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## Epistemologies of Family: Intentionally Centering Relationality, Mutuality and Care in Educational Research

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### ABSTRACT

This article resulted from an American Education Research Association (AERA) conference presentation that consisted of a dialogue between three scholar-siblings of color who use methodological pathways that intentionally center relationality, mutuality, and care in educational research. The authors do this work understanding that familial ways of knowing and being are resources that contribute to the survival and thriving of BIPOC communities in the face of white supremacist structures. The authors' conversation discusses how they disrupt the white western gaze by relying on the critical mass of Black, Indigenous, and other scholars of color who refuse exploitive methods and, instead, charted new methodological pathways that (re)center cultural, familial, and tribal ways of knowing. Given the authors' positionalities, the communities and families that collectively raised them, and the extended scholarly family who have nurtured and supported them in their efforts to push against extractive research practices, the authors attend to the ways knowledge is shaped at the intersections of race and gender. This dialogue contends that there are sophisticated knowledges, ways of knowing, and ways of being rooted in the experience of marginalized families caring for one another and fighting for each other's rights.

We come together as scholar-siblings of color, working alongside, supporting, valuing, and validating methodologies that center the heart in our work. We acknowledge that the Western methodological gaze often positions work that (re)centers relationships in research as less rigorous or even unethical. Although this gaze is powerful and sometime paralyzing, we move beyond it by relying on the critical mass of Black, Indigenous, and other scholars of color who refuse extractive and exploitive methods and, instead, chart new methodological pathways that (re)center cultural, familial, and tribal ways of knowing and being in relation to the lands and people to which they are connected. Many of these guides have become our academic elders and mentors through the National Council of Teachers of English Cultivating New Voices Among Scholars of Color program. These methodological pathways that intentionally center relationality, mutuality, and care in educational research have allowed us to understand that familial ways of knowing and being contribute to the survival and thriving of BIPOC communities in the face of structures that refuse to acknowledge such beauty, brilliance, and joy. Because of who we are, the communities and families that collectively raised us, and the extended scholarly family who have nurtured and supported us in our efforts to push against extractive research practices, we attend to the ways knowledge is shaped at the intersections of race and gender.

We contend that there are sophisticated knowledges, ways of knowing, and ways of being rooted in the experiences of marginalized peoples and families caring for one another and fighting for each other's rights. Through, what we are referencing as, *epistemologies of family*, we (Hui-Ling, Grace, and Timothy) position and are positioned by those we work with as loved ones and we take that position very seriously.

Much like our training, qualitative researchers are often taught to engage in research that develops questions, collects data, and then exits the field once a sufficient amount of information has been gathered. We are concerned that, without negotiating the tensions of identity and power researchers bring to their focal setting, a sense of carelessness for participants may arise even when the researcher frames their study through critical perspectives. We acknowledge that we are not immune to these pressures; however, we envision our recorded conversation below as a necessary pause<sup>1</sup> (Patel, 2014) in order to explore, deepen, and honor the ways we have come to be in-relation with others, what Tachine and Nicolazzo (2022) describe as *weaving an otherwise*<sup>2</sup> as a way to “align research with our heart, values, visions, and hopes” (p. 2).

Our conceptualization of the epistemologies of the family are a product of our location within scholarly families that have cherished us, pushed us, taught us, collaborated with us, mentored us, and modeled for us what it means to work with vulnerability, care, and responsibility. We draw on research lineages that describe what it means to engage in humanizing and decolonizing methodology (Campano et al., 2016; Paris, 2011; Paris & Winn, 2013; Smith, 1999) as consistent with anti-racist, decolonial, and critical theories that frame our studies (Anzaldúa, 1999; Collins, 2000; Lorde, 1984). Both through our interpersonal relationships and our relationships to others’ scholarship, our research has evolved. Scholars have long established that research is not neutral nor objective (Erickson, 2006; Milner, 2007). As people, we leave our settings, participants, and selves differently than before we entered (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As emphasized by San Pedro and Kinloch (2017) who, in reflecting upon their researcher positionalities, state: “we impact and are impacted by various places and people, and we emphasize this impact because it contributes to how we story and re-story our interactions” (p. 381S). Humanizing methodologies (Paris & Winn, 2013) demand that researchers negotiate their own positionalities as they build trustworthy relationships with participants (Edwards et al., 2016). Because our research encompasses critical frames that interrogate identity and power, it is important that we negotiate the tensions when seeking or waiting to be invited into space with others, the time it takes to build authentic, meaningful, and reciprocal relationships, how we approach co-analysis strategies, and reciprocity when we envision how the knowledges shaped and shared with us will be shared beyond us (San Pedro et al., 2020). We seek to explore methodologies that do not reproduce colonial endeavors through our research and instead become what la paperson (2017) calls a “scyborg-<sup>3</sup>” reassembling oneself and institutional tools for decolonial purposes. We recognize our challenge to conduct ourselves as abolitionists<sup>4</sup> (Love, 2019) and look toward liberation rather than just “completing” a study. Drawing upon these lineages, the questions that we hope guide your entry and connection into our conversation are:

- (1) If we want our research to push the field, how are we pushing ourselves to maintain integrity and invest in the communities we study to build knowledge that uplifts the collective toward equity? (see also Regalado et al., 2023)
- (2) What does it mean for us to study race, identity, sexuality, intersectionality, power, and oppression as we negotiate the *ways* we conduct our study?
- (3) How do we ground our research in mutuality and care as the foundation of our work?

Our work, herein, is an exploration, through conversation, of the ways we have intentionally centered relationships in research and the ways mutuality and care strengthened our bonds to community and provided more direct avenues to join in freedom and liberation movements with those who welcomed us into their lives. Our conversation addresses, directly or indirectly, our three guiding questions above. To better contextualize our conversation, we first introduce ourselves as well as position our relationships to each other. Then, each of us shares the context of the work that we make reference to during multiple recorded conversations in which we discuss the intentional ways we center relationships in our work. Finally, we invite you, the reader, to listen into our conversation as we make sense of the differences and commonalities of our relational work. It’s our hope that we build toward our main offering in sharing this with new audiences—our lives and our work are so closely intertwined that our

relationships to community, to those who choose to work with us, and us to them, delve into areas of mutuality and care that ought be viewed as methodological assets as we build with others toward liberation and freedom through education.

Hui-Ling S. Malone is a biracial Black and Chinese woman whose research explores how community is taken up within schooling in BIPOC spaces for the purpose of educational justice. Her work is driven through the pursuit of decoloniality and healing in education. Using African oriented epistemologies of community, her work is rooted in the collective wellbeing of youth, families, and grassroots organizers and community members.

Grace Player is a Japanese American mixed race woman with maternal roots in Brazil. Her work in this world as an educator, researcher, writer, and artist build from the lessons taught to her by her migrant mother, by her existence and experiences as a raced-gendered daughter, sister, and auntie, and by her commune with other People of Color committed to resistance to whiteness and coloniality. Her research centers the lives, multiliteracies, and knowledges of Girls and Women of Color as the foundations for coalitional liberatory work in educational spaces and beyond.

Timothy San Pedro is Filipino-American who, from the age of four years old, grew up on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Western Montana, home to the Séliš, Ksanka, and Q̓lispé tribes. From this early age, he was welcomed into the homes, lives, and stories of his Native American friends and became chosen family to many of his peers. It is from his schooling experience on the reservation that he became aware of curricular injustices occurring in his classrooms where tribal knowledges and lessons offered in community were blockaded from the school walls. He saw the negative impacts this had upon his friends. His research and work has always come back to the fundamental question: What is happening in curricular and pedagogical choices in schooling spaces that is preventing or allowing for joy and liberation through knowing one's self in relation to others?

## Storying through mutuality and care: a conversation

**Hui-Ling:** We have been thinking a lot about relationality, mutuality, and care and how we conduct our research, how we think about our participants, and executing a project that is humanizing and beneficial for everybody, not just ourselves as we explore questions and gain new knowledge. We ask ourselves, what will our projects do for the communities that we're working in, and how is it uplifting a greater collective larger than ourselves? So we're going to have a conversation today about that and how we've done it in our work, and I'm just excited to learn from both of you!

