

Dehumanization of the Black American Female: An American/Hawaiian Experience

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ABSTRACT

The dehumanization of Blackness and its effects on Black females are rooted in the harsh history of slavery in America. Attributes such as race and gender impact their life and educational experiences. Examining the historical implications of dehumanization through the lens of Critical Race and Black Radical Feminist Theories provides a foundation for understanding issues surrounding gender, race, and identities of black females in society. This article uses data from 72 Black female students in Hawaii along with the author's personal experiences to investigate the implications of being Black and female in Hawaiian society.

Slavery, the most obvious example of the dehumanization of Black people, left a legacy of unequal treatment. For the purposes of this paper, dehumanization is defined as the process of depriving a person of human qualities, attributes and rights such as individuality, compassion, or civility (Feagan, 2001; Maiese, 2003). This is a process by which members of a group of people assert the inferiority of another group through subtle or overt acts or statements and may be directed by an organization (such as a state) or may be the composite of individual sentiments and actions. As such, dehumanization is a psychological process of making some people seem *less than human* or not worthy of humane treatment; dehumanization serves to morally exclude individuals from the norms of society. Maiese (2003) explains that ideology, skin color, and cognitive capacity are often criteria for exclusion and those who choose to dehumanize others tend to perceive them as a threat to their well-being.

Understanding the historical implications of dehumanization through an analysis of race, gender, and class can provide a foundation for understanding issues surrounding the identities of Black females in American society. However,

what occurs when a Black female finds herself in a specific society like Hawaii, the most ethnically diverse state in the United States? Researchers have acknowledged that the dehumanization that exists in Hawaii is often hidden within the “spirit of aloha” (Blair, 1998, Kreifels, 1999; Lee, 1948; Takara, 2002). The present dehumanization of Black females in Hawaiian society can be linked to the general history of Blacks in Hawaii, particularly those associated with the military. This study addresses the implications of being Black and female in Hawaii, and explores the attributes of Black female students and how their historical lineage to the military influences current acts of dehumanization in the Hawaiian public schools. In this study, historical literature, data from 72 Black female military dependent students (children of an active duty military member in the US Armed Forces), and the researcher’s personal experiences addresses and confronts acts of dehumanization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Four main areas of theory & research guide this study: (a) the history of Blacks in Hawaii and the impact that race and military association had on the local Hawaiian culture, (b) stereotypes that dehumanize the Black female in America, (c) the intersecting attributes of race and gender surrounding Black female military dependent students in Hawaii and (d) consequences of dehumanization that include objectification, “othering”, and self-definition.

Significant academic and social challenges for Black females in their journey through America and its educational system have been discussed on many levels in the literature. Research has examined the social problems faced by Black females in U.S. society (Banks & Banks, 1995; Brown, 1993; Davis, 1983; Gay, 1987), and many of these discussions deal with academic achievement and gender bias (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Delpit, 1995), while others emphasize behavioral issues including relationships with peers, parents, and teachers (Patton, 1995, hooks, 1992, Williams, 1998). Some literature has addressed the historical roots of Blacks in Hawaii, including Lee’s (1948) early report on the first Blacks in Hawaii, Henderson’s (1993) study of local Hawaiian teachers’ perceptions of Black students, Jackson’s (2001) historical accounts of African American military association in Hawaii, and Takara (2002), whose work emphasizes gendered racial patterns among women in Hawaii. However, research specifically addressing the interaction of race, gender, and class with regard to Black female military dependent students in Hawaii is minute. Black female students who are military dependents in Hawaii continue to go unnoticed in the literature, despite significant evidence of this group’s dehumanization by the local culture. The term “local” refers to

those people living in Hawaii who have more than one racial/ethnic background (Hawaiian, Asian, Latina, Filipino, etc.). Hence, local is defined as persons who possess two to four different ethnic identities and live on the Hawaiian Islands.

Today more than three-fourths of the Hawaiian population is made up of immigrants and Hawaiian descendents. Blacks make up 2.8 percent of the Hawaiian population. Of the 2.8 percent, the majority are associated with the military. In addition, the 2004-2005 Federal Survey Card reported a total school population in Hawaii of 183,629. Black military students made up 1.9 percent of the total school population. These students share the public schools with Hawaiians, part-Hawaiians, Filipinos, Whites, Japanese, Samoans, Chinese, Hispanics, Portuguese, Koreans, and others that are not specified. In 2003, there were reportedly 14,906 Black students attending Hawaii public schools (Awaya, 2003).

