Summer 8-11-2020

Centering Black Women's Ways of Knowing: A Review of Critical Literacies Research and a Black Feminist Analysis of Black Women Educators' Extraordinary Literacies

Francheska Denise Starks

ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, CENTERING BLACK WOMEN'S WAYS OF KNOWING: A REVIEW OF CRITICAL LITERACIES RESEARCH AND A BLACK FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF BLACK WOMEN EDUCATORS' EXTRAORDINARY LITERACIES, by FRANCHESKA STARKS, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education & Human Development, Georgia State University.

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Muhammad, G.E., Starks, F., Dunmeyer, A. (Month). Historical voices for contemporary times: Learning from Black women education theorists to redesign teaching and teacher education. *Theory into practice (In press)*.

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES AND ORGANIZATIONS
American Education Research Association
American Reading Forum
National Council for Teachers of English

CENTERING BLACK WOMEN'S WAYS OF KNOWING: A REVIEW OF CRITICAL LITERACIES RESEARCH AND A BLACK FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF BLACK WOMEN EDUCATORS' EXTRAORDINARY LITERACIES

by

Francheska Starks

Under the Direction of Sarah Bridges-Rhoads and Thomas Crisp

ABSTRACT

This dissertation follows in the footsteps of numerous scholars who have called for the explicit and intentional integration of Black women's experiences, knowledge, and wisdom into academic research and more specifically into research that aims to dismantle educational inequities. Grounded in Black feminist theories and methodologies as well my own positionality as a Black woman, this dissertation aims to broaden the ways that a historically praxis-oriented body of research in elementary education, critical literacies research, is theorized and enacted by integrating more thoroughly Black women's ways of knowing. My goal is not to essentialize Black women as a monolithic group; rather, this dissertation explores how to leverage our individual and combined perspectives, which are grounded in our rich history of resistance and thriving in the face of adversity, in order to produce knowledge and literacy practices useful for justice-oriented education.

Chapter One of this two-chapter dissertation (Review and Research format) is an analysis of academic literature related to critical literacies research and Black women educators in elementary education, addressing the question: How are Black women's ways of knowing integrated in critical literacies research with participants who are Black women educators? The chapter offers a sense of the extent to which Black women educators' ways of knowing are associated with the term *critical literacy.* It also identifies fruitful strategies that critical literacies researchers can use to integrate Black women's ways of knowing into the knowledge base and practices of critical literacies, such as integrating Black women educators' emotions and spiritual knowledge into the research and co-researching with Black women who are also participants.

Chapter Two is an empirical study that examines the narratives of four Black women educators to understand the literacies, which Jeanine Staples (2020) refers to as extraordinary literacies,

that they practice in their own lives as resistance to experiences that threaten their physical, spiritual, and mental well-being. I ask: How do Black women who are educators employ extraordinary and critical literacies to address oppression and marginalization? and What are the affordances of extraordinary literacies for Black women who are educators as well as for critical literacies research more broadly? Guided by the assumptions of Black feminist theories as well as my own ongoing reading, writing, and living in relation to justice-oriented practices, I analyzed data produced through individual interviews with participants, audio reflections created by participants on their own time, and group interviews as collective conversations. Findings demonstrate how participants' extraordinary literacies act as expressions of agency and self-definition toward participants' resistance to oppressions and efforts towards social justice. Participants' enactments of extraordinary literacies also expand existing conceptions of literacy practices that promote justice and help educators and researchers gain greater access to the sophisticated intellectual and activist practices of members of marginalized groups, specifically, Black women educators.

INDEX WORDS: affect, Black feminism, Black feminist thought, Black feminist methodologies, Black women, Black women educators, Black women teachers, Cite Black Women, emotions, extraordinary literacies, intersectionality, spirituality, t/Trauma narrative,

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Francheska Starks

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Early Childhood and Education

in

Early Childhood and Education

in

the College of Education & Human Development
Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA

2020

DEDICATION

To the mother of Lottie Holmes, who is the mother of Rosa Starling, who is the mother of Sherry Denise Ponder who is the mother Tammie Renay Starks, who is my mother.

AND

To the mother of Lucille Gibson, who is the mother of Emma Lois Woods, who is the mother of Shirley Ann Woods Starks, who is the mother of Timothy Orlando Starks, who is my father.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To God who is and always will be the author and finisher of my faith. I started this journey because of You and I am finishing because you have seen me through. I promise to complete what we've started.

Family

Mommy, you have been my safe place, my supporter, my cheerleader and my friend. You have always made me feel powerful and courageous. This has been no different. There are not enough words to describe the amount of gratitude that I have for the selflessness and the perseverance you have shared with me during this time, but I promise to spend our days ahead showing you how truly grateful I am.

Daddy, thank you for your encouragement and your listening ear. Thank you for challenging me, listening to my ideas and always requiring me to rise to the occasion. I know I am able to do anything I put my mind to, in part, because of your unwavering belief in me. Thank you for encouraging me to be fearless, determined and to always finish what I start.

Alex, Sissy, I love you. Thank you for brightening the dark days, checking in on me during the tough times, and celebrating all my wins. I love you BEYOND and am so blessed to call you my sister and friend.

Wessie Poo, you joined us earth side towards the end of my journey, and you are everything I needed. Thank you for the joy that you bring to our family and to my life. During some of my most challenging times, I kept going because I wanted to make you proud. Tee-tee loves you forever and always.

To Grandma Tiny and Grandma Sherry, the matriarchs of my family. You are light, hope and power. Thank you for shepherding our family and the examples that you have provided for all of us to follow.

To my aunts, uncles and cousins, thank you for your consistent support. Thank you for each time you called and texted to check on me and ask how I was doing. Thank you for taking this journey with me and keeping me in your thoughts and prayers. WE did it!

Co-Chairs

Dr. Crisp, we started this journey together several years ago and you have remained consistently supportive until the end. Thank you for the thoughtful ways that you have guided me