**Timothy:** Me too! I just really appreciate that our questions are still in-process, emerging, and in construction and we are showing what that looks like! So this first question is:

### *How did, or do you, see yourself in your participants? What role did or does that play in your methodological approach?*

**Hui-Ling:** Yeah, so, I start with myself because I'm taking up the great Yolanda Sealey Ruiz's "archaeology of self"<sup>5</sup> (Sealey-Ruiz & Mentor, 2021) and just thinking about who I am and, then, how that plays on how I see myself and my participants. I come from a big family. There's six of us siblings. I am biracial. My dad is black American, a descendent of enslaved Africans, my mom is East Asian, Chinese, but grew up in Taiwan. And we were like such an anomaly where we grew up, I never saw anyone that looked like me or was mixed like me. In my schooling I felt like my identity was just totally erased. And my parents did a really good job just trying to instill in us our own cultural heritage and values. And, you know, eventually, after reading Black history books, and watching Roots, and reading Malcolm X, and all of that stuff and going to Chinese school I became really proud of who

I was. And when I started my teaching career in Detroit, Michigan, I knew I wanted to go into education to provide an education that was validating, that was student centered, that was empowering. And, when I went into research, I wanted to do the same. I wanted to learn from young people. I saw these young people as agents of change. Young people who I could really learn from who had rich stories and rich backgrounds that maybe aren't always recognized in mainstream schooling narratives. And I saw myself in them as just these dynamic, young people who want to fulfill their potentials and do something to better their worlds and the worlds of others. What about you, Tim?

**Timothy:** I'm learning so much with you, Hui-Ling! For me, it has been a real gift and a blessing to have the ability to say that that the women in my life raised me and continue to support and love me in the work that I do. Being Filipino-American and growing up in a reservation, I had to learn that our histories were different, mine being a second generation immigrant from the Philippines, theirs being of these lands, waters, and places since time immemorial. I was taught the importance of invitation into settings and stories. I learned that there were stories and lessons for me and some that were not and that I would be invited into those when and if the time was right. When these invitations into the lives of the Séliš, Ksanka, and Qlispé and their families came, I became immersed in their stories and knowledges. And when I was growing up, I feel like I began to develop a critical consciousness, around my sophomore leading into my junior year, particularly in my history and English language arts courses, where there was no mention of my friends or their families or their important contributions to the land and to knowledges that were shared in the community and in their homes and you know, I felt myself becoming disengaged, as were my friends who are Native American. We all resisted in different ways. Some of my friends resisted by either leaving school to go to another reservation school that had a higher population of Native students, or they were pushed out of school altogether. And so for me, the question that drives me is what was happening in our education that was leading us to become disengaged or to resist the curriculum that we were being taught and the ways that we were being taught? And so that led me on the path I'm on now. For me, that through line question of, how do we see ourselves in the work that we do? How do our relationships impact the work we do? I feel like by centering my positionality in the work that I do, the lens through which I view this world, it strengthens my work because it centers my why. And that lens is one that's crafted by important questions that have been taking shape throughout my life. And they lead to the projects that I do.

**Grace:** Just continuing on this kind of archaeology of the self, for me, it starts . . . Well, it starts a long time ago. I'll start by tracing it through my mother's history first; she is the daughter of Japanese immigrants to Brazil, and then, herself, an immigrant to the United States. I think about these migration patterns and what motivated them, what caused them to leave their homes and start over again in new places, new lands that were unfamiliar, uncomfortable, often hostile in different ways, and try to make something new where they landed. So, my mother came to the United States, because she felt kind of constrained by a lot of the ways that patriarchy shaped her family life, as well as the situation she was in. Her father didn't want her to go to school, he wanted her to stay and work on their farm. And the only reason why she was able to go to school is because her sister saved up money, and gave it all to her and said, "You're going to be the one who goes to school" and that eventually led her to come to the United States to learn English. In raising us, her efforts to protect us, were rooted in this kind of assimilationist model where we didn't learn Portuguese. So, I'm the monolingual daughter of a trilingual mother; I can't communicate with my family in Brazil in the ways that I wish that I could. She put us through private school, even when we couldn't afford it. And, then, I had to figure out how to survive these spaces she thought were best for me—for example, I found my homegirls in those spaces, my girl of color friends, all of us daughters of immigrants. and together, we built safe havens

within this very white schooling system that we were put through because our parents thought it was a way to protect us, to bring us closer to the safety they thought lay in whiteness.

But, when I think about ideas of mutuality, of care, of relationality, I think about my mother's story and how it translates my own story. I think about the ways that she often didn't know how to care for me and my sister in ways that allowed us to be fully ourselves, to connect with our histories, because she was taught, through the lens of whiteness and patriarchy, that we should be whiter, and we should be these very specific ways of being smart and successful, and all of this stuff that placed us in often dangerous, or at least, not happy places throughout our schooling experiences. But I do know, from the endless conversations that my mom and I have been lucky enough to have, these were the ways that she thought she was protecting us.

