded patriarchy and violence is in the everyday of her world – how it is insistent upon breaking down any power that women have. About an argument that is overheard, hooks writes, “they catch his angry words in their hands like lightning bugs-- store them in a jar to sort out later... she thinks of all the nights she lies awake in her bed hearing the woman's voice, her mother's voice, hearing his voice. She wonders if it is then that he is telling her everything – warning her” (146). A few things are important about this quote, starting with the example of the third person (both singular and plural) used in the chapter. When she is bearing witness to violence against herself, her intellect, or cherished people in her life, hooks moves to this disembodied point of view, perhaps to create a distance from the sharpness of the memory. In a way that also helps us define Black feminist autotheory, hooks expands the notion of narrator in the memoir space to use her lived experience to show us an origin story that shapes her ontology. From this space, she the writer and we the audience can make theory that acknowledges the pain of the moment, sees the universality, and names the systemic problem. She creates a separate character that she can watch and critique in the role of witness not actor, particularly when the writer-scholar-reflector bell hooks wants so desperately for there to have been the opportunity to act or disrupt. Instead, she tells us an important initial act of daughterhood, the secret-keeping, by holding her father's angry words like lightning bugs – buzzing around her in mind, light bulbs of realization of her mother's place, eventually her place, in this family unit and community. She knows she is learning, that this is

knowledge she will have to piece out and process later, on her own, mining the words exchanged for a deeper understanding of gender roles, relationship roles and the dynamics of power. Her mind can not be at ease because she is positioned as the decoder. She understands the circulation of these voices in her head to be the process of knowing. She analyzes how the lesson can offer her the space to not be in the same position, to be defined by her father's and community's expectation of women. There is a warning to be decoded and kept close about the preservation of her own humanity – the same humanity she watches get stripped from her mother over and over again.

In the next vignette, as hooks watches her mother mentally and emotionally unfurl herself from defensive mode after experiencing abuse, she wonders what her mother's next move is, feeling the injustice and unacceptability of the situation on behalf of her mother. But again, rather than a moment of action, hooks guides us into the third person, asking us to sit in the tension of witness, writing, "the daughter is silent, staring into the woman's eyes. She is looking for the bright lights the care and adoration she has shown the man. The eyes are dark with grief, swollen. She feels that a fire inside the woman is dying out, that she is cold. She takes her hand, ready to go with her" (150). In her daughtering, hooks stays in the role of observer and secret keeper, positioning herself to be as supportive as she can be (in this case, the bearing witness, and later, the truth telling)⁵³. The tension of the moment, of her mother's predicament teaches her and the reader that secret keeping is beyond just social survival; it also literal survival. Both her and her mother experience fear of punishment or banishment from both their community and home spaces if they bring light to the situation. However, from her distanced perspective as writer and theorist, she offers the window of hope and change in her own identity formation, reclamation of her power, and use of her knowledge. She learns that she might not be able to save her mother, but she can dream for her. The moment of being "ready to go with her" is more than just the thought of leaving their home or leaving her father, but also a spiritual tie to being her mother's daughter, to finding a way to either not let her mother's flame go out, or to carry that flame for her. Through the process of writing this book, even in the fractured ways she had to approach it to get to the heart of the trauma, hooks fulfills the vision she expresses, going with her mother towards the truth.

In *Remembered Rapture: A Writer at Work*, hooks reflects on the process of writing *Bone Black*: and where this writing would lead her, particularly in the mode of self-discovery, self-care, and power:

My assumption was just that I would write the story of my life and that it would unfold on the page in a conventional documentary fashion. Yet when I began to write, having made no conscious decisions about style or content, the writing that emerged was not the conventional autobiographical format. The style was lyrical, poetic, and abstract. It was not the straightforward linear narrative that

⁵³ This moment also brings to mind the daughtering of Lucille Clifton, as described in the poem "fury," in which Clifton bears witness to her mother being forced to burn her writing. After describing the act of her mother throwing the pages into the fire, Clifton writes: "she will never recover./ remember. There is nothing/ you will not bear/ for this woman's sake." In this moment, Clifton visions herself as a poet she will become, knowing that in her adulthood, she can become the storyteller. She holds this moment as a core motivator to move through the tension of other roles ascribed to her.

characterized my previous nonfiction work period the writing was different from anything I had imagined, but I liked it. For what appeared on the page were words that evoked the spirit of the world I grew up in and that spirit unfolding in its own manner and fashion moved me. A gentle, tender intimacy was invoked in the words, I felt it (89).

I would like to argue that hooks's gentle, tender intimacy here is illustrative of the reconciliation of both her daughtering-self, (letting go of all the internalized messages of childhood and the expectations of her early adulthood, even as a scholar), and her sense of legacy, (both the internal promise to her mother and the legacies of black women writing she situates her work in). It is important to note that hooks wrote and published this book in the midst of her other academic-leaning works; her direct style of writing already positioning her for critique among her peers. In the legacy of other Black feminist writers and in the legacy of daughtering, hooks moves through and beyond the tension space of secret-keeping and finds a softer and truer vision of herself in this work.

Following the legacy of bell hooks's work, Kendra Allen's *Fruit Punch* introduces us to her complicated family life that, while buoyed by love, is punctuated by violence and intensity. This memoir is a coming of age that sees around and through the motions of adulthood by her parents and extended family. Like hooks, as she tunes into the messages from others about what it means to be a girl and a woman, she actively questions why she is expected to assimilate and rejects these messages. Allen, firmly located in a millennial identity, has less personal, cultural, and societal navigation to do in order to access the questioning space or the tension space of her daughtering identity.

Allen learns the performance of daughter while also parenting herself. She supplants her parents nurture and care. As she grows up, she builds an internal resistance to the misdirected attempts of parenting from her mother and father, while also often trapped in the physical reality of the dance between fight/flight, of the body's tired fold of trauma. Through her writing, Allen does the work of recognizing her worth and creates the space for her internal world to exist and flourish. Like hooks's use of shifting point of view, Allen crafts a distance between herself and her mother to highlight the ways she has to parent herself. This includes using the abbreviation L.A. for her mother's name (instead of any parental signifier like "mom") and providing omniscient-like reflections on her parents' actions towards each other and her.⁵⁴ Early in the book, she does this to situate L.A.'s perspective on childrearing – setting the context for how L.A. moves as a parent and her observer perspective clicked in even as a child. She writes,

Disobedient is L.A.'s favorite word to define children. She even write it on a piece of construction paper and pin it up on the living room wall with the rest of

⁵⁴ This narrative choice by Allen is echoed in the novel *Break this House* by Candice Iloh. The novel examines layers of familial pain through the perspective of a young woman named Yaminah, who after creating a life of distance from her mother's family, finds out about her mother's death from a Facebook message. As she attends a family reunion, she reckons with daughterhood and the unveiling of secrets that don't match her own, opening the space for storytelling. Iloh writes, "I was the one who ain't nobody think can handle the truth...I used to think Pop and Sandra knew everything" (39). The detail of calling her mother by her first name, a symbol of the distance and Yaminah's supplanting of the role for herself and caretaker for her father, posits her directly in the tension of daughtering.

the words I'm learning to spell like *like, space, and leave*. Sometimes she even make me use the words in a sentence; like if she loses something in our space, she gone say somebody stole it and if they don't confess right now they gotta leave" (xv).

Any care/work that L.A. does for Allen is filled with sharp edges that ask Allen to be perfect and also know the right answers already from observation, rather than instruction/parenting. Allen expresses the tension of her stuck-ness in these unsupported, yet ascribed daughtering roles with outward tension and resistance. She examines the stasis of anger. Allen writes, "how everything feels the same every emotion is oddly similar except for the anger. That the anger is the only part of myself that feels real and sustainable. The only part of myself that's lasted because I've settled for it." Anger is Allen's way of moving from secret-keeping to storytelling, propelling her narrative. The emotional distance she creates makes space for her survival, focused on her physical safety and well-being, as well as supplanting other care-taking. However, even this method of survival is criticized by her mother and weaponized against her. Allen tells us:

"LA says I act like this because I got a takeover spirit and got a problem with organizing and orchestrating how everybody gotta spend they time in my presence. That I can't handle somebody not liking what I love without shutting down. How it makes me think something is wrong with myself. That I spend too much time – specifically – tryna tell her what I don't wanna do when she the parent" (xiv).

In my interview with Kendra Allen⁵⁵, she shared that in her writing process, she was obsessed with how she had been mothered and what gaps that revealed about her identity as a daughter. She described that as she was able to access the storytelling space, she found herself processing emotional spaces that she could not comprehend as she had experienced them and her writing process helped her understand how it felt in her body. She found herself focused more on feeling rather than constructing a plot, and letting it happen in short bursts, similar to the experience of memory.

Allen shared that the phrase "takeover spirit" was weaponized by her mother whenever she questioned something, (connecting to the intellectual shaming hooks describes in *Bone Black*). Resonating with the theory of daughtering, Allen shared that daughtering can relate to a sense of martyrdom, especially when we watch our mothers shift into their own daughtering roles. Residual anger occurs, as she describes in the above quote, when the martyring does not work; it feel terrifying. She said, "it scared me out of my personality, but also forced me to be brave when I was often terrified. People called me brave, but I just had to do things." In our training as daughters, Allen argued, we believe it is our job to check on everyone; we are shamed into caretaking toles, even if its killing us. Through her therapy and healing process, she realizes now that thinking we can save people is arrogant, moving from a supplanter mindset to a more sustaining point of view. She realized, "I can't be the daughter who is also the mother, the son, the husband, the everything." Daughters are taught to coddle adults, she reminds me, and none of these relationships are as loving as we think they are. Instead, she watched her

⁵⁵ Interviewed conducted via Zoom in April 2023 after I conducted Allen about this research and the influence of her work.

mother's refusal to acknowledge the way these roles can be a problem and still works on healing a formerly co-dependent relationship that they formed in adulthood as her mother finally recognized the trauma through Allen's work. To get to that place, to exploring the truth of ourselves and the women who enable daughtering as this system, Allen explained, "we have to leave too many women behind because they haven't imagined themselves behind these roles yet."

That word from Kendra Allen brings me back to fiction, and to central characters of classic novel, *Sula* by Toni Morrison. The examination of female friendship and the differing aspects of womanhood between Sula Peace and Nel Wright is perhaps best remembered by the adulterous betrayal at the novel's climax. Depending on the read of the novel, and the positionality of the critic, Sula's movement into and through her womanhood may be damning, but freeing in the way she imagines herself beyond the home. From the lens of daughtering, Morrison provides us the context for this inevitable interaction by showing us how each character is socialized into their daughterhood.