Black Military Lineage in Hawaii

African Americans are sometimes defined as involuntary immigrants in America since their migration was forced. Black people in Hawaii historically experienced dehumanization through colonialism and involuntary immigration (Ashcroft, Griffith, & Tiffin, 1998). Menton (1999) reported that the general attitudes of early explorers and missionaries about Hawaiians were that they were “dark savages against which they [missionaries] saw themselves as the light” (p. 2). Hawaiians fell within the barbarian identity defined by the colonizers and were often perceived as barbaric and savage by missionaries. Over time, Hawaiians and local residents accepted and assimilated some Eurocentric beliefs and ideas including those about African Americans (Jackson, 2004).

In 1913, the 25th Infantry Regiment, an all-Black unit of 2000 soldiers, was assigned to Schofield Barracks, a military installation on the island of *Oahu* (Jackson, 2001). This group is historically responsible for the lineage of Blacks who live in Hawaii today. Black military personnel and civilian war employees of the 25th Infantry Regiment found a welcoming environment on these islands, where Black people could live without feeling the overt bite of racism from the locals (Jackson, 2001). Jackson explains, “Black soldiers found that some locals expressed a preference for Blacks because they felt that some White servicemen were arrogant and looked down on them as being no better than Blacks, often using racial epithets” (p. 31). The Army, Navy, and Marine Corps generally maintained separate quarters for Blacks within an installation and sometimes even an altogether separate camp (Lee, 1948). Though Lee’s study is 60 years old, this analysis is significant because it emphasizes the historical linkage between dehumanization and military association in Hawaii during this time. Lee observed that White soldiers also

sought to portray Blacks as the “other” by spreading negative stereotypes of the Black servicemen throughout the islands. As these stereotypes became rooted in Hawaiian society, Blacks fell further down the social ladder as an ethnic group, with the local people becoming increasingly disdainful towards them (Jackson, 2001; Lee, 1948; Takara, 2002). Racial friction between Whites and Blacks resulted in fights and riots as tensions on the mainland increased amidst the struggle for civil rights. Negative stereotypes and generalizations of Blacks increased during the Civil Rights Movement and traveled across the Pacific Ocean. Hawaii was impacted by negative stereotypes of African Americans. Many African Americans rebelled against dehumanizing treatment, while some chose to assimilate and accept the culture. Race, however, was not the only factor that determined the status of black people in Hawaii; the military association also played a role.

Military ties forming in the islands grew over the years as military units began to come in significant numbers. The military was a key contributor to the Black community and is also associated with territorial take-over in the islands. When Hawaii became a territory in the 1900's the federal government took some of the lands and used it for parks and military bases. The government owned over 40 percent of the land in Hawaii. Through such actions, Americans demonstrated what was perceived as a lack of respect for the land and for the Hawaiian people. As Menton and Tamura (1999, p. 404) noted “Hawaiians believe that the land is religion. It is alive, respected, treasured, praised, and even worshipped...Land is the foundation of native Hawaiian culture.” In 1953, the U.S. military dropped bombs on the island of *Kaho`olawe*, and used it for war games and target practice. Many Native Hawaiians fought for the island's preservation because of its historical significance, but damage to the small island angered many Hawaiians. The military action on *Kaho`olawe* is a reminder of their marginalization and clearly described in many Hawaiian stories and legends; Hawaiians resent the military for the cultural destruction on *Kaho`olawe* (Jackson, 2001).

Black lineage in Hawaii has a strong association with the military, and a consequence of this association often results in dehumanizing treatment toward current military dependents in Hawaii. For example, as military families transition in and out of the islands they are often viewed as the “other” or “outsider,” coming in to occupy Hawaiian land. Blair (1998) explains that locals share a special language, mode of behavior, value system, and special racial experience, which separates them from “outsiders.” He goes on to say, “Continued affirmation of local identity over the past decade represents an expression of opposition to outside control and change in Hawaii and its land, peoples, and cultures...local is a distinction between “us” and “them””(p. 174). In addition, all racial stereotypes (in Hawaii) are not created equal, for the more hostile stereotypes usually refer

to darker-skinned people such as Blacks and Samoans (Blair, 1998). There is a historical context associated with race and identity in Hawaii and these factors affect individuals socially, emotionally, and academically. *The Honolulu Star Bulletin* has reported a number of racial incidents involving Black students in Hawaii schools. For example, one article, aptly titled *Is trouble brewing?* outlined ten incidents of racism in Hawaii schools related to Black students and Black female military dependent students.