So, what brings me to my research, then, is thinking about how we create spaces where girls are learning to be fully themselves and caring and build on those ideas of mutuality, care, and sisterhood, in ways that are healthy, that come from a place where they can be fully themselves and learn from one another; build new ways of being in solidarity with one another; move forward in ways that I don't think my mother had the capacity for and, therefore, in many ways *I* did not have the capacity to do. So, a lot of my research is focused on thinking about what are the beautiful spaces that we can build with girls, with their dreams, their motivations, their relationships, their knowledge at center.

With that, I'm going to throw this question to Tim.

### ***What is your process of entering a community for the purpose of research? How do you think about relationship building?***

**Timothy:** I'm thinking right now about the ways that relationships are feigned, or are sort of surface level in order to gain access, that we have terms like "cultural brokers." When we think about the relationships that we develop in research, it shouldn't be something done for the purpose of just data collection or just gaining access. There should be a through line throughout the process—from authentically fostering a relationship with people and having an invitation into settings with people to having opportunities to co-construct and co-envision what research projects should be and how we shape and share what we are learning beyond us. Traditionally, researchers come to a study with our own preassigned questions, with our own methodological tools, our ideas for analysis, and our own epistemological lens and we sort of shape and share that data in the absence of those who helped us to see and understand. Instead, it should be about thinking about ways to collaborate. For me, something I've been doing a lot lately is having opportunities for participants to shape and share their stories with me, to co-author their stories, since they share their stories with me much like we are all collectively making sense of mutuality and care here in this co-authored piece. Another example is the book, *Protecting the Promise: Indigenous Education Between Mothers and Their Children*. There's a series of five different chapters from five different families. Those chapters are authored by them first; it's their stories that are central, so their names are listed first and my name is second (San Pedro, 2021). I did that intentionally because I wanted to show that it is their stories that we're looking at; their stories that they shared with me. I wanted to acknowledge that they are the owners and shapers of their stories. Through that process, it really helped me methodologically to think about how we come to these stories, how we share these stories, and how we have opportunities to correct, revise, and update our stories. Each of us carries our viewpoints, our knowledges, the ways we see and interpret our world. In other words, our epistemologies are the ways that we come to know our realities and the ways that we understand that reality. Because of that, we view things, even the same event, differently. For us to more fully know that the stories we shape and share are true to *us*, we need to enter into meaningful and reciprocal relationships with people who can let us know if the stories we are shaping are true to them or not. In this way, the stories become more meaningful, more enriching, and more beautiful

because it is at the intersection of our relationships that those stories become realized, what Valerie Kinloch, Emma Elliott, and I (as well as many others) refer to as “storying.”

**Grace:** I think this matters so much. Because whenever we think about any of our relationships, whether with friends or with a community, there has to be a mutual agreement that we’re coming together for a purpose. I’m not going to impose myself on someone I care about.

One of the gifts that was offered to me by my mentors, Drs. Gerald Campano and María Paula Ghiso, was researching with the St. Thomas Aquinas community in a multilingual, multiethnic inquiry group into how families used their linguistic, historical, cultural, and creative resources to navigate Philly school systems, to not only make sure their own children were being placed where they wanted to be, but also how they continuously shared resources with one another, teaching one and learning from one another. I was lucky enough to come onto this research team in 2013, and have the opportunity to work with them through my entire doctoral program. So for five years I was on-site, learning from the community constantly in spaces where we gathered around food. There was laughter, there was criticality, and, at the same time, there were investigations into what was going on in their lives and how we could mutually help one another and learn about these conditions, all while holding each other with grace, with opportunities for healing, and with opportunities to create and to build off of all that they brought to those community spaces.

One of these students who worked with me through the whole project just turned 21 this summer and I’m supposed to take her out next time she’s in New York City, which is going to be interesting. But I think that really speaks to these kinds of long-term friendships and sisterhoods—sisterhood, auntieship, whatever you want to call it—that we form with the folks that we work with when we care about them and are cared for by them. So I’m really appreciative of this student. For the ways that she’s taught me since she was a middle schooler in 2013. Until now, as an adult, aspiring Tik Tok star, et cetera, et cetera, who has taught me so much about what it means to be a sister, taught me so much about what it means to envision educational freedom, taught me so much about what it means to feel freedom in being herself and growing constantly.