Nel, raised in a more traditional, conservative way, is introduced to us as a child boarding a train with her mother, during which her mother leads them through the "white" car to access the "colored" car. When they are stopped by the conductor, Nel's mother begins to move along, but turns to smile at them, a pained smile that shoed "no change in the expression of the eyes, but a hard wetness that veiled them as they looked at the stretch of her mother's foolish smile" (22). From that moment, Nel craves an invisibility, some way to escape the awkward force of respectability politics that will govern her behavior. From that moment, Nel takes on the identity of secret-keeper/observer and "resolves to be on guard, always. She wanted to make certain no man ever looked at her that way" [the way the conductor looked at her mother] (22). Nel internalizes, quiets herself and moves through situations without much fuss, daughtering just as her mother wishes, since Helene "enjoyed manipulating her daughter" (18). This is complicated by her mother's own rejection of daughtering, layered on top of her expectation for Nel to be the perfect daughter. Wanting to create distance between herself and the creole heritage, language and mannerism of her family, Helene corrects Nel's interactions with her family. When she is on her own, Nel sees the shape of the tension she is caught in: "'I'm me,' she whispered. 'Me.' Nel didn't know what she meant, but on the other hand she knew exactly what she meant. 'I'm me. I'm not their daughter. I'm not Nel. I'm me. Me'" (27). Morrison lets us see Nel absorb the power of the word me – the possibilities of the reclamation of self – but, as Kendra Allen shared above, lacks the imagination to claim this power in her current circumstances.

The one place that hold this potential for activating Nel is Sula's house, a place that she feels a different level of comfortability because of its lack of rigidity. The women of the Peace household have had to cultivate that imagination to create a survival for themselves that is personally fulfilling. And while Nel and the readers can perceive that freedom and agency with which Sula's grandmother and mother carry themselves, there remains a gap in direct messages about daughtering, with the expectation that Sula will observe, secret-keep and stay out of the way. Sula carves her own distanced daughtering spurred by secret-keeping her mother's sexual freedoms and observing the uninhibited joy of being unattached to others.

Moving back to creative non-fiction, Deborah D.E.E.P Mouton's *Black Chameleon: Memory Womanhood, and Myth*, brings vision to a daughterhood that is nurtured by messages similar to Nel, but grows into the agency of Sula. Mouton explains how her daughterhood identity, (and ability to access its visionary capabilities), is also connected to her father: "we are our father's daughters too. And for every inch our mothers give us insight, our fathers gift us every harvest of speech. ... my father taught me how to speak in story. I mastered it late at night, in the few stolen moments I had between his arrival from work and my drifting off to sleep" (79). While Mouton receives ample care from her mother, this storytelling, and the freedom she finds within it, is tied to the nature of her connection to her father and how inherent stories are to his identity. Stories and storytelling is a way she resists having to make herself feel small, which is what she experiences in school spaces (98), because of the oppressive atmosphere of the classroom. To be explored more in the conclusion, Mouton leans into myth-making as her way to honor her daughterhood identity that does not come at the expense of her mental health.

The last title I want to add to as a core text that defines daughterhood for this research is Hafizah Augustus Geter's memoir *The Black Period: On Personhood, Race and Origin*. Like Mouton, Geter also leans into myth-making, examining the effect of the myths of American society and how her family adapts to them. Geter questions what it means to be the queer Black daughter of an artist, growing up surrounded by extended southern U.S. and Nigerian family. From the first page of her book, she describes herself as "want[ing] to be memory, protector, and the protector of memories" (xxii). Geter is firmly situated in her observational role and "wanting to be an accurate witness. There was as much to guard as there was to see (xxii). She understood her father's art as correction to the incorrect myths of America and the preservation of truth to be part of her family's legacy. Despite the truth-telling in art, Geter's family was incredibly private, particularly to anyone outside of their close Muslim community. She realizes her role and learned behavior of secret-keeping, wondering if her parents "were simply doing what all Black people reflexively do in a world as violent to us as America: concocting a spell of protection," but does not shy away from asking "what are we hiding? What are we afraid or ashamed of" (49). Despite not having direct answers to these questions, Geter continued to collect evidence from the world around her; these observation and secret keeping skills made her stand out in school, like Mouton and hooks. Geter explains:

Now I can understand that voracious reading as a manifestation of a child desperate to fit in to and understand her world. And if I couldn't fit in, at the very least I wanted to recognize white America before white America could recognize itself. Definitely before it could recognize me. ...I was careful to never let on to anyone how closely I was watching. I was a girl determined to never get got (68).

As all the other daughters of this lit review, Geter understood and worked to develop the skills she knew would be essential to her survival and independence, while also supporting her role in her extended family and community.

Reflecting on each of the above works, I want to take space to acknowledge their intentional focus on Black mother and Black daughters, which is a key focus of my work and definition of daughtering, but not its whole vision. From my own positionality as a Black biracial woman and daughter, the scope of this definition is also meant to include the experience of Black biracial women, focused on those raised in Black communities or with a Black personal-cultural location. While there is a lot of overlap in these experiences, there are some differences of note, especially connected to a sense of belonging and acceptance. This questioning is reflected on in some of the participant interviews and also canonized in several fiction texts including Danzy Senna's *Caucasia*, and Heidi Durrow's *The Girl Who Fell From the Sky*. In autobiography, we find a layered and isolated sense of identity-building, such as in Natasha Trethewey's *Memorial Drive: A Daughter's Memoir*, which details her relationship to her late mother. Reflecting on a picture her mother posed her for, Trethewey imagines that her mother knew she "would ultimately be alone in the journey towards an understanding of self, my place in the world, yet carrying the invisible burdens of history, borne on the back of metaphor. ...my mother wanted only that I not be destroyed by it" (42). Similarly to Rebecca Walker's reflections in *Black White and Jewish*⁵⁶ Trethewey sees herself as a person not just *for* herself, but also as a symbol. In her daughterhood, she must balance the complexities of two legacies and the secrets between them, (including the assumptions about the union of her parents and the violent history built into the realities and assumptions of mixed race children's existence).

Additionally, another theme in many Black biracial autobiographies and essay collections is the shifting of the relationship with their non-Black parent as they claim and find comfortability in their Blackness. Although it was her white mother who made sure she was surrounded by Black aesthetics and culture, in *Don't Let it Get You Down*, Savala Nolan shares, "as I've become more individuated from my mother and more at home in my Blackness, race separates us more concretely than it used to. ...the culture's general impulse towards segregation wants to keep my body and my mom's body apart. In a way, it doesn't want us to be mother and daughter" (55). As a Black biracial daughter in academic spaces, the stepping away from my white mother was an intellectual movement that became clear my studies of Black feminist writers and scholars who could articulate that identity-make, self-assurance, and resilience I needed to develop to not die in academia.

⁵⁶ Walker writes, "I'm the one in the Langston Hughes poem with the white daddy and the black mama who doesn't know where she'll rest her head when she's dead: the colored buryin' ground behind the chapel or the white man's cemetery behind gates on the hill" (13). Later reflecting on her mother and father's relationship, she claims, "I am a Movement child" (24).

Altar Call: Four Case Studies

Trained in oral history as method, it was always my intention with the interviews to share them more as narrative than as sound bite; to preserve the authentic voices of the participants and use these works as a catalyst to larger storytelling projects.⁵⁷ In the following section, I have chosen four of my interviews to highlight in this way, sharing longer responses that activated my understanding of daughtering, and pushed towards the act of visioning its power. Structurally, I have started each case study with a personal letter to the interviewee, two of which I had personal relationships prior to the research and two I met through the process. These letters are meant to provide context to the connection formed during this research and the sisterhood found in daughtering. The letters do the signifying of autotheory as method, as Black women sharing of knowledge as theoretical knowledge, as autobiography as the “center the creativity and spirituality of Black women’s healing” (Botts-Ward). Additionally, making space for “a narrative voice allows for the acceptance and emotion in knowledge acquisition and counterclaims. An ethics of care and empathy are important in qualitative inquiry and in the assessment of the validity of an exposition... scholars who embraced the tenets of black feminism have also embraced this intellectual challenge of keeping a strong presence of emotional investment visible” (Evans Winters 23). After the letters, I share a brief note about the interview process and key words or themes that were present in their narratives. As I share their narratives, I use white space to delineate a break or shift in topic or text that was edited out between the core moments of their narratives. My own additions for clarity are present in brackets []. As I wanted the narratives to be as undisturbed as possible, I have moved my comments and analysis into the footnotes as a way to continue my practice of autotheory as method and to be in dialogue with the participants. This form helps me to honor the epistemology and languaging of each participant, to highlight, “those things about living that cannot be quantified nor calculated. Only elucidated with words. Only exposed through the truths of illusive language. Poetics release me from the hold of academic rigidity” (Botts-Ward).

In the Black church tradition that initially trained me as daughter, the altar call is a regular part of service which signals the close of the pastor’s message and the invitation to dedicate your life to god and the day’s message, (most often through sharing testimony, asking for a specific prayer request, or stating the intention to get baptized). It starts in song, lead by the pastor or a choir lead – usually a short, melodic, repetitive phrase that gives the intention of the altar (for example, “there’s a need of prayer/ some one is standing in the need of prayer⁵⁸,” or “give yourself over to the lord”). As the song carries on in the background, the pastor will begin an extended prayer, focused on the needs of the congregation, the church itself, for the souls of the extended community. This prayer is the most animated for the service, a prayer for the regular parts of living, for the

⁵⁷ “Our truths must be validated from within, with less concern for how outsiders legitimate or receive and perceive our assertions. Black women’s lived experiences, and reflections of these socially constructed experiences, are legitimate subjects of research and analysis” (Evans Winters 23).

⁵⁸ See the example of the pattern of song from Messiah Baptist Church’s “Altar Call and Prayer:” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LeeOkD52pn4&t=133s>

everyday resilience our community nurtures, for the growth of faith for the trials beyond our understanding. Pastors claim salvation, claim mercy, claim worthiness of the servants of the congregation. They pray for the vision to see, and bring into action, miracles. The physical practice of the altar call differs, but in the tradition from which I am from, it includes moving into the aisles to be closer to receive this prayer, and the call from the pastor to make your way to the front of the pews to share your testimony.

I use the metaphor of the altar call to signal the gathering at the feet of these women to hear and learn and vest in them the deepening of our understanding of daughtering and its inextricable influence in our professional interactions. I use the altar call to signal the rootedness of affirmation, to reach for healing, to conjure the rememory⁵⁹ of our powerful daughterhood and to vision the revolutionary potential of intentional care/work for ourselves and others.