The Image of the Black Female

Images of Black females are portrayed in society from many perspectives. However, “no other group in America has so had their identity socialized out of existence as have Black women” (hooks, 1981, p. 7). During slavery Black women were identified as laborers, child bearers, nannies, doctors, field hands, breeders, wives, mothers, and mistresses. Davis (1983) discusses countless tales of Black females being raped by their masters, husbands, and other male slaves. From the point of view of others, the violation of Black females was brought on by their own promiscuity (hooks, 1981). In addition, hooks emphasizes that if a Black woman wore clean clothes and presented herself in a dignified manner, she often became the victim of “white men who ridiculed and mocked her self-improvement efforts” (p. 55). Black females undoubtedly belong to two historically labeled groups: women and Black people. These two groups were labeled as subordinate and were oppressed just for being female and Black. Davis (1983) explains that African slaves often endured unique abuses “But women suffered in different ways as well, for they were victims of sexual abuse and other barbarous mistreatment that could only be inflicted on women” (p. 6). Moreover, during Reconstruction, Black males upheld patriarchal roles while they encouraged “Black women to assume a more subservient role” (hooks, 1981, p. 4). Today, Black women continue to find their intellectual, physical, social, and educational capabilities challenged in society (Morton, 1991) through objectification, “othering” and self-definition.

Objectification, the Other, and Self-definition

Objectification distinguishes a person as different and/or inferior, and is central to the process of oppositional difference. In any context, objectification forces an individual to self-define. People who are dehumanized are often defined as “other” on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, and other cultural attributes. A person is objectified as an *other* when they are viewed as “an object to be manipulated and controlled” (Collins, 1990, p. 69). As well, “The enslaved African American woman

became the basis for the definition of our society's "*Other*" (Christian, 1985, p.160). The image of the Black woman is the opposite of the colonizer. She is not male, she is not White, and she is generally not affluent. Christian (1985) explains that as long as the image of "*Other*" is attached to the Black woman, it will provide an ideological justification for race, gender, and class oppression. Marking a person as "*Other*" contributes to the process of stereotyping and dehumanization.

When minority children constantly hear racial epithets, as derived from stereotypes, they begin to question their competence, intelligence, and self-worth (Delgado, 1995). Oftentimes, they define who they by what is required to fit in, and this can be associated with physical appearances such as lighter vs. darker skin complexions and hair textures. Skin complexions and hair textures are major identity issues raised by Black Radical Feminists with regard to a color caste hierarchy (hooks, 1990, 1992; Takara, 2002; Williams, 1997). It is evident that Black females come in all shades and colors, from light skin to brown to dark brown, to different hair textures (curly and straight), and styles (braids, corn rows, dreadlocks); however, skin complexion is an important variable for understanding Black female's racial identity. Nevertheless, being singled out because of one's physical attributes is a racist act and significant to the process of dehumanization.

Collins (1990) states that, "The journey toward self-definition offers a powerful challenge to the externally defined" (p. 106). She notes that there is power behind self-definition because it allows the Black woman to explore two lives, one for the dominant group and one for themselves. Further, "Denial is another characteristic [of self-definition]. By claiming that they are not like the rest, some Black women reject connections to other Black women and demand special treatment for themselves" (Collins, 1990, p. 84). Self-definition entails members of minority groups to take on the mannerisms of the dominant group in order to adopt an illusion of acceptance in their society. However, individuals might assume the cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, without necessarily internalizing them, in hopes of evading dehumanization (Ashcroft et al., 1998). Looking at the constructive acts of dehumanization, this study is based on the history of Blacks in the military in Hawaii, the history of Black females in America, and the researcher's personal experiences. In addition, this study analyzes the challenges of Black female military dependents students in Hawaii as derived from the complex interplay of race and gender.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY AND BLACK RADICAL FEMINIST THEORY

Critical Race Theory (CRT) challenges the dominant cultural view by using race as

an analytical tool (Bell, 1987; Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado, 1995; Irvine, 2003). CRT argues that race and ethnicity are the primary determining factors that affect a person's status within an historical context. Race as an analytical tool, rather than a biological or socially constructed category, can deepen the analysis of educational barriers for people of color (Sleeter, 2002). Previous research found that Blacks had a harder time culturally assimilating in Hawaii because of their race (Lee, 1948). More recent work based on data from Black students, parents, teachers, administrators and local Hawaiian educators supports the conclusion that Black females experience difficulty culturally assimilating into the Hawaiian culture and are often dehumanized (Hairston, 2004). Intersectionality is a theme recognized by critical race theorists (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Research on the intersectionality of race, gender, and class emphasize how these factors often link together to form complex multiple identities and become targets for dehumanization that result in both internal and external conflicts (Davis, 1983; hooks, 1990; Ogbu, 2003; Tatum, 1997).