But one other thing that I want to acknowledge when we do go into these spaces, and do build these bonds with folks who, like in my situation, I wasn’t part of the community when I entered, but became part, right? And that was a large part because of *their* spirit of welcoming and allowing me to be there. And I think that not being a community member from the start, one of the things that I had to really think about, and this comes back to the ideas of archaeology of the self was, you know, our differences. I think a lot about Audre Lorde, when she talks about connection through nondominant differences being a pathway towards justice. Thank you to one of our scholar-family members, Danny Martinez, for introducing me to this article by Liu and Shange (2018), about thick solidarity. And this idea of solidarity that isn’t meant to erase difference. But instead to think about difference, and think about the ways that we develop empathy for one another, and therefore move forward. So, I’m really trying to layer in this idea of thick solidarity, and how we work through those non dominant differences as strength.

**Hui-Ling:** I love that, thank you so much, both of you. I love that article, by Liu and Shange about thick solidarity. I’m really glad you brought that into this space, and how we can think of ourselves in thick solidarity with the communities that we work with. Because I think that when it comes to community building, we think that there’s some type of homogeneity that makes communities strong, when really it’s understanding differences, understanding different layers of power, understanding privilege, and then understanding yourself in relationship to folks. And once you have those understandings, you recognize that we’re only more powerful, as powerful as the least vulnerable of us are, and so when we’re propping up the most, you know, the most vulnerable person in whatever context, whether those are women, black



folks, folks with disabilities, sexuality, so on and so forth. We know that we're not all entering spaces the same, but we can grow together when we learn and truly understand those differences. Grace, you were talking about sisterhood, how you built sisterhood as a girl for your own sustenance, and you're still doing that work because you're thinking about yourself and how this work is meaningful. And similar to me, I needed community and thought a lot about community building and resistance and things like that.

So our question about, like, how do we think about relationship building, I mean, I literally think that's the foundation of it all. There would be no study, no project, no anything without the relationship building, without the community building. And though I was interested in community, community engagement and community practices, community resistance—I kept that at the heart of how I interacted as a researcher. And the young people that I've followed around for that year, they also became my little siblings, and they still call me today, and we talk about our lives, and they know they can hit me up for anything. I've always had great mentors and know that that's part of giving back in the academy. Django Paris modeled that for me, because I was in his study at one point when I was a teacher, and he sort of encouraged me to think about a PhD. And that had never, ever, been a thought. And when he planted that seed, that thought never left. Even though I continued teaching for several more years, it was him that I had reached out to when I started thinking about PhD programs. And he's been, you know, a mentor since. So I feel like my participants have become my family and they know that I'm there for them, no matter what.

When I'm following [my participants] around, it's not like, I *just* want to get information from them so I can write about how they are experiencing school and how they're experiencing community. But like, I want to know how they're doing, genuinely. And like there was a moment with Sorayah [one of my youth participants] during the year of my data collection where she was, like, really not doing well. And I could tell that she was struggling. And she wasn't speaking as much; she was becoming reserved. And there was literally a moment where she was walking away from the school and I had to chase her down. It's really a comical moment when Sorayah and I reflect on that moment, because she thinks it's funny now, but, like, I ran after her to ask how she was doing, like, what's going on? How are you? And again, it was a genuine concern. And she started to explain how things were going and what was going on with her mom and what's happening at home. And just all this mental health stuff. So, you know, I again, it's not just "well, you're in my study, so I need to know what's going on." It was just like, I need to know how you are, just how you are as a person, as a human being.

The other thing I want to say is that in my work, like the protests that I was showing earlier, I think it was important and I went to a few rallies over that year. As I'm talking about the South Bronx community, I also wanted to show up as, like, a body, as a person that supports the cause that they're talking about. I wasn't a resident there. I lived in Harlem at the time so I wasn't too far away, but whatever they're doing, yes, I'm documenting it, but I'm also there with them. I'm also showing that I'm a supporter, that I'm another body in the street for people to see like there's a mass of people who are concerned about the issues that they're talking about. Even just buying at locally owned stores while I was there, that stuff, I think, is important. That I'm not just kind of, like, you know, colonizing right? That I'm not just there supporting gentrification and pushing out history, which was going on in the neighborhood at the time. So just being mindful of that.