An Altar Call

From Jamila Woods, "Sun Ra"

My wings are greater than walls
My wings are greater
My wings are greater than walls
My wings are greater
My wings are greater than walls
My wings are greater
My wings are greater than walls

Come with me, get this air
Our heaven could be right here
(My wings are greater)
Come with me, get this air
Our heaven could be right here
(My wings are greater than walls)

For those of us standing at the edges of identity, standing on the outside of institutional belonging, yet standing firm in our sense of where we come from, an offering from Audre Lorde. In "House of Yemanja," she writes: "my mother had two faces/ and a broken pot/ where she hid out a perfect daughter/ who was not me." In this poem, Lorde summons Yemanja for us, "goddess who is the mother of the other deities in the Yoruba tradition...this "mother" [character] who has a material, conscious, and subconscious role in the subjectivity of this imperfect daughter" (Gumbs 215). Gumbs

⁵⁹ From Toni Morrison's "The Site of Memory", "For me- a writer in the last quarter of the twentieth century, not much more than a hundred years after Emancipation, a writer who is black and a woman- the exercise is very different. My job becomes how to rip that veil drawn over 'proceedings too terrible to relate.' The exercise is also critical for any person who is black, or who belongs to any marginalized category, for, historically, we were seldom invited to participate in the discourse even when we were its topic. Moving that veil aside requires, therefore, certain things. First of all, I must trust my own recollections. I must also depend on the recollections of others.

teaches us that through this poem the meaning of mother and daughter are “in production” and can be dreamed by us. As we dream forward into our daughtering, let us remember the ways we have been trained to hold ourselves steady. In the intro to *Black Liturgies*, Cole Arthur Riley leads us in mediation around calling, asking:

as we make sense of our callings, may we do so with an inflicting awareness of the exterior world ...so we would understand our vocation in relationship to those around us and their needs. Protect those who sense service and helping others as a primary call on their lives, that they would retain their empathy without allowing it to swallow them whole. May we learn to care for ourselves with equal gravity to which we care for those in our midst” (Riley 53).

INHALE: I need more than me.

EXHALE: We get free together (Riley 71).

Altar Call: Arielle
Boundaries, but Grief of No Bounds

Dear Arielle,

We have sat together at too many funerals already. Two people, to be exact, but we don't need any more to feel the impact of the Black women on the communities they inhabited. And at one of these services, I asked you about your Black community, asking who still existed in your life that connected you to the practices and ideas and cultural nods that we saw happening between people in these spaces. And you said *me*, and I was grateful, because for me, it is you too. I could not have sat at either of these funerals without you there – two Black women who were also in academia, two Black women though far apart in age, both gone before their time. Two Black women sent off with services seeped in traditions we knew from childhood, ones that we somewhat abandoned because neither of us fit neatly into what those communities wanted us to be. Us too queer, too rejective of binaries, too anti-patriarchy, too radical. And/ but/ yet we remember how to navigate those spaces, what is expected of us, how to blend in, unlike the rest of our teacher-writing group.

Grief marionettes the body...you lose yourself.⁶⁰ As we sat in these funerals, we felt the rhythms together, hummed things we remembered. We shook our head at things we have escaped, found chuckles in the structures of sermons. We know and could feel the sense of spirit in those rooms. Not a spirit there for me or you to carry with us like some of our kin do, but one that recognizes them and recognizes us enough in relation to them that it still pulled us in the ways we need to pulled to sway, to clap on time, to anticipate the next beat. We whispered behind paper fans, held tissues folded around our fingers, just like one of the aunties I always imagined myself as when I was young. The recognition of these habits, rituals, music, and movement between us opened up a new possibility of grief in me – a grief that sat alongside the mourning of these women and even the mourning of my loss of faith and separation from Black church communities.

This grief was here not here to help me survive, but instead, to keep me alive. This grief told me it was not survival because mourning was necessary; this grief told me parts of me had already died in this work. The little church girl who knew how to fold her hands and cross her legs and shut her mouth was gone. The young kid who had to do everything better than everyone else to prove her self-worth was gone. The teenager who did mental gymnastics to fit herself into the molds presented to her was gone. The early professional afraid to call out injustice was gone. I had to look at these pieces left and arrange them, I had to see if I recognized any of them. I held them up to you and asked, is this familiar? You saw some of them. As I started to be able to name it, you also recognized that what lasted was Daughter – a lineage carved into my bones (and perhaps yours, and perhaps all the women of this project in their own ways). We saw that I have not survived, as some of me has died. And/ but/ yet what is alive in me sought the threads of communion that are life-giving in you, my closest contemporary in thought and cultural and writing and community.

⁶⁰ These are the words of Dr. Ashaki Jackson, reflecting on the theme of grief in her poetry in an interview with Prairie Schooner.

In the last few years, in the years of this grief baring itself, and especially in the grief of writing grief, you have sat with me in ways our other colleagues cannot. You've heard and held the fragmentation, because you've seen what these spaces do to our minds – that in the fracturing of our selves to fit into academic spaces we enter a liminal space, an in-between of not being who we once were and not being who we are expected to be. In the trauma of our education, we have both learned that “to be healed, we must be dismembered, pulled apart,” but that there is not a neat way to assemble the pieces again (Anzaldua 29). You have watched me stand above the puzzle, more patience than I can often muster. You know this has been a long, long time for me because it has also been a long, long time for you.

Ashaki Jackson teaches us about communal grief, that we build worlds with each other to evade loneliness, to recognize ritual in each other, to engage in practice with one another. She tells us:

I feel that body has a demonstrative vernacular—all the triggers and switches you haven't yet logged in yourself are activated in loss. I'm learning this more and more about myself. The eye twitches. The mind brings you gifts. The stomach seizes. The hands hold ghosts. The body calls out and, sometimes, receives a response from others. Even the ways that we simply do not seem ourselves because the body is mourning draws others' attentions, company or rescue” (“‘You Will Lose Yourself:’ The Rituals of Grief in the Poetry of Ashaki M. Jackson”).

Do you remember at both of these services, we noticed how people touched each other, and we compared notes on what these touches meant? The grabbing of forearm to steady each other, the double hand handshake, the hand gently placed above the elbow to move along. Seated, between us, the bumping of shoulders, the nudge of ribs, the stitching of brows, the bowing of heads. Did you see that? Can we laugh a moment? Can you feel that heavy? Thank you for being in company with me. This company has kept me from dying.

I was thinking about you making the move from part-time teacher to full-time – an inevitability in my mind because of your brilliance as an educator. I was thinking about mentoring folks I don't know and the grief I've experienced watching them get hurt in the same ways I've gotten hurt. And then I remember that its from you I learned how to assert boundaries. How to get closer to the truth as I tell stories. Which doesn't mean that there is not still going to be so much muck for you to sort through, so much more ask of your time and effort and care/work when you take this role.

What are we willing to give up of ourselves to gain stability?⁶¹ What is it to be stable. I wish you were there when I was catching up with an undergrad student who told me that during the winter break she was learning financial literacy, had started a CD—all, she says, in hopes of social mobility. Something about the way she said it plain shocked me. Not to “save money for the future” or “finish the degree” or anything vague in between. This student got straight to the point, cushioning it only by saying, “but it is something that's hard to achieve in this economy.” We have talked about leaving academia, about not giving the best of ourselves, our best ideas, to institutions that don't

⁶¹ Alexis Pauline Gumbs, “The Shape of my Impact,” *Feminist Wire*

care about us. Remember all my loud talk about leaving? All that fire coming from my mouth, but still encouraging you to go get your dollars from academia if you needed to? Gumbs asks us:

“Should I take a tenure track job anywhere in the world among any manner of quiet or loud racists just to have the security of a health care plan that will become more useful every year because of the stress and ideological violence I suffer on the job? Does it honor my ancestors for me to uproot myself from the communities that have nurtured me that are my realest sources of sustenance and that I must also sustain with my presence and my love?”⁶²

Would I be wrong to say that you might ask, “does it honor the self? Does it honor our creative work and orientation as storytellers?” I respond, does it give us space to love ourselves?

--jamie

Interview Notes

At the time of their interview, Arielle was a part-time English faculty at a large community college in Central California, with three years of teaching experience. Arielle speaks on themes of protecting the self and setting boundaries, fairness, and interdependence. They began to define and identify daughtering within themselves through the act of truth-telling to students and being stuck in a perpetual audition with others, especially colleagues.

During my interview with Arielle, I felt relatively calm, considering our previous rapport with each other, but a tinge nervous at it being the first interview for this research. Knowing Arielle to be a person of high professional boundaries, we kept to the specified time for the space of the interview and returned to the themes of this work in casual conversation many times after. In each conversation, a new confidence in the term daughtering, and a deepening or broadening of the definition, took hold in Arielle, which challenged and enriched my work. Arielle’s key phrases included: “Avoiding pressures of emotional support,” “volunteer time,” and “indignant sense of fairness.”

Arielle’s Narrative

I view [boundaries] as a form of self-protection...especially at a time teaching during the pandemic where educators are asked to bring even more to the table and give even more of themselves and be even more accommodating. It was important to me where I was like, OK, I'm gonna make sure y'all get what you need. And then I'm outta here.”

I take, especially at a workplace, volunteering time very seriously and I make sure that I check in with myself that I know that I'm volunteering. As a part time employee, I

⁶² Ibid, italics from original text

know that I am volunteering, so I make it a choice every single time. Do I want to stay additionally for this student or am I gonna encourage them to e-mail me? I just make sure that **it is a conscious choice**⁶³ and not just, oh I'm here they're here, let's do this.

Hearing things like uh, 'oh hey, like I know you're off at 4 but so and so is running late.' That has nothing to do with me and the time frame I agreed to be here in the time frame I'm getting paid for. **They assume desperation**⁶⁴ because that's kind of what it is. It's like, 'Oh well, if you're stuck in a part time position, then you need this so bad that you will accommodate what me as like a manager or administrator is asking for it.'⁶⁵ So after enduring that I was like we're not doing that anymore. So at this new part time position as an adjunct, I have realized that it's part of why I stay away from campus because that can't be demanded of me if I'm not there. Daughter into with the caregiving aspect you know so yeah. Basically, if the temptation is not there, I can't be tempted to give into that.

So you know when we're having these diversity and equity meetings? We're talking about the students, but **we're not even practicing with our fellow staff mates**.⁶⁶ We're literally in the room in these meetings. It just it's kind of funny, not funny-funny, but you know what? I mean. I take those meetings seriously. And so, I'll write down resources that have been shared with me as a part time employee and things that I can do, and other troubleshooting things. I follow through on them. And then there's just gaps in the care, so it's really frustrating when you're getting directions. You're following them, and then it's just not being addressed as you were ensured, it would be. I don't like giving false information out. If I'm being told to ensure my students of something, that information better be true. I feel like it causes a disruption in my educating / care when what I'm being informed to do is not accurate and not fair to other students. I don't like giving false reassurances to people.

⁶³ This is an idea and movement that I pull into the conclusion – the question if moving to care/work as a conscious choice is part of the key to visionary daughtering. How do we cultivate a sense of choice? What prevents us from feeling like we have choice?

⁶⁴ In "How Faculty Identity Discourses of Community College Part-Time Faculty Change Over Time," Kathryn Thirolf examines how and why part-time faculty identity shifts over the course of their career – mostly tied to relation to other faculty, rather than the positive experiences with students. From one faculty narrative, she shares, "because [the interviewee] is an adjunct, he cannot fully claim the faculty identity he wishes he could...[there is an] 'us vs. them' distinction...it can be a difficult relationship (180-181).