Also significant to this study is narrative voice. Critical Race Theory identifies the internal and external voices of minorities and employs narrative and storytelling methods to share their experiences. The storytelling method allows the scholar to step outside of the realm of formal reporting and provide literary and narrative effects to give victims of discrimination and oppression a voice. "Stories also serve a powerful psychic function for minority communities. Many victims of racial discrimination suffer in silence or blame themselves for their predicaments. Stories can give them voice and reveal that others have similar experiences" (Delgado, 2001, p. 43). The primary goal storytelling in this study was to link the worlds of people of color with those who are unfamiliar with their experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2002). Through narrative, the link between younger and more experienced Black women is made evident and personal connections to dehumanization are exemplified.

The second theoretical perspective, Black Radical Feminist Theory (BRFT), also emphasize the intersectionality of race and gender. This framework explains how these attributes determine the social construction of an individual and elucidates the extent to which the person will suffer exploitation and domination in society (hooks, 1989). BRFT reinforces the notion that in order to understand the repercussions and coping strategies of being Black female military dependent students in Hawaii, one must understand their history and hear their voices.

METHODOLOGY

Critical race theorists emphasize the use of stories and narratives as a means of

building cohesion with minority groups and shattering the mindset of stories created by the dominant group (Delgado & Stefancic, 2002). The CRT qualitative context captures the essence of the voices for the study and is framed by BRFT, which emphasizes the importance the role of the researcher takes in a study where she shares the same gender and race as the participants.

The Perspective of the Researcher

One BRFT narrative technique used in this study is the voice of the researcher. As researcher, Black female, former military dependent, and educator, the author's experiences enhanced the analysis in the study. Collins (1990) states:

One key role for Black women intellectuals is to ask the right questions and investigate all dimensions of a Black women's standpoint with and for African-American women. Black women intellectuals thus stand in a special relationship to the community of African-American women of which we are a part, and this special relationship frames the contours of Black feminist thought. (p. 6)

Moreover, she notes, "All African-American women share the common experience of being Black women in a society that denigrates women of African descent" (p. 5). In this article, the researcher's voice substantiates experiences of being Black and female.

Context for the study

The study was conducted in eight military impacted schools (with large military student populations) in Hawaii. There were 16 military housing facilities on this particular island and within these areas, 39 military impacted schools with a total military population of 183,629, and a total military Black population of 14,906 (Federal Survey Card, 2003-2004). Seventeen of these schools have military populations over 50 percent; the lowest was reportedly 50.7 percent and the highest was 99.7 percent military dependents. Each of the Black students attending these schools was a military dependent.

Participants

There were 72 Black female military dependent students out of a total of 115

Black students who participated in this study. Demographically, the participants were identified by their parents and/or the individual schools' ethnicity reports as African America, Black or mixed (Black with another ethnicity). All participants were enrolled in grades three through twelve. Ages ranged from 8 to 19 years old. The participants displayed a diverse range of attributes in personalities, physical appearances, abilities and disabilities, academic achievements, parents' military ranking, and their social and academic interactions with peers, family and teachers.

Data Collection

During the twelve months of the study, two data sources were collected: open-ended questionnaires and focus group interviews. The author's personal experiences as a Black female teacher in Hawaii were also part of the data analysis. Participants' questionnaire responses were collected during the focus group interview sessions. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather information about each individual participant and generate narratives. Data from focus group meetings were collected during the first six months of the study, at the participants' school sites. Over the course of the researcher's life and time spent in Hawaii, a personal journal was kept with explicit poetry and dialogue about race, gender and class experiences. Portions of the journal were condensed into a narrative and included to demonstrate the acts and consequences of dehumanization as a Black female.