So, yeah, that's some of my thoughts as I think about how I enter community when I'm conducting research. Moving to our last questions, although we are storytellers, some stories are sacred for our communities.

### ***How did you decide when or when not to include personal stories from your participants in your publications?***

**Timothy:** Oh, y'all are giving me so much life in these answers! And just sharing some new details that I haven't heard from your stories before that are both heartbreaking and, and hopeful. I think one of the things that's resonating with me is this question of who do we answer to. In other words, as Audra

Simpson (2007) puts it: “Can I do this work and still come home?” (p. 78). That’s what I’m hearing in both of your stories is: Can we do the work that’s being asked of us that’s recognized by institutions and still come back to those communities that love us and support us? And if we can’t, then I think that’s our answer, right? What we’re saying is that it’s okay to center mutuality, that it’s okay to have relationships that span beyond the expiration date of what the IRB says is finished or done with, and I think in all the work that we’ve done, we have had long-term relationships. Some relationships, of course, may fade for natural reasons, but others continue to be sustained. Two examples come to mind with Michael Munson and Roo Dowd. Both are powerful Indigenous mothers who were part of the book project I referred to earlier, *Protecting the Promise*. Right now, I’m co-authoring a chapter on Indigenizing Social Studies Education with Michael Munson, who at the time was the Dean of the School of Education at the Salish and Kootenai College. I was thinking with her how just creating spaces to listen is a reciprocal act in itself. And what we mean by that is that when we offer space to have others shape and make sense of their realities through story sharing with us, and we give verbal and nonverbal affirmations, we give others opportunities to make sense with us, their realities, their understandings. And we give back in dialogic ways by sharing and revealing our lives in relation to theirs. And so I think that this type of work, this relational work is different in that our stories are part of the research itself, right? Our lives impact, and we are impacted by the lives of others. And instead of shrouding that, hiding that, or attempting to say that it doesn’t exist, we’re saying that if you don’t show that, then the work that you do may *not* be as rigorous, that it’s potentially harmful if our positionalities go unexamined. I think this is so well represented in a conversation between Roo and me, the other example I was thinking of. We were talking about the project itself early on and the ways stories are collected and crafted. We discussed trust and how our long-term relationship allows us to strengthen the stories shared between us. Here is an excerpt from that conversation:

**Roo:** Any conversations we have are yours to do with what you will, because I completely trust you physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. I trust you so much that you’re a steward of the information I’m sharing with you completely. There is not going to be any time I ask you to turn [the recorder] off. I believe in you, and this trust is complete and whole.

**Timothy:** Thank you for sharing that. [The stories] will be envisioned by what you and Scyla [their daughter] and others want your story to be. And I’ll do the . . . legwork, the transcription . . . but, in the end, like I’ll bring it back to you. And we’ll engage in further conversations to think about what story we are shaping here, and then also envisioning the audience that we’re talking to. In my mind, I want this to impact communities, I want it to impact teachers, I want it to impact people that you work with, I want it to impact the friends that Scyla has. In the end, it’s our story. I don’t ever want to frame it as mine.

**Roo:** I know that to be true. I just want you to know that in terms of my trust, I trust even that you’re gonna allow me that space when needed and when I decide I’m changing it up because you know that’s something that I’ll do, too. So, when I say I trust you, I even trust you to be able to handle when I feel like I need to say something different or challenge you back or whatever. That complete trust is deeply rooted in respect and belief that you and I as partners in this process will do fine. Yeah, I don’t have any concerns.

I see this transcript between Roo and me to display what respectful centering looks like: to center the ways that we are responsible to one another. And this was very early in the project to sort of frame that I’m not just going to take their stories and do what I will with them. But I’ll bring them back to them and think through what they mean. And they said there, you know, when I want to change things up,

I know that I trust in you completely, that you'll give me the space to do that. So to address the initial questions, there's a through thread of relationality that exists before in some cases, and exists even after, in the stories that we're given access to. So I think we need to think carefully not only that those stories are captured, but to make sure that those stories were meant to be shared beyond us. So I think that's one of the caveats or the dangers of developing really close relationships with people is that sometimes we share stories without thinking about the story going beyond us. We need to have opportunities to say this a story that we want to share outside of our relationship. And so that's another thing that we want to think about is: Just because the stories were collected doesn't necessarily mean that they were intended for people beyond us. And so there needs to be that extra level of analysis, or co-authorship or collaboration, whatever we want to call it, to make sure that the stories that we're sharing are right for both of us. And I think that's the mutuality. That's the care of it.