⁶⁵ Connecting back to Kalisha's care/work reflection for other colleagues, Arielle also feels this pressure, particularly from administration.

⁶⁶ There are colleagues I hear others talk down in department meetings, claiming they do not participate in committee work or assessment sessions. They say these colleagues "just barely teach," unaware of the work the professors of color put in when they arrived to be taken seriously for tenure, (more often than not, work that includes the constant tokenization on hiring committees and diversity panels), and the invisible labor that goes into supporting our students of color. Saying this, white colleagues are constantly, "sending students with questions that only [they] could answer or problems only [they] can solve, or the many instances in which they treat [them] not like a colleague but like their personal research assistant or native informant" (duCille 605).

[In regard to my personal well-being], this might have more to do with Daughtering, **but since I'm directly doing [a task], I know it's getting done.**⁶⁷ I don't have to assume they're getting that need met elsewhere. I don't have to assume OK, they are attending, tutoring or whatever because I'm like, I know for sure I spoke to you. I understand that that's beyond what I am contractually obligated to do on campus, yes, but for me it's kind of worth that peace of mind. And so, that's where the voluntary part of it comes in, where I'm like, OK, I'm choosing to do this.

There have been a few thank yous about how I approach certain topics or how I accommodate [students] in certain ways. [These are] things in in class that I'm hoping my other colleagues are doing since we all got to hear about it. I have my doubts of the frequency in which [these resources are shared because] my students bring up that it's no one ever told them that before or oh I didn't know that, so it is like I understand, if I had a little more. It's like, 'I'm not supposed to be the first time you're hearing about this.'

Daughtering it almost has this, auditioning quality to it. There is this sort of like, "is this right? Is this what you wanted?"⁶⁸ **While also asserting like that survival observation.** Let me see what I can or can't get away with in this space while I'm trying to be here. And honestly, I'll probably reflect on this beyond this interview of because I've been so concerned about like, "I'm nobody's Mama." I am just so focused on not accidentally mothering because all the societal stuff and hopefully I'm unpacking that. But the daughtering part I have not given as much direct attention to and **it is kind of this serving an observant role that doesn't necessarily step into the spotlight but seeks to be supportive.**⁶⁹ But a lot of times daughtering, unfortunately, it's **like supportive at the detriment of oneself.** That kind of sacrifice. I want to be sure that I'm aware that that is voluntary as well, so I don't want to inadvertently give too much of myself then needed or wanted.

Once, when an instructor asked me why I was in my own classroom with my own keys, I will say daughtering, at least accidentally, took a back seat. [I thought,] "Oh no. Why doesn't she think I should be here? What should I have done differently? Am I dressed weird?" But then I saw she's in a tank top with her hair still wet from her shower and flip flops on. And I'm showing up with like, not that you know respectability politics, but I'm in a button up and slacks and ready to teach and got my pens in my hand and my keys. Surely one of us looks like we're prepared to do the thing and one of us maybe not as much. But daughtering part of me though, did want to audition. It wasn't a conscious

⁶⁷ The role of the oldest daughter, the perfectionist, the martyrdom. This is the exact feeling that kept me on specific committees even when I knew that the work was burning me out – I didn't believe anyone cared about it as much as I did. I didn't believe anyone was going to do it like I did it because of their lack of care.

⁶⁸ This is part of the awareness of double-consciousness, as described by Dubois. The mental gymnastics of "am I meeting the assumption that I am assuming you have of me?"

⁶⁹ Arielle describes the intersection of the Secret-Keeper and Supplanter here, both gathering knowledge in a way that is observant and often invisible. The knowledge gathering is what provides the lessons for being the best supporter or substitute.

choice to be like, “No, not right now. Not right now. Right now, she can squirm and figure out what she's doing wrong and why. She doesn't, she just needs to leave because her course time is over and just let that be that.” But I will say it did kick up [feelings] as far as auditioning. She doesn't have to audition. All the other times I've been on campus, I feel like I'm still adjusting to being on this side of it just from having been a student so long. The daughtering aspect is kicking up because it's kind of like, “oh, do I get to do these things or like how do I assert?” Because **I guess with daughtering, asserting is not really your job. Having to assert is still a learning curve for me.**⁷⁰

Also, I think that **we're more dependent on one another and the community college space, and so those kinds of familial dynamics will probably kick up more.**

⁷⁰ Gumbs asks, “what happens when we shift our behavior beyond the characteristics most palatable to predatory allies” (Undrowned 71).

Altar Call: Bridgette With Your Heart Open

Dear Bridgette,

Our literary worlds have been right outside each other without us knowing. We have overlap in Los Angeles writer community, organizations, and events. It was surprising to me to make connection with you through this research and our professional work, instead of those spaces, and I wondered why for the months after our conversation. I wondered why when I read the acknowledgments of your published work and caught the names of some local valley homies there. By the time we had our conversation, there was a different sense of purpose and presence to our meeting that motivated my work in an important way. It is clear, through our conversations and the public narrative you create online about your teaching and tenure journey, that you work hard to show up as your fullest self in your classroom and campus interactions. This includes everything from appearance (a dazzling variety of natural hairstyles and bright, styled outfits with matching bags) to presence (your dialogues about committee service and constant contributions to equity work).

You engage in a public autotheory that I bear witness to on my phone screen and in your direct messages, celebrating your fashion, swapping links, asking about book selections, cheering on sabbatical applications. Without knowing or meaning to, your posts have become a daily part of my online social time, as I tune in to your stories. The insideness and outsideness of our connection to each other adds an interesting layer to the parasocial relationship that I'm sure others feel to your social media presence as well. I wonder if other professors, especially Black women, reach out to you in their own daughtering as you reflect on a multi-generational household. If they reach out to you in the advice-seeking of navigating higher education, in the ask of borrowing some of your courage to bring to their next department meeting. There's an undeniable pride you exude in every aspect of your work and your presence, that I know it must touch people. That if they are lost in the sea of burnout and rejection, how it must surprise them how brilliantly you flex your intellect, your style and your Blackness. How all of these aspects of you are intersections that others can not replicate.

Your poet persona and online presence are resonant for me of Ashleigh Greene Wade's emergent theory of Black Girl Autopoetics, which she describes as a "spatiotemporal praxis of creation" which she breaks down into "self-making" (10). She expands:

I deploy the concept of self-making in two ways: Black girls making themselves (i.e., their subjectivities) and Black girls staking claim to a creative process that is their own (making *for* themselves). I present BGA as a praxis of creation because it encompasses how Black girls (re)invent cultural products, spaces, and discourses in their subjective formation and expression (10).

The way in which you create and story tell, especially about your teaching journey, is a life affirming poetic, emphasizing an embodied knowing that is connected to a collective knowing. Thank you for making me feel connected and known

---jamie

Interview Notes

My interview with Bridgette was one of the longest interviews of my research process, filled with several anecdotes spanning both faculty and student interactions. Bridgette was full of passion with each of the stories, and with a poet's flare, dug into the emotional context of each story as she worked through the theory of daughterhood with me. Bridgette is a full-time, tenured English faculty at a Southern California college and describes herself as involved in everything on campus. Her key themes included "responsibility, "Feeling of guilt," "supposed to [insert]" and "it was up to me"

Bridgette said she felt theory of daughterhood applied most to her interactions with her colleagues. With her students, she wavers into the mothering role as she does not see the campus sharing the responsibility she feels to do right by her students.

Brigette's Narrative

I think I'm fairly young for my department. I'm not the youngest anymore, but I probably was for a couple of years at just 35. I appear to be younger to many of my white colleagues than I am because of just being a black person and so the perceived youth, **my perceived youth, when I first came in as a full timer also translated to like perceived inexperience.** Intersect it with just blackness, meant: you don't really belong here. And so I found myself like, OK, **I need to prove to you that I belong here, that I am good enough that I can perform this way**⁷¹. The way that I look and the way that I can kind of compartment myself and all that stuff has to be, you know, perfect. There's no doubt.

The trouble is that I came in to my college from an art school. I came in very colorful, very big personality, calling myself by my first name in the classroom – I came in like that. And so I didn't necessarily play into the idea of authority that people would see. There weren't a lot of other black elders really around to like, be the person I could look to and be like, hey, can you, like, help me with this? [I realized], oh, I'm the black Elder, I gotta figure this out. I decided to like reject a lot of what was expected of me just to set the tone really quickly and early. One semester I came into our hiring committee the first day of it and I had just dyed my hair blue. And I was like, this is it. When we when we interview all these people, they're gonna look across the table and see me with blue hair, second chair to the right. So we can just set the tone for what's going to happen here at this college and who these people are here. And it felt like a rejection of like, expectation and like me kind of like winning back a little bit of the power that I've been kind of seeding slowly over the years, something as small as like, my hair being different.

Not that I ever looked "traditional" really when it comes came to hair. But that one little thing is so dramatic. And it's so off putting and it's so attention grabbing that I can't blend if I wanted to. You can't forget me even if you wanted to. But here is the issue, the other one, the only other black women professors, also cut our hair short and dyed her hair blue, unbeknownst to me. We meet, we see each other, and we have the conversation of people have been mistaking her for me and me for her already. Just like in life, despite her having locks being older than me, having been there for decades, right? Despite all of

⁷¹ This echoes Arielle's sense of the performance of daughterhood as auditioning.

that, we become the same person. Even me trying to stand out, [they] still didn't even see me. Back to the drawing board, right? And so that's that's why I [connect to] the daughter[ing]. Like, what do we need to do like to get this into your mind? This is who I am. Also there is my feeling of responsibility of like I am the black lady, you know. So how do I represent myself and like, subvert whatever you think I'm supposed to be? And then also establish myself as an authority. The teaching part is whatever [to this part]. But like [how do I be] an authority in this space and not like the little kid? Like, oh, she's so new, she doesn't know.

I had someone say to me, “you know, you're really good at rhetoric” after a meeting and I was like, “we teach English.” I had two students in the elevator with me and they just looked over like, what's this lady's problem like? What? What's happening? I got back to the class, and they're like, that was weird. I was like, I know it was weird. Another person of color and I was like, yeah, I know it was weird, huh? To be complimented on your rhetoric by a person who also teaches rhetoric. It's weird. It's a weird thing to do, but like **little moments like that of like didn't really belong here. Just not even asking outright, but just like those little questions.**⁷²

I remember just this summer and getting ready to do this equity plan work that I've been I worked on. The a person higher up was like, “this your first year teaching?” and I was like, why would it be my first year teaching if I was gonna be doing this? How could I lead the faculty for the equity plan for this part of it if I never taught before?... I was like, no, I've been here for a number of years. ...I'm already doing the work. I had to lay it out [for them] so we could establish like a baseline of respect. Expect *this* of me, which is to expect the best. I think that that when I read daughtering it's giving me, you know, oldest daughter. **I need to do this really perfectly well so you don't doubt me and all the responsibility that you've heaped upon me. I can do it even if I don't think I can. You have to believe I can. Because if you don't believe I can, then who the heck else is gonna do like, who's gonna do this if it's not me?**⁷³ So I need to just get prepared. I don't think I understand all of this, but if I say no, you're gonna pick that other person who *I know* doesn't know. And **they don't have enough skin in the game. Like literally skin in the game to learn it.**⁷⁴ I would rather struggle through and figure it out while I'm in there.