Data Sources

Questionnaire: The questionnaire had two purposes. First, to gather each participant's age, grade, and military branch with which they (and their parents) were associated. Second, two broad open-ended response questions were included for the participants to share personal stories and experiences about being a Black female military dependent student in Hawaii: (1) What does it mean to be a Black female in America, and (2) What have been your experiences as a Black female military dependent with regard to race, gender, military association?; How did these experiences influence your interactions with locals at your school? The responses to the questions generated narratives that represented a means for understanding experiences. Within these narratives, the stories and experiences of the participants were revealed (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The narratives generated by the questionnaire allowed the voices of Black female military dependents to be heard and revealed the cultural and social patterns through which individuals perceived their experiences. In the same sense, the *researcher's voice* enhances the plausibility

of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). By overcoming the barrier of formal writing and offering a dislodge version that is rooted in a person's experience through this methodology, the voices of the oppressed are heard (Delgado & Stefancic, 2002).

Focus group meetings: Focus group interviews were chosen as a data source because this type of interview generates data from a variety of sources in a social context (Patton, 2002). Nineteen focus group sessions were conducted in all. There were 6-8 participants in each session. Each group session was audio and video taped and dialogues were transcribed. Limitations with the focus group interviews included: some individuals dominated the conversation and others strayed from the topic. As well, it is possible that some could have agreed with their peers because they sought approval and some may have held back information.

Data Analysis Framework

The qualitative approach utilized to analyze the data is connected to the storytelling and narrative inquiry presented in CRT. The questionnaire and focus group interview sessions were analyzed for thematic content using a coding system. This coding system involves searching through data for regularities and patterns, jotting down coding categories as data is collected for future use, and developing a list of coding categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The participant responses were coded with regard to specific key words and phrases, themes, and into categories of similarities and differences in experiences.

Validity

The participant responses and experiences were then triangulated with other themes across data sources (researcher's narrative) and through member checking. During a second visit at each of the eight school sites, participants attended an open assembly forum. Prior to the forum, participants were given a transcript of their interview session and were asked to return the transcripts with any editing and additional comments that might clarify their responses.

FINDINGS

Participant responses were divided into two categories: (1) Black females who are ethnically mixed and/or have lighter skin complexions and (2) Black females who are mixed and/or have darker skin complexions. Findings revealed three connecting themes that captured participants' experiences in this study that confirmed evidence of dehumanization toward them from local students and teachers in their schools.

Dehumanizing tactics included: racial epithets (stereotyping) – objectification (“othering”) – identification (self-redefining).

Racial Epithets (Stereotyping)

Data revealed that all of the female participants experienced racism in school through stereotyping from local students and/or teachers. Sixty-seven of the 72 participants referred to name-calling and stereotyping as a form of racism and all of the participants were called a nigger at school. Data revealed that 50 percent had been called a nigger in Hawaii more often than on the mainland. Moreover, 12 of the elementary students revealed that their first experience of being called a nigger was in Hawaii. In addition to being dehumanized by the historical term nigger, other racial epithets attacked their race, gender and military dependent status. The following is a composite of the slurs:

“Nigger!” “Dumb Nigger!” “White Nigger!” “Oreo!” “Ignorant!” “Chicken eater!” “Coco lips!” “Charcoal!” “Red bone!” “Military Brat!” “Cotton Picker!” “Darkie!” “Blackey!” “Dirty!” “Chocolate Milk!” “Chocolate Ice-cream!” “Land Stealer!” “African Booty-Scratcher!” “Black African!” “Big Black lips!” “Monkey!” “Ape!” “Stupid Black girl!” “Weirdo!” “Black bitch!” “Black ho!” “Black heffa!” “Popolo!”

These racial epithets referenced their race, gender, and military association; however race in relation to the participant’s complexion served as an added complexity to the slurs. For dark skinned participants, darkie, blackey and chocolate preceded the slurs, and for light-skinned participants, white, ghost and red bone preceded the slurs. Participants stated that *nigger*, *cotton picker*, *black ho*, *black bitch*, and *popolo* were the most offensive slurs. One participant, Vanessa, explained that, “Popolo means purple when African-Americans arrived in the islands; this is what the Hawaiians called Black people.” When some students reported the racial slur to their local teachers, the teachers either ignored the incident or told the students not to take it “so seriously.” One participant, Michelle, stated that her teacher commented: “If people take race seriously in Hawaii, they will have an unpleasant experience here.” Data revealed that during the focus group discussions, participants were often blamed for their perceived problems with assimilating into Hawaii schools. Students stated that local teachers made comments such as: “She brings issues of racism on herself” and “Black students expect to be treated differently and often trouble finds them.”

In summary, these data suggest that Black female military dependent students were constructed as the problem, rather than the racist attitudes and actions toward them. Instead of finding solutions for racism and stereotyping, the participants were expected to accept the “objectified” words used to describe them.