**Hui-Ling:** I love that transcript that you showed, Tim, because it really showed that there was trust. They knew you and they knew you weren't going to do them wrong, period. That was very clear. And I think we are doing it right when that's the case. And for me, I definitely had the young people and the adults read [my dissertation] and approve it. And let me know if there's anything I misrepresented or I should take out anything to add. After I sent them their respective chapters, they responded that they felt I accurately captured their stories, so much so that it made them emotional. And that meant everything to me. Sorayah [one of my youth participants] mentioned that some of her story opened up feelings of sadness and hurt, as she recounted what she went through at home and school. And I was like, "Well, I mean, I can definitely take it out." But, she's insisting like, no, this is important to show this, it's just emotional for me to revisit it. And I don't know, I think their insistence to say like, "this is my story, and I do want it told," is important. And if it's not, if there was ever the case that this was not helpful to them, then I didn't add it in. I mean, there were other stories that I've heard that I just thought were sort of unnecessary to share, and to have out there. Not that everyone's reading my dissertation. But [laughs], you know, it mattered at the end of the day, what they thought about it. And I think that's basically where I land. When I decide to write about other people, do they feel like this is accurate? And if not, then anything is game to take out because this is not just about me, I can't own someone else's stories. This is a collective project and they are as much a part of it as I am.

**Grace:** Building on what both of you are saying, something I've been thinking about for a while is Glissant (2010), and his idea of the right to opacity, right? We have the right and the people we work with have the right, to not show everything when it comes to research and storying. And so I think, both in those relationships, and the methodologies that we build, it's so important to allow for that opacity, and make sure that, as people who care about our communities, we're holding our responsibilities and that right to opacity. And I think another thing that I've been thinking about most recently, is methodologically, how things like the arts, like poetics, like all of this stuff, allows for a level of opacity.

So, fahima ife (2022), just wrote this gorgeous article—so beautiful. She talks about, Black poetics as a way of offering that opacity. And she says, these Eurocentric methods, kind of force data to be super "legible," but the thing is, our stories aren't always legible to everyone, and we have the right to keep it that way. So she talks about the importance of rendering data, particularly about Black bodies and experiences, as "less characteristic, less property, less categorical, less legible, less straightforward" (p. 11). And I think even, you know, Hui-Ling used the word "ownership." We don't have to show ownership over these stories our communities offer us. It's not about that control. It's about the freedom that we are creating within this work. ife's poetics is refusing clarity where clarity does not exist and I think that's a really beautiful way of thinking about the work we do—we don't have to tell these stories in ways that

are necessarily legible to those who don't deserve them. So whether that's obscuring some of the parts by purposely taking out or editing out parts of the stories, or whether it's allowing participants and ourselves the opportunity to use things like poetics, arts, whatever, that are not directly translatable (i.e., Butler, 2023; Player, 2021). But instead having that obfuscation. Maybe these stories, maybe these answers, maybe the, like, "mastery" of whatever I'm trying to communicate isn't for everyone.

And I was just reading bell hooks (1995) as well—the book, *Art on My Mind*. And she says, depending on the context in which you're viewing art, depending on the knowledge that you know about the artist coming to that work and the communities from which it emerges, the meaning of the art and your interpretation change. So, someone who has the context, who comes from either a personal relationship or from a community that has just the basis of understanding, the relationship to that work is going to be different, the understandings are going to be different and deeper. And so perhaps one of the utilities of art is that if you do not have the knowledge, because you don't have the personal or community or cultural place to stand upon to understand it, it just might not be for you. I really liked that. And I think that's something I really want to dig into and consider as we protect our stories and protect the folks that we love and work with. In our work, how we allow for different ways of communicating these ideas with different levels of opacity might be a tool for resisting the colonial gaze.