A fellow instructor started crying during equity conversation because they're just like, “I can't believe this is happening and I didn't notice it.” And I sat there. Wearing all black for some reason, very thematic for a conversation like that. I wear color all the time, but I wearing all black and I just looked at them and I was like, “do you think I could cry right now?” I passed you tissues and we're like, trying to make you feel better, to get you to stop crying in the middle of this meeting in this work group that we're in.

⁷² The culmination of microaggressions, the thousand little cuts

⁷³⁷³ The supplanter and perfectionist emerges again. The martyrdom of supplanter, because of the belief that you are the only who can.

⁷⁴ In one presentation about how to talk about the white supremacist riot that happened in Charlottesville, NC, a colleague responded to the suggestions by saying, “well, I’m not a Black woman, so how I am I supposed to present this stuff?”

And now that you stopped crying, like yo. I cannot cry right now. We just heard all these numbers about black people and how much we're failing them and this is happening. And somebody said the N word at so and so and blah blah blah and you are crying because you can't believe you didn't know this before. And I notice every day and I could not cry in this room with you. Like, do you understand what you just put me through? Watching you cry right now. When I know I can't. Like so, there was like a moment of, like, tension between us and like, I don't listen. Just yo, fine cry. But like you, don't you not thinking about your setting your context like what's appropriate for the moment other people? **I'm always thinking about other people in my position alongside them, the daughter, everything.** I know I'm sad about it already, and obviously I would be right. [But] let me tuck my little feeling to the side to make sure that you're OK and that you understand why tears aren't enough.

To be honest, I think a lot of [Black women] resent the care work because it feels like we're asking as a black woman doing all this work, just meet me halfway or try something. It's like I'm asking you to go outside of your job description by my mere existence doing this work. **Because I care so much, you are upset because I make you feel like you should care. And you should.**⁷⁵ Probably, but I didn't say you had to. I'm just saying we're trying to close the equity gaps. What are you gonna do about it? Ohh, you're gonna make up excuses as to why it's not your fault.

[In virtual meetings, to my colleagues, I am thinking] I am so drained having this conversation with you about race and equity on the side. **I'm shaking beneath the zoom table --I'm getting so angry about what you're saying to me as I'm trying to help you unpack your feelings about race and equity,** so that we can come to some kind of middle ground where you will be helpful and not a hindrance to this effort. I'm visibly shaking. But I really want you to get it: how sad I am and how much I want to cry right now to the side because you need to unpack why your white privilege is really important to this conversation. I have explained it to you four times and I think you get it. Then you backtrack. It was so rough. It's over. No more. No more side conversations. **So now I seem cold.**⁷⁶

If I'm cold, that's only because you expected me to be warm. And I don't think I expect any of you to be. Which is the reality, like I could walk in with no expectations of friendship or, you know, camaraderie. As far as my colleagues, I'm not walking in

⁷⁵ One white colleague came to my office to ask about how I taught race in the classroom, as she feared the moment students brought it up and not knowing how to handle it. She took notes as I shared strategies with her, but in her responses, I realized she was seeking advice on how to "manage" students of color who became "too vocal" for her during those conversations. She sought silence rather than voice; a conversation she could control even though she admittedly "couldn't understand the experience of the characters in a book." She wanted my affirmation that not facing that fear was okay, and when I would not give that to her, became frustrated with me and criticized my pedagogy in a public meeting later that week.

⁷⁶ The stereotype of cold that other interviewees shared wither experiencing or being afraid of being cast as.

expecting to be able to say, let's talk tomorrow, and I'm gonna unpack on unload on you all the things that being a black woman in 2020. They're like, oh, I didn't even think about that. Oh, I didn't even think about that. Oh, I didn't even think about that. And I'm like, yeah, I know. I'm always thinking about it, but I don't. I don't. I don't wanna. I wanna say it. I don't feel any resentment about always thinking about it because I'm supposed to always be thinking about it. **I'm a Black woman, if I'm not thinking about it, then what else is happening in the world that is drawing my attention away from my lived experience and lived experience with my students?**⁷⁷ I think I'm supposed to be thinking about it. OK, the resentment comes in. I'm always thinking about it and you have the privilege raft to, like, float away from it whenever you want to or get closer to it whenever you want to.

It wasn't until I was a full timer at this college where folks [began to say] we're a family and we are in it for the long haul. These students, you know, they're part of our family. "Family" is big in every e-mail: this college family, this college family. **It was the first time that I kind of bought in like, I'm a part of this family too. This is the space to be family. These students need somebody...I can be in the family here. And then immediately, probably some of the most hostile experiences ever.**⁷⁸ This is not our family. I felt like I opened my emotions up so big because I knew. I want to be a community college professor for a very particular reason, because I witnessed students when I was in high school going to the local community college to just have somewhere to go after class to get extra classes in because that's the best option for them. You know, they kind of stand in the gap. And all through my college experiences, I took community college classes in the summers. ...So I was open to, like, give everything. I'm not going to shut off anything. We're a family. We're a family. I'm in it. I'm going to show up and do whatever. And once again, I was like, yeah, this is not a good family. The students were fine again. But the other part. Y'all this is not working for me. I think it is different [in] community colleges; you have to walk in with your heart open.

⁷⁷ Rankine again, with this anecdote: "a friend argues that Americans battle between the historical self and the 'self self'. By this she means you mostly interact as friends with mutual interest and for the most part compatible personalities however sometimes your historical selves, her white self and your black self, or your white self and her black self, arrive with the full force of your American positioning. Instantaneously your attachment seems fragile, tenuous, subject to any transgression of your historical self. And though your joined personal histories are supposed to save you from misunderstandings they usually cause you to understand all too well what is meant (14)

⁷⁸ In my experience volunteering on behalf of the college family, I was so busy navigating other peoples' expectations of who I was supposed to be, others expectation of me to fill the now empty chair on the diversity panel, that I didn't want to see the cycle I was assimilating into. Instead, I took on more and more, developing trainings, serving on committees, and taking a leadership role in hiring, reporting directly to administration. My elders told me I was going to be used in this way. They told me I would be praised by administration: they would dote on me and the palatable diversity I brought to their committee reports. They told me I would be used as a native informant – questioned on what the people of color "wanted" on campus to feel better, to ask me to tell the secrets of allies while keeping the processes of administration under lock. My elders told me that I would be shown a superficial love that I should not be blinded by, love that was just for show.

**Altar Call: Jacklyn
Care and Love Evolves**

Dear Jacklyn,

In *How We Show Up: Reclaiming Family, Friendship and Community*, Mia Birdsong writes, “The ability to hold space for another’s experience is a critical one. It’s not about giving advice or trying to fix anything, but witnessing and just being an active, attentive presence. Sitting with the grief and pain of other people can be so hard.” This quote reminded me of the interactions I’ve been able to have with you and the ones I’ve witnessed you have with others. It the way you move through a space, with a welcoming-ness, with insight. The instant recognition of another. The acknowledgment and validation of other’s brilliance, as you share your own in the effort of community building. You met me at bell hooks, at liberatory pedagogy, at equity battles and newly assumed mentorship. As I sit with all the narratives of care/work, I wonder more about yours. The sustainability of open hearts.

You presented yourself as professional ally, then also as personal ally. And the present-ness you bring made me feel like I was talking to one my cousins –you know those cousins you talk to like twice a year that you end up telling the whole truth to? I appreciate the kinship in the spaces we’ve been able to share. The care/work, the follow-up. hooks, reminds us that “one of the dangers we face in our educational systems is the loss of feeling of community, not just the closeness among those with whom we work and with our students, but also the loss of a feeling of connection and closeness with the world beyond the academy” (*Teaching Community*, xv). I admire and looked for insight in your narrative about how you so actively create community. You invited me into one of these communities to present my work, (supporting the work as I was still figuring out what the work was). I had never been so nervous, bringing the early work to a room of folks I was doing this work for, other Black women. The validation and inquiry and motivation I received from that room held my heart during the hardest parts of this work. You placed me in a space to do my best daughtering, and also my best visioning. If this is possible, I can only imagine what that means for your students, classroom, and other communities.

--jamie

Interview Notes

While the formal part of my interview with Jacklyn was straightforward and insightful within the constraints of that format, I was able to have many follow up connections with her that helped me deepen my understanding of care/work and supplanting. As I look back on this initial conversation, I see these themes very present, particularly in her campus interactions. She is a full-time, tenured professor at a large college in Southern California. Jacklyn’s key themes were “authentic care and love,” “overcoming my own obstacles,” and serving “the most vulnerable.”

Jacklyn’s Narrative

What motives me is authentic care and love.⁷⁹

Students see me as a person not just an educator or teacher – like they know me. I think that's what rings true. So when people get the [community] college experience, and they have a class with [me], I think it represents, authentic care and and love. And so that's what they feel and that's what that's why they come back. Authentic care and love. What motivates me is authentic care and love.

bell hooks, in *Teaching to Transgress*, she talks about self-actualization. *Teaching to Transgress* is the text that I live by. I read like it's my Bible. And I teach it. I consume it regularly. There is always something new [to get] out of it. One of those things is the self-actualization process. **Being connected to myself and my identity and my values, I think helps me show up in spaces authentically.** I have the idea that we will either connect right on some level or we may not and that's OK. But I think the authenticity is across boundaries. So when **you're self-actualized, I think you can come into space and be authentically who you are⁸⁰**. And that crosses like racial, racial, and gender, and all kind of boundaries. **When you have authenticity, you can have dialogue with anyone. Because we say, you know, we say so much. Recognize real.**⁸¹

I think when you tap **when you tie that into care and love, folks tap into their own ways of caring and loving for themselves.** It's like this exchange of energy, right. Like I give you that, you give me that back. That's what I mean by it, it helps me. And from the selfish aspect of it, you know, for me is that in turn it continues to help me build up and define what care and love looks like for me because it's evolved. It's ever evolving. I will say that it evolves. And changes and shifts, yes, yes.

I think when I say overcome my own obstacles, sometimes I'm talking to them, to them, and I'm talking to myself.⁸² Like **I've learned how to kind of step back and say**

⁷⁹ We both know and live by the word: "As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence" (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*). The shared excitement, that shared interest is fueled by that love and care. Our students model their own interactions after they way we interact with them, especially in our cohort communities.