Objectification (“othering”)

Data revealed objectification of the participants and incidents where they were made to feel as an “other”. Incidents with light skinned female participants occurred most often from a cultural assimilation perspective. Physically this group has fairer skin, straighter hair and consider themselves accepted into the local culture. The majority of these participants admitted that they mimic the local culture by taking hula, “talking local” (using pigeon – a form of local dialect) and/or having local friends. One participant, Jasmine, stated:

My teachers and friends treat me nice and we spend a lot of time together because I take hula in the local community. My teacher is my dance instructor. They don’t believe that I’m Black because I’m light skinned, I can talk pigeon and I look local, it’s cool, we all get along great. I had a strange conversation with one of my local friends. She was asking me why my skin was so light and could not believe that I am Black. I tried to explain and I finally said, “If I’m not Black, then do you think I’m white?” She replied, “I don’t know what you are, I don’t consider you Black, you’re just different. That kinda hurt my feelings!”

With regard to the darker skinned participants, more negative and degrading signs of “othering” surfaced. During focus group meetings, several of the females shed tears, expressed humiliation and displayed anger. One participant, Sharon, expressed:

Local girls are a trip. They are very pretty, but they talk about and make fun of me. My favorite comments from them are: “You’re pretty for a dark skinned girl,” or, “Is that your hair, is it a weave, why is it braided because it is so nappy? Black girls can be very creative with their hair!” They make me feel so out of place! I stay to myself in school or hang with the other Black girls from base, I feel safer when I do this. Just the other day this local kid called me a Black bitch, he was mad because he thought I passed him in

the lunch line. I don't feel accepted in Hawaii. I've been called a Black heffa and military brat bitch by the local girls, a nigger by the local boys and that really makes me mad! They don't treat me like a person, and sometimes I wonder if it would be easier if I could change who I am.

To summarize, these findings revealed that the participants, in both groups were made to feel inferior and/or question their race and culture. Some of the participants began to define who they were as Black female military dependent students in Hawaii.

Identification (self-defining)

Data revealed that in both categories of participants, questions about who they were and how they appeared to others surfaced. For some of the participants, self-definition entailed taking on the mannerisms of local culture in order to adopt an illusion of acceptance in society. These data show that the physical appearance of participants in the ethnically mixed/lighter skin category were more similar to the local population than the darker skin group. As such, these females had an easier time "fitting in" with the local identity. However, some of these participants admitted that they do not associate with other Black students at school and consider themselves to have more in common with their local friends. One participant, Denise, explains:

I have a lot of friends at church. They are different from the friends that I hang with at school, and I keep them separate because the interest levels of the two groups are totally different. I like going to church because I can be me.

But when I'm at school, I don't need to be around Black people. One day I was with my local friends and this Black teacher walks directly up to me. She didn't acknowledge my friends, just me. I know it was because I was Black. Don't get me wrong she was nice, but there were no introductions she just started asking me if I knew so and so. Then she wondered if we could be related. My friends were looking at me. I felt so embarrassed. I don't know why I felt embarrassed maybe it was because I felt like she put me on the spot. Now whenever I see her, I wave my hand quickly and try to avoid her. I do everything I can to "be local". I just want to be

accepted for being me and not just for being another Black person.
I am proud of my race, but I...I don't know.

Denise felt ashamed when the Black teacher acknowledged her Blackness. She felt that if her identity was pointed out, her local friends may not accept her. She states, "I felt so embarrassed." She needed to separate herself from this identity to feel comfortable in the local school setting. This is evidence of denial. She chose to identify and mimic activities that associated her with the local culture in order to be socially accepted. However, when she was at church, she was in the presence of a majority of Black people and she stated "I can be myself". At school the local culture was the majority. Denise is proud of her culture, but in front of her local friends she is embarrassed and did not want to be labeled as Black, thus, walking with "one foot in two worlds." Denise shifted her identity to fit the situation and self-defined herself as an individual with no attachment to race.

In summary, data revealed that Black female military dependent students were constructed as the problem, rather than the racist attitudes and actions toward them. Although they all had been called a nigger, been victims of dehumanization with regard to objectification, they still chose to self-define in order to fit into a society. The impact of wanting to fit in and not stand out, points to evidence of inferiority, thus dehumanization was occurring.