**Timothy:** Yes! I think I said earlier that we need to be careful when we're talking about this topic, and in particular that's what Gloria Ladson-Billings (2014) says, "once you place an idea into the marketplace of ideas, consumers of your ideas feel free to use (or abuse) your idea as they see fit" (p. 81). And I'm just envisioning the future of an article being out there or of people looking at this, watching us have this conversation and saying, "Yeah, how much better would the data be? If there was a genuine relationship like that the participants that we work with would really be telling us their true stories. If we really center the relationships." But then, if we're doing that, without good hearts, without that care, without that mutuality and respect, then it becomes, again, a tool of the master, right? And so I think there's also a cautionary tale within this: We need to make sure people don't co-opt this, this idea or what it is that we're trying to offer here, for their own purposes, because an important part of that is, again, the relationship is woven throughout all of it. We're not doing this as a methodological tool. We're doing this because we care, we're doing this because it enriches us and it enriches others. And so I'm thinking, in addition to what you offered, Grace, of how things are changing how people are in positions to afford this type of work, to enter into esteemed journals, right? And I'm thinking about the editorial board that has transitioned in *Equity and Excellence in Education*, Jamila Lyiscott, Justin Coles, Keisha Green, and Esther Ohito and the ways they've intentionally centered the building of relationships with their editorial meetings and allowed new and different types of writings to be shaped and shared in their journal (Green et al., 2021).

**Grace:** I love that.

**Timothy:** And I think about these needed revisions of review processes in relation to the work that we're doing. We're imagining anew, we're imagining educational research that centers care, that centers mutuality, respect, relevance, reciprocity, answerability, like many terms that go beyond those that we are centering here. We're envisioning research as relational, as coalitional, as in alliance to the people and communities that we work with, and to frame that as an asset and a strength, rather than as something to avoid or not discuss for fear of compromise or lack of validity.

## Conclusion as openings to new discoveries

This conversation breathed life into our souls and kindled the flames within us of purpose and passion that we hold toward educational justice research. We are thankful to each other for sharing our stories and perspectives. It was affirming to provide a model between us centering scholarship that is grounded on relationality, mutuality, and care. As scholar siblings, we embrace each other and nurture ourselves as a collective to show up in academic spaces as our authentic selves. From our stories, we show that there is another way to do research—a way that is grounded in community, reciprocity, and ultimately, love. In Ladson-Billings’ latest book, “Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Asking a Different Question,” she shares a powerful reflection: (Ladson-Billings, 2021)

Perhaps the most radical thing I have done in my work is to ask a different question. Instead of scratching my head and joining the chorus of voices that asked what was wrong with Black children, I dare to ask what is right with Black students and what happens in classrooms where teachers, parents, and students get it right. (2021, p. 2)

As we work in the context of schooling, we are acutely aware of how racial capitalism impacts young people and their communities. We follow Ladson-Billings’ lead in asking new questions. Our work is not about the ways BIPOC youth are often positioned as less than; instead, our work *is* about the remembrance of the Freedom Schools of 1964, Fannie Lou Hamer, water protectors, and other freedom fighters who built up their communities in spite of existing in a white supremacist, hateful world. We seek to be a part of this lineage and work toward *desire-based research* instead of damaged centered narratives (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Thus, we hold ourselves responsible to our communities, our families, and our ancestors, and create spaces, pedagogies, and research centered on radical care and joy. We understand that white supremacist logics cannot and will not validate the beauty we create; our worth is rooted in our relationships to, and coalition with, one another, our communities, and ourselves. Our resistance is in moving toward co-building and thick solidarity with the young people and community members we learn with. Our relationships do not end when we reach saturation, we continue to reciprocally support each other in our lives and work as a collective toward a more just and loving society.

## Notes

1. Patel (2014, pp. 357–358) defines “pausing” as the productive interruption that allows for deep learning and self-reflection.
2. Tachine and Nicolazzo (2022, p. 2) define “weaving an otherwise” as the interconnections that exist when shaping and sharing story in ways that honor relationships and align our hopes for a more equitable and loving future.
3. paperson (2017, p. xiv) defined “scyborg” as “the structural agency of persons who have picked up colonial technologies and reassembled them to decolonizing purposes.”
4. Bettina Love (2019, p. 2) defined “abolitionist teaching” as “the practice of working in solidarity with communities of color while drawing on the imagination, creativity, refusal, (re)membering, visionary thinking, healing, rebellious spirit, boldness, determination, and subversiveness of abolitionists to eradicate injustice in and outside of school.”
5. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz defines “Archaeology of self” as “the deep excavation and exploration of beliefs, biases and ideas that shape how we engage in the work” (<https://www.yolandasealeyruiz.com/archaeology-of-self>).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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