⁸⁰ From hooks, "When our lived experiences of theorizing is fundamentally linked to process of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice. Indeed, what such experience makes more evident is the bond between the two — that ultimately reciprocal process wherein one enables the other."

⁸¹ Ladsen-Billings teaches us: "This is the secret behind culturally relevant pedagogy: the ability to link principles of learning with deep understanding of (and appreciation for) culture...Death in the classroom refers to teachers who stop trying to reach each and every student or teachers who succumb to rules and regulations that are dehumanizing and result in de-skilling. instead of teaching, such people become mere functionaries of a system that has no intent on preparing students, particularly urban students of color, for meaningful work and dynamic participation in a democracy."

⁸² Mia Birdsong writes, "Being on the receiving end of harmful oppressions is decidedly and specifically horrible. But wielding them has its own corrupting and denigrating impact on the imposer. This is important to understand, not because it makes those who hold privilege and power "victims" or somehow as equally harmed as those who experience racism, sexism, and classism. It's important to

you need to actually listen to to your own self. You need to take your own advice actually. So when I see them, I see versions of me.⁸³ I see parts of myself and so. You know, it's always easier. That's why we do peer review, right? Like, it's always easier for us to look at someone else's stuff and see what needs to be fixed. And we get our own paper and we're like, "oh, I don't know what to do." So that's how I look at life in these exchanges. So they help. They help inform, you know, the decisions that I make and how I overcome obstacles because they come to me with [their obstacles] and so I'm better able to see myself.

I no longer kind of possess this idea that I have to protect or please. If I am, you know it's truth. I will say I'm cognizant, so there's certain spaces that I will not say, there's certain folks I would never. I don't care what I think about this, this other black woman and what she's doing. I'm never gonna say it to this white woman because you're way more egregious. You know what I mean? ...I'm watching myself. How am I? How are other people in roles of garnering relationship to me... I'm balancing like, am I letting them get too wild?

I give space for it because I don't want to be *that elder*. I know some. Elders who who will just lay low, be like no, you needed to do this, and you need to be respectful and you need to... You know, if I'm doing this for you, then don't call me out. But I think that I have encountered other models. You know, I would even say my own.

Grandmother, who was super strict. I watched how she moved. She lived in that world. ... She would say like, look, this is what I know, this is what I've taught you and I know this is what you see. I know what the system says, but this does not mean this has to apply to you in the same way.⁸⁴ [For myself], I think it it's like 3 prong: mothering, daughtering, and then now being in a role of being a junior elder.

I'm, if I'm being honest, Jamie, I probably sit on too many committees. I will be in two zones at the same time. **I'll just be out here doing the most. I really need to sit down, actually, right.**⁸⁵ But it's so important to me because things happen in those spaces and

understand because the work of dismantling systems of oppression that you benefit from isn't altruistic work that just helps others; it is about your own liberation as well."

⁸³ We bring all parts of ourselves into the classroom, and when we bring our fullest self, magic happens. Parker Palmer talks about this in *The Courage to Teach*, as he explains, "If identity and integrity are more fundamental to good teaching than technique ...we must do something alien to academic culture: we must talk to each other about our inner lives --risky stuff in a profession that fears the personal and seeks safety in the technical, the distant, the abstract" (12).

⁸⁴ This takes us back to Terrion Williamson's felt life of Black feminism, learning from her mother and grandmother "what it meant to organize on behalf of those who were sometimes called 'the least of these' and that I was in fact, inseparable from those deemed least. They taught me that rebuke could be an act of love, criticism an expression of the deepest care" (262).

⁸⁵ Like I mentioned in the letter, I worry for Jacklyn's heart, her rest. How can we not turn to Tricia Hersey's *Rest is Resistance*, to remember ways to resist the most dangerous impulses of our care work. She writes: Our drive and obsession to always be in a state of "productivity" leads us to the path of exhaustion, guilt, and shame. We falsely believe we are not doing enough and that we must always be guiding our lives toward more labor. The distinction that must be repeated as many times as necessary is this: We are not resting to be productive. We are resting simply because it is our divine right to do so."

decisions are being made. That impact our students and I just feel like I have to be there. Too much is at risk.

Altar Call: Kiandra
Still Ourselves, Steel Ourselves, Steal Ourselves

Dear Kiandra,

But some of us are brave. I know you know the reference. In fact, I trust you are more than my match in Black feminist literature references, I'd take the bet that you know more than me. What an honor to share doctoral timelines with you, years after our initial graduate experiences. What a moment of pure joy to watch you finish, determined and teaching along the way, just like me. I've always believe that you, as bell hooks says in *Remembered Rapture*, "[you] confronted the reality that we may discover the rightness of our vision and vocation before others do" (127). You have always carried yourself with this purpose.

You were there when I first began to nurture my own vision. You were there during the first time I participated in changing something in higher education. In fact, you stood with me, a voice louder than mine and our arms metaphorically linked together in an email thread. We were challenging the structure of our graduate program and demanding change. In an MFA program that said it was the only that was focused on social justice praxis, many us stood together and asked, where's the justice? Gathered together as a small action group, we networked with current students and alumni to make enough noise, to even threaten the reputation of the program, until the admin called a meeting. I represented our group in the meeting with two of our administrators, and a guest lecturer that our group had just criticized by email. I walked in with our developed plan: proposing speakers, student of color affinity groups, campus wide race and equity workshops. I walked in to the very first instance of an administrator saying, "well alright, you can do the labor to fix this then." With your and Daniel's and Kemba's support, six months after finishing the MFA, and as I finished an additional semester of pedagogy, I delivered a new core course for the campus titled, "The Dialogue of Difference: Cultural Conversation in the Creative Writing Workshop." I remember you sitting in the middle, I remember the informal conversations you helped host about diversity issues when the campus wouldn't give us formal spaces for it. We did what we could to leave that spaced changed, and I'd say we did.

As we both joined the professoriate, finding our calling in the community college, where we recognized the students and the potential of these classrooms. And we learned around the same time that despite all the heart that we bring to our classrooms, "serving students well is an act of critical resistance. It is political. And therefore it will not yield the normal rewards provided when we are simply perpetuating the status quo. The lack of rewards may be less disappointing than rejection by the very students we have served (hooks, *Teaching Community* 90). Like at our grad institution, we must constantly remind ourselves we are planting seeds. At our luckiest, we get to see them sprout and find the wind towards the next thing – dandelion seeds. I'm grateful for the ways we've found our soil, began gardens.

--jamie

Interview Notes

Kiandra's interview was the most unconventional on the entire group, mostly because our long history together meant that personal check-ins bookended the interview. With packed scheduled and a long-waiting intention to catch up, we took as much advantage of the opportunity as we could. Kiandra is a full-time, tenured professor at a college in the Inland Empire of Southern California. Kiandra also finished a doctoral program, while maintaining her teaching position. Kiandra's reflection of dedication to her students while also balancing so much is a testament to her unrelenting energy and heart.

Kiandra's Narrative

It's an interesting dynamic to walk in both worlds, because I can literally be walking into a discipline meeting and on my walk, I'm walking with the student, and I'm occupying that role as mama. Then I walk into that discipline meeting and I'm occupying another role. I'm literally advocating for students [at every moment].

You feel a certain role in expectation but there is only so much that you [can be and do]. It is a constant negotiation of which battles am I gonna choose? How am I gonna occupy this space? Is this a moment that I'm gonna speak up, or do I need to save it for something else? You know it's funny because, [regarding] students, we had a racial justice task force, and they were talking about how do we get students to share their grievances with us when something has happened? **How do we get their trust right?** That was this one of the things that we want to come out of this task force is that we wanted our students – our black students – to be able to feel empowered to speak up when something anti black and racist is happening. How can we empower them and do they know that they can fill out this, form etc. And I said, let me share with you all a story.

My first semester, I come into a classroom in our campus. We have badges right that have your picture on them. They're like this big, like a playing card. They're big, and they say faculty on it, and that's how you get into classrooms etc. We have keys. It even has a red lanyard, so you can see it. I'm wearing this on my person. I'm walking into a classroom with students, and the students are saying, Miss J, Mama J, that homework assignment. They're talking about homework as we're walking in and there's a white man that's in the classroom ahead of me.

I walk into the classroom, and he says, "Who are you?" I say, "I'm Kiandra," like, what do you mean like who are you? He's like "No, *who* are you?" I'm just, you know I'm dealing with the students, and so I'm not even really like kind of chatting in with him on that level. I'm just dealing with my students; I'm trying to get the class you know, situated, answer their questions and whatnot. And I'm like, okay. I'm new here. Maybe he doesn't know. He's like "Oh, I've never seen you here. **You supposed to be what subject? Do you teach? Are you really a teacher here?**" **And I literally had to walk up to him and he asked again, "who are you and what are you doing here?"**⁸⁶

⁸⁶ I had a former colleague who never recognized me, even after several years of working together, with overlapping hours. He had fine rapport with other folks, including white male adjuncts who did not consistently teach on our campus. In the staff room he confronted me, "students can not sit in here," standing guard over a communal staff table until I pointed to my campus keys sitting in front of me, next to a stack of essays no less. The worst of it was similar, waiting for a classroom after his session. He often

I literally had to [show] my badge. I'm the professor of this class. And he rolled his eyes at me, and he just like continued shuffling his papers, like I'm not going to be about my business of getting out of her way so that she could teach this class...like professional courtesy. He literally rolled his eyes at me.

This is what we get⁸⁷, and so he eventually like, very slowly gets his stuff together. He's got all this stuff written on the board. He doesn't erase the board, like none of the professional courtesy that we do when we're changing classrooms and he leaves, and so two times a week he's in the classroom before me and **every time he's diligent about being late and he's diligent about leaving the board messy. He's diligent about rolling his eyes at me. He's diligent about just being so blatantly disrespectful to the point where my students are now feeling protective.**⁸⁸ Hugs for me and coming like around me; they start to take on this like we need to protect her.

[Another day, when it's raining in Southern California], I let my students know in our group app: drive carefully, I may be 5 minutes late. He has them sitting outside in the rain. He does not allow them inside of the classroom. He's in there just holding the space. The students wanted to come in to get out of the rain, and he's like you're not allowed to be in here. He had another student, one of his students with him, and he looks at my students, and he tells them make sure you double check that you lock the door and he leaves them standing outside in the rain. I come like literally a couple of minutes later. The brain -- it won't even let [them], see how he's treating me, [when] I tell my colleagues this story.

If [my students] are looking towards me, I'm mama, I'm the professor. I'm the educated, qualified, employed. I'm their hero, she-ro, and **if they're looking at me and see that I don't have power, what in God's name power do you think they believe that they have? How are you going to empower them when they see that I don't have power? If I don't have power, what power do they have, right?**⁸⁹

ran late, and yelled at me if I entered before he felt it was finished. "Stop interrupting my class, wait for your professor," he said in front of fifty students, half his, half mine waiting in breezeway. My daughter's training, as Kiandra's looked initially for the apologetic way out of conflict. For the proving myself way out, rather than creating a grievance for the aggressive behavior. I held the story in.