The Researcher's Voice – A Black Female Experience

As a Black woman professor working in the field of education, my identity is often challenged. I have been Black and female all my life, a teacher for 10 years, and a professor of education for three. In order to fully understand dehumanization, I believe one has to experience it. My experiences in America appear to be Black and white, literally. I know I am Black—no surprises, at least not for me. Everyone seems to understand who I am based on them knowing me personally or by believing in stereotypes that have been embedded in their minds stemming back to slavery. Throughout my life, I was dehumanized by other people, both in and outside of my race. I was objectified and made to feel as an "other" and I defined myself based on what I was experiencing at the time.

Growing up, my race and the color of my skin came up a lot in school. Seeing as though I am the lightest of my siblings, I was often called, "white girl," "white nigger," "want-a-be," and "red bone" by both Black and White kids. I can remember my brother fighting many battles on my behalf for the tears that I shed. The old saying—names can never hurt—is a lie because my spirit and my self-identity were deeply wounded. Sometimes, on hot Virginia days of 101 degrees, I would

bask in the sun trying to get darker so that I could fit in, with my darker skinned Black friends and relatives.

As I grew up I began to feel more comfortable in my skin; however, I continued to face challenges of being a Black female. I came to Hawaii looking for serenity. I did not realize that I would miss my culture so much. I saw other Black people on base, at church, in the beauty shop, and at functions specifically for Blacks. However, when I discovered Dr. Jackson's book, *And They Came*, I learned the history of the first Blacks in Hawaii. Prior to this book, I had no prior knowledge of Black History in Hawaii. This book was the first sign for me that there were historical roots of my culture in the Hawaiian Islands.

As a dependent in the military, I often faced stereotypes and sneers from locals. It can be irritating to always be associated with the military as a dependent because dependents are not active duty service members. We usually have civilian jobs, our children attend local schools, and we are just different from our active duty parents and spouses. Many locals make comments such as: military members live off the government or "live free" in Hawaii. I worked hard, so I knew I was not in Hawaii without paying. Moreover, living in Hawaii as a military dependent gave me a chance to experience segregation by living on a military base away from local culture.

Negative experiences regarding my race and gender occurred when I was a 6th grade teacher in Hawaii working at a heavily impacted military school on one of the bases. A fellow teacher at work, who also labeled my class as the loudest at the school because, as she put it, "All Black people are loud," called me a nigger! I later found out that she did not like me because her husband had left her for a Black woman, so since I was a Black woman....(it doesn't make sense!). I politely excused her from my presence and reported the incident to the office. Both incidents were reported to the administrator, the local Hawaii teacher association representative, and the local Civil Rights Commission. Unfortunately, she was still allowed to continue to work in the school. On a positive note, as a teacher in Hawaii I became aware of certain issues and concerns not only dealing with the environment, but also regarding military students. I became particularly interested in Black students and their families, but many of the other minority parents, along with Black parents, brought their problems, questions, and concerns to me.

I came to Hawaii from Virginia with expertise as a multicultural educator. The students at the school were all military dependents and came from all ethnic backgrounds, and had lived in many places around the world. Multicultural education fit perfectly into my classroom. I often wondered and questioned if the local teachers understood military culture and the transitions students endured at the heavily impacted military schools. As well, I was the only Black teacher at this

particular school and I became the role model for many minority students. It was from these experiences and questions that I decided to pursue a doctorate and my research focus centered on Black military students in Hawaii public schools.

My experiences as a young Black female and educator are not common stories in Hawaii or in general for that matter. Listening and talking to other Black women, I heard similarities in experiences surrounding our race and gender. Overtime, my personal experiences as a child and a teacher allowed me to identify and understand the degrading effects of dehumanization. Attacks on my race as a child and an adult, attacks on my gender as a teen and an adult, are all examples of others trying to objectify me and make me feel less than human. I did define and redefine myself many times based on each experience. However the experiences allowed me to see that at the end of each day I am a Black woman. Therefore my research agenda concentrates on issues and experiences of race and gender to remind others about the importance of diversity, multiculturalism, and the effects dehumanization. These are growing experiences and life long lessons that have made me stronger.

DISCUSSION

The unique perceptions and experiences of Black female military dependent students became evident through the voices presented in this article. Critical Race Theory and Black Radical Feminist theory placed race and gender at the forefront of this study and showed how race and gender exerts their own unique influence on human experience (Brown, 1993). Moreover, by utilizing storytelling and narrative inquiry, personal construction of Black female military dependent students' worlds were revealed through focus group interviews, questionnaires, and the researcher's own voice (Tesch, 1987). As a Black female scholar, my experiences in life and in Hawaii laid the foundation for the study. As Berry (2002) aptly observed, "One's life experiences influence all aspects of the research process...the topic one chooses to research, the kind of research one chooses to do, how one interprets the data collected, and even the conclusion to which one comes" (p.145).