⁸⁷ McKittrick reflects, "the project of erasure often unfolds as an affirmation of racial privilege" (*Dear Science* 22)

⁸⁸ I think about white supremacy aims to strip agency Black women feel in any space. How we come across this conflict as Black women professors, finding ourselves in a space of fawning, of daughtering in a submissive way, to relent space. McKittrick reminds of the politics of geographic space: "the wear of black geographies and black subjectivity is often aligned with spatial processes that apparently fall back on seemingly predetermined stabilities, such as boundaries, color lines, proper places, fixed and settled infrastructures and streets" (*Demonic Grounds*, xi). McKittrick presents black women's geographies as beyond physical space, to include knowledges, negotiations and experiences. She writes that we produce space, that it is always shifting. Kiandra and her students reject the predetermined assignment of the space to create a space that is meant for healing and connection, particularly in their protecting of her and reversing that role.

⁸⁹ Rankine, again and always: "All our fevered history won't instill insight/ won't turn a body conscious, / won't make that look/ in the eyes say yes, though there is nothing / to solve/ even as each moment is an answer" (142).

The idea of daughtering, being in like walking, straddling both spaces – to have the intellectual negotiations that one has to go through in order to survive that. It's emotional. It is the emotional, having to still oneself⁹⁰, so I can go into that classroom and look at this man. [This man] who dehumanized [me] in front of students or in department meeting scowling at [me].

And that's the exhaustion that you see at the end of a day, at the end of a week, at the end of a semester at the end of a year, because it all builds up. And then doing that not just in the professional world, but doing that in the academic classroom to spaces that you know you're not expected to be in. Your ideas are not necessarily meant to be heard or to be front and center. I've had professors tell me to be quiet in multiple classes. Every single time it is wounding, and every single time that that happens, I cried like that ugly, ugly can't breathe cry, [but] not in front of them. **It is integral, it is such a part of how I know myself in the world to be inquisitive, and to think critically and to learn and to be able to express those things. So to be told in spaces like this "You need to dull your light, you need to step back, you need to be quiet." It has literally broken me every time.**⁹¹

I think about [my students] because I can't lose my space because I'm creating the space for them to enter. I know that I am the bridge I am showing them. [I have to think] how am I gonna lead them out of this? How are you gonna help? What are you here for? And I have to like sort of steel myself and check in, you know. But then also go to those [internal] places and spaces that I know that I can be soft. **I will tell you that one of the key ways that I have survived and continue to survive is this fugitive way of being. And this this way of like, so there's one of steeling oneself like making yourself like you know, like you're getting prepared for a punch**⁹², that kind of steeling. But there's another of actually steeling, steeling myself and finding those cuts. Thinking of molten

⁹⁰ This begins to explain the physical feeling of the tension spaces between the roles of the daughter and the potential of visionary daughtering. Like Anzaldúa's *nepantla*.

⁹¹ bell hooks describes the devastation of this kind of degrading of her intellectual curiosity in *Bone Black* – for her, coming both from home and the classroom. She learns from this that everyone around her thinks it's a waste of time for her to be intellectual when they see her destined for a certain life. But she rejects that. Reela-Violette Botts-Ward describes the reclamation of her intellectual and spatial power as she writes, "Black girl, existing in a world that defined me for me without my say, defined by environments that were never equipped to carry me, sites of injury that jaded my perspective on me. Black girl, realizing that I have the power to know a new kind of environment, the power to decide where I choose to place my body, to prioritize places where my body feels safe, to curate spaces where my body feels safe, where the power of my interior world overpower the dominance of this cruel cold world, where I create my own world inside myself and have it reflected back to myself" ("Transmedial Autotheories")

⁹² On the subject of fugitivity, I consult *The Undercommons*, where Harney and Moten assert that the only relationship available to the university if you are a person of color is a criminal one. The undercommons offers a fugitive space of self-awareness. They tell us: "in that undercommons of the university one can see that it is not a matter of teaching versus research. To enter this space is to inhabit the ruptural and enraptured disclosure of the commons that fugitive enlightenment enacts. ...What the beyond of teaching is really about is...a radical passion and passivity such that one becomes unfit for subjection" (28).

the break in the break, the cut. [And also], **how can I steal myself away? So that I can feel some capacity of joy, some space so that I can serve not only survive, but survive intact**, right? I don't wanna just survive. I wanna thrive. I don't wanna just survive it, but I don't want to end this race without joy. That's just that's no longer a possibility for me. I've taken that off the table.

I will not give these people my joy. I will not give them my capacity to love. I will not give them my intelligence. I'm not gonna be small.

I can't give you any reason to take me from this space because if you take me from this space, you're taking something away from these students, and it's bigger than me. My worth must proceed me in the room. Because if my worth isn't preceding me in the room, am I even in the room? Am I using it?

Everything that I do is a revolutionary practice of love. They ask: how [do] you know your pedagogy, or what I tell my students on day one. **[My students know] she really really does love us, and I tell them, even when you're all mad at me.**⁹³ I don't care. Be mad at me. I still love you, and I'm still working. And laboring on your behalf, because I, seeing in you, what you don't see in yourself.

⁹³ Core pedagogy, bell hooks reminds us that we honor servingness, we honor our legacy of daughterhood in this way: "any radical pedagogy must insist that everyone's presence is acknowledged. That insistence cannot be simply stated. It has to be demonstrated through pedagogical practices. To begin, the professor must genuinely value everyone's presence" (*Teaching to Transgress*)

Conclusion: Visionary Daughtering

“This project is for those of us who create theory, pedagogy and lifetimes, not out of thin air, but out of lines walked, impossible futures lived. For those of us who hold out foolish hope that our borrowed time in universities need neither kill our spirits nor tame our vision, I offer this critical literary work itself as a model of intergenerational practice, a method of engagement and survival full of faith, love and poetic falling apart as an intervention into what we mean by scholarship and where that ship should take us. This is spiritual work, an offering made of love. For all of us.” -Alexis Pauline Gumbs, “We Can Learn to Mother Ourselves”

“I can hear the even breathing that creates passages to dreams. And yes, I want to interrupt to tell him her us you me I don't know how to end what doesn't have an ending” (Rankine 159).

“What would Black women create if they could create from a space of ease rather than resistance” -EbonyJanice Moore

Daughtering in this work is defined by two distinct roles and breaking through the tension of these roles creates the movement of/ towards visionary daughtering. The ontology of daughtering does not go away, in fact the acknowledgement and continued embodiment of this role is crucial to the ability to do the visioning. In review, daughtering as secret-keeping asks Black and Black biracial women faculty to call on their training as observers and confidants to understanding and hold sensitive information and to use discernment to be strategic with that information (which can affect their care/work). Daughters as supplanters asks Black and Black biracial faculty to be constantly prepared to assume roles beyond their identity, roles that often end up superseding their identities, for the illusion of voice and power. These aspects of daughtering as theory and method have supported a fractured survival of women of color in academia, but have not prevented multi-level burnout.

The term visionary daughtering comes from the mind of Alexis Pauline Gumbs, specifically a talk she delivered to Michigan State University in 2015 titled: “Visionary Daughtering: An Intimate and Intellection Activist Archive.”⁹⁴ Gumbs grounds the talk in June Jordan’s guiding theory of “love is life force,” signaling to her the healing energy that is possible with intergenerational connections. She defines daughtering “as work, a form of labor and a specific positionality that defines a variety of social and discursive relationships,” (which this work has outlined within the faculty context). Gumbs calls in the ancestor dreams of Alice Walker, which Walker wrote about in a 1973 letter, describing the relationship with future generations as forward moving, rather than as a hovering, static ancestor. She asks “what does it mean to be a daughter as we search our mother’s gardens,” as she reflects being introduced to Walker in person in a way the

⁹⁴ With deep gratitude to Dr. Yomaira Figueroa for locating the recording of this session to help this research.

implied a daughtering relationship without explicitly saying so. Gumbs's "emergent literary daughterhood" is inspired by Walker's connection to the work of Zora Neale Hurston.

Gumbs argues that daughtering is "work you were inducted into when you weren't paying attention," and "the position of daughtering means you don't actually get to decide if your feelings are going to get hurt." This relates to the abovementioned inquiry about the individual humanity of daughters. In the exploration of the potential of daughtering, Gumbs asks us to look for the ways the terms mother/daughter/sister are used in Black feminist study, but to consider the how the love between women can transform these definitions placed upon us. With this possibility in mind, with the invitation to dream transformative ways to be in relation with each other, Gumbs asks "what if we activated the different roles [of daughtering] as significantly different?"

Gumbs proposes then, a visionary daughtering, inspired by the demands of Assata Shakur's daughter. The then four-year-old, becoming increasingly distanced from her imprisoned mother, claims that Shakur is not trying hard enough to be her. That the prison was not as real as their relationship. She, in her unencumbered visionary daughtering, can vision a life with her mother, but does not see her mother doing the same. She asserts that freedom is possible. Gumbs concludes, "A daughter believes a free world is possible; we can escape anything. The world in which we are free is the world in which we love each other more than we are allowed to."

In the context of my research, visionary daughtering in praxis is the intentional choice of care/work that serves to restore my humanity and ability to radically imagine my potential, while continuing to honor the traditions that shaped me. In order to honor that legacy, any care/work provided as a visionary daughter is informed by and trusts my embodied knowledge, my epistemology, and is sensitive to the communicative power of my dreams.

This work can not serve as a survival guide because "I do not want to create [or perform care] within resistance" (Opata). Daughtering as methodology, without confronting the tension to move towards the visionary, can leave one stuck in the performance of trauma responses that lead to an irreparable burnout at best, physical/mental/emotional consequences at worst. It is well studied that Black women in academia have a shorter life span and higher instance of disease. In my personal experience, this is inextricably linked to the care/work of my faculty position and the ways in which I've responded or blocked my own healing because of my daughtering training. For me, the pain and trauma of daughtering serves as an armor I wear. The armor may protect me at the surface level, it looks strong and adapted to a harsh environment. However, how often does a knight talk about how heavy that armor is to wear? What spaces are there to express how stifling it is, the uncomfortable heat in there? The trauma and pain of not questioning my daughtering cuts off my circulation, my breath.

The act of visioning asks to move forward, to step into vulnerability with the belief that you will gain a resilient strength by not hiding behind the superficial armor. Visionary daughtering can take the assumed labor of daughtering and "transform it into revolutionary potential, right at the site where bondage is supposed to be produced" (Gumbs, "Visionary Daughtering").

Confronting Tension of Daughtering Roles

In my interview with Kendra Allen, I asked her if daughtering could be visionary. She questioned if we can be visionary if we keep being invisible. How do we make visible the work of Black and Black biracial women in community college? Allen, in her practice of daughtering, continues to write into the future, to maintain the position of “we told you that already,” and hopes to “write towards sitting down. Let people fall down and figure it out until they listen to us.”

It is hard to convince a daughter that this work is not her whole life. That this work is not her whole purpose. I am still finding ways to remake myself, to sit in the tension between assumed expectations and spiritual freedom. Even as I sit in legacy, as I have been cultural trained to know and believe and move with the knowledges and lesson of the mothers before me, Allen leads me to a restorative thought, one that alarmed my whole nervous system at first, but perhaps is the start of practice on visioning emotional and spiritual freedom.

“I am not grateful,” she tells me. “This is a thing we are not supposed to say. It feels wrong as a daughter, but we need to say it.” We need to say it in the face of the trauma we’ve been asked to hold, for the breath trapped in our bodies, for the work we’ve picked up for others. “We should not have to constantly use gratitude [to assert] what we deserve.” Our process of coming back to the self requires rest and flexibility, we must release the structures of work placed upon us by others, to work when we work. We must let ourselves sit down for the first time and ask how it feels. As adrienne maree brown reminds us in *Emergent Strategy*: “nothing is required of me more than being, and creating. Simultaneously being present with who I am, who we are as a species... and creating who we must become, and within that who *I* must become” (11). We must become Visionary Daughters.

There is tension between the movement of Secret Keeping to Storytelling. Can we move past the fear of being visible and honest? Can we abandon allegiances to people who do not actually protect us in order to tell the truth of what has happened to us in our institutions (and beyond)? Can we be strategic with the trust, communication, and protected knowledge bestowed on us and leverage it to reveal systems that need to change? Can we challenge our professional and community spaces to create more opportunities for storytelling?

There is tension in the movement between Supplanter to Sustainer. Can we confront the death of old self, (including the deaths we’ve faced as intellectual daughters)? Can we release the desire to be of service to others and disentangle that from our sense of worthiness? Can we reimagine the ways we deliver care and support (to the people and spaces we chose to) that emphasizes sharing sustainable healing and learning practices with those in our spheres of influence?

I want to turn to two important insights from the participants to articulate the movement into and through the tensions of daughtering. Apryl, having expressed struggling with the secret-keeping of the ineffectiveness of campus resources and the supplanting of equitable pedagogy training with her colleagues, shared, “expressing my boundaries is a constant challenging struggle. But it can also mean reclaiming my power. It helps me develop a sense of confidence. The other thing that makes expressing

boundaries a constant struggle is when I think about how it impacts others.” Although I assumed Apryl is considering the expression of boundaries as a struggle because of the negative impact on others, denying them her care/work, I would request a reframing of that struggle by asking, who is at the center of the struggle in that instance? This is not to deny the emotional impact of setting boundaries with folks, particularly as a new practice, but the struggle is really for the person requesting work that they have not found a sustainable way to complete for themselves or a supportive way to engage in collective effort on. I would also argue, that the expression of these boundaries have a positive impact on other Black women colleagues looking for models/ mentors of putting their needs first.

Ria Williams, a full-time professor at a large Central California college, considers the complicated relationships between different generations of Black faculty, (with the implication of the lessons of respectability politics and assimilation being essential to the older generation’s sense of identity, worth, and success). She shared:

This reminds me of my experience with black women that are older than me. I do think there is a lot of pressure on younger black women too bear the brunt [of aggressions] or help older black women process things that they're angry about, that they're worried about on our behalf. I think that there's a lot of mental anxieties around being a Black woman [in academia and beyond]. Let alone what that means for younger generations, what we can help sustain, what we can help create. I think that there's always this pressure and expectation [to listen to them and their ideas]. I don't feel like that space is reciprocal, but I do think we can try to create that.

Here, Ria touches on something that was my tenderest experience of disillusionment with the traditional roles of daughterhood. I looked to be mentored by the (only two in my district at the time) Black faculty. However, I found myself saddled with warnings about being too loud, too bold, too radical, and left for a prescription for survival that, to me, looked like silence. I saw the ways these faculty had retreated from all campus participation, in the effort to make this version of survival work for them. When I sought support in the times I was hurt by the college procedures and/ or by our colleagues, it took me right back to girlhood, sitting at the kitchen table with my aunties and othermothers: “well, I told you so.” At best, I’d receive some pity, tissues, and a reminder of the ways we had to steel ourselves. I am grateful for the work and the sacrifice the generation above me made, carving the pathways into academy. But I refuse to let all that work be in vain, for that work only to let my generation of educators subject to the same abuses. I stand in their legacy and also refuse to inherit silence or complicity.

Practice the Visioning

How do we cultivate a practice of visioning in our academic roles? In *Pedagogies of the Crossing*, M. Jacqui Alexander gives us steps to begin a personal interrogation of our values and capacity to begin feeding this imagination. She asks us to consider, “where do our visions for justice originate? How do we inhabit them, clearly our task is to reexamine and transform inherited practices that stand in the way of justice” (Alexander 93). For me, and many of the participants in this research, the origin of our justice vision comes from our cultural upbringing, from the whispered injustices we

collected as secret-keeping daughters. It comes from the energy and encouragement of our students and their requests for support. Alexander gives us space to acknowledge that origin, to honor it by considering how we inhabit these influences are foundational to how we have been able to stay alive and build who we are. But we must recognize the limitations and resist the urge to keep the status quo, even when it looks like progress (because is progressing through the academy revolutionary if we are given no agency to transform the institution?). We are not beholden to inherited practices. We are not beholden to inherited practices of survival, of performance, of people pleasing, of secret-keeping, of supplanting. We are not beholden to anything that stands in the way of our ability to stay alive. In the practice of staying alive, Alexander offers us this method, “thinking justice, teaching for justice, and living justice means that we continually challenge each other to enunciate our vision of justice” (116). And what a practice of daughterhood and kinship and community that could be: creating space for the expression of our visions of justice. Holding each other in loving accountability to those visions.

And if you’d follow me into some deep, remaking-of-all-our-selves theory, in *Imagination: A Manifesto*, Ruha Benjamin reminds us that real revolution happens in the context of the work of Sylvia Wynter, and to remember that as we have shaped our definition of human and humanity, not everyone has always been afforded the category of human or humane. We can see this in the struggle of hanging on to aspects of daughtering identity that deny black women faculty their sense of humanity and tie their identities only to the validation of others. Benjamin writes,

the historical mission of our time must entail, then, an honest reckoning with the existing stratification of humanity as a starting point for any reinvention. We must rewrite the story in which, as Jamaican philosopher Sylvia winter has described, one genre of human, *the Man*... has subordinated all others, leading to the social and ecological catastrophes we now face. For some, talk of reinventing the human... maybe too far out there... the challenges ahead feel too daunting. Yes, but so is lurching from one crisis to the next until finally, there is no in-between, no time to catch our breath (Benjamin 43-44).

This is daunting, heavy work, as any kind of healing is. However, I take Benjamin at her most literal when she says there is no time to catch our breath. I, for one, have been gasping for years, drowning and trying to break the surface of this ocean of identity. Black women are dying in institutions meant to kill us. As I mentioned in the preface, I believe parts of us always will be killed in academia. But I believe the urgency of our visions, the practice of our visioning, and the intentional positioning of our care/work in service of our vision can keep us alive.

Interview participant and professor, Kiandra, reflects in her own daughtering practice, in her self-invitation into the practice of vision and naming her justice vision behind traditional mothering/daughtering roles:

I am learning this year that that my joy is not up for grabs. Without that I am not going to be able to do the work that I intend to do, that I want to do
As a daughter, and you know, being a mother... like all of these things, converging, and it has been so helpful [to consider]. [This realization, this vulnerability] has been so life changing, an affirming gift, and I shared it with my students. ...I have started to learn and realize that my identity is my love.

By leading with love as life force, as June Jordan did, Kiandra begins a vision of justice that is people-first, empathy first, in order to build solidarities with her students and allies that create a community that protects each other from harm.

When I asked Kisha at the close of our interview what else she might want to add, or what might be missing, she shared:

I just have questions: in this new generation, what's it going to look like? What's next with the students and teachers that come after us in a few years? How are they going to do it differently? How do we make sure that we last, that we're around we're healthy and you know available for the long haul to be in these institutions and continue to support our students?

Kisha is asking questions aligned with Alexander's vision of enunciating our justice dreams. The expressed continuation of a legacy of care towards students does not have to be sacrificed in the reimaging of our approach to the classroom. This space of what is possible, takes us back to hook's imagination of the classroom as the site of liberation.

Alexander asks us to:

come to understand pedagogies in multiple ways: as something given, as in handed, revealed; As in breaking through, transgressing, disrupting, displacing, inverting inherited concepts and practices, though psychic, analytic and organizational methodologies we deploy to know what we believe we know so as to make different conversations and solidarities possible; As both epistemic and ontological project bound to our beingness and, therefore, akin to Freire's formulation of pedagogy as indispensable methodology (Alexander 7).

Pedagogy, the study of teaching and learning – the making of who we are and what we know – is an active process we must engage in to make our way through.

Finding Vision by Connecting to Personal Power

What I can leave this vision with currently, is the beginning of my own rituals of vision practice, shaped by the work of Sangodare and Alexis Pauline Gumbs, who are situated in the traditions they come from (Black feminism, Black Baptists preaching, altar-building, dedication, prayer and scholarship), but vision these traditions anew through a queer, revolutionary, fugitive lens. In a recent gathering of learners, Sangodare offered a series of thought-provoking prompts, situated in the dedication practice of Gumbs. To start this work, Gumbs invited us to dedicate our work of the day to someone or something present in our lives (an ancestor, a living accomplice, a pet, an object, etc). We grounded ourselves in a thing, person, or idea that we come from – making space to honor that legacy and recognize the work we've done to get to our current place of study/ practice/ healing. With that, Sangodare invited us into the mindset of transcendence, asking how we can reclaim our power. Meditating on a thing that weighed heavy on our spirits and a thing we are grateful for, Sangodare encouraged us to find the potential link between the do, to identify what internal powers we can use to motivate us ("Transcend").

I write this conclusion as a daughter who can not fully claim the practice of Visionary Daughtering yet, but in my efforts of healing, I am working to continue to do everything it takes to be spiritually grounded (hooks, *Remembered Rapture*). As my attempts toward healing and Visionary Daughtering have existed within the constraints

of the institution, I must challenge myself to continue to do this work *for me*, beyond the academic performance, that allow for the nurture of the creative self . I stand in the legacy literary elders who tell me that this part of the work, “is non-academic; academia is not designed for that labor to happen, it’s from love and heart space. It takes rest to be present” (hooks, *Remembered Rapture*). I rest. As I vision beyond my inherited knowledge, I imagine an aliveness that brings me back to my passion for teaching and learning in community.

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