Researcher's Voice

As Black women, I believe we must hold true to our cultural identities and educate others about who we are, where we came from, where we are going, and what we believe with regard to how we are perceived in American society. Data in this study revealed and confirmed that acts of dehumanization are occurring toward Black female military dependent students in Hawaii. Over the past few years, I gradually

moved into the rainbow, and back to mainland America. I now know that hearing the voices of the female students in Hawaii was cause for my gradual movement toward understanding historical and personal experiences of dehumanization in America. Only I can define who “I am”; others may try, but the definition is truly within my cultural heritage and identities. When I arrived in Hawaii and began my research, I was on top of the world—above the rainbows that filled the perfect sky. As I journeyed through this study, I found that society had placed my culture somewhere under the rainbow. I searched for Black history and its proper place on the islands and in America. Through my life experiences and the experiences with the Black females in my study, I cannot go on allowing society to get away with the insensitive process of dehumanization, and, more importantly, how they define who we are. The racialization of skin color and hair texture as described by myself and the participants of the study supports the notion that Black females are considered as “other” in American society. Aesthetics of Black women continues to drive research of Black feminists (Delpit, 2002; hooks, 1981, 1992). The participants in this study must define themselves and continue to acknowledge that while being a Black female in America has its challenges, it also represents a beautiful, albeit complex experience.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

As researchers, educators, parents, politicians and others continue to contribute to our knowledge about the nature, quality and value of teaching about the effects of dehumanization it is possible that understanding and recognizing that racism is a normal part of American society will become easier. Society must first acknowledge racism in order for it to be defeated. Cultural and political conditions and experiences of different ethnic groups can become positive symbols in America. As Maya Angelou observed, “Black women whose ancestors were brought to the United States beginning in 1619 have lived through conditions of cruelty so horrible, so bizarre, the women had to reinvent themselves” (cited in Newman, 2000, p. 371). There is no doubt that Black women are still inventing, compromising, and overcoming identities of race and gender in America.

In mainland American schools, the targets for dehumanization continue to be minority children via their race, gender, class, language, and other cultural attributes. In Hawaii, one of the targets is Black female military dependent students. The experiences of these students are inextricably linked to histories of military and Black female lineage in America. Societal and historical perceptions have placed them at the bottom of Hawaii’s social ladder. It is time for them to climb the ladder and speak up!

This study can serve as a resource for local teachers, Black military families moving to Hawaii, the local population, the Hawaii Department of Education, and other researchers who wish to further investigate the experiences of Black and other groups of students on the Hawaiian Islands. Through diversity training and multicultural curriculum development, educators can use the findings of this study to further identify and discuss issues in the Hawaii school system that will focus on: (1) the absence of multicultural education; (2) the absence of culturally responsive teachers; and (3) the absence of Black teachers and administrators as role models.

These data point to how race and gender are major dynamics in society. It displays the importance of allowing marginalized voices to begin a conversation about issues of race and gender (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Future research includes following up with the female participants in order to conduct more in-depth case study analysis and explore the implications that dehumanization has on their educational and social experiences in Hawaiian schools. In addition, African-Americans need to educate themselves about the local Hawaiian culture, and the local Hawaiian culture needs to be educated about African-American and military cultures. Currently, the Hawaii Joint Venture Education Forum (JVEF), which is a cooperative group that includes military, community and school participants, are working to assist the Hawaii Department of Education in their understanding and support of the needs of military children and families transitioning to Hawaii. It is my recommendation that the JVEF use the data from this study to address issues regarding African-American military students in their current military courses. I also recommend that the policy makers consider making the military culture courses mandatory, especially for those teachers that teach at heavily impacted military schools. In addition, the military needs to provide information to families coming to Hawaii that incorporates both positive and negative factors about the local culture. This may decrease cultural shock among African American students attending local Hawaiian schools.

The inclusion of marginalized voices open a window into ignored or alternative realities for members of a dominant racial group who cannot easily grasp what it is like to be nonwhite (Bell, 1987). How should an individual define themselves in a society that often judges by attributes like race and gender? The definition lies within each individual experience and story and only “we” can define ourselves. I say...

I am. I am a woman.

I am a Black woman.

I am a light-skinned Black woman.

I am who I am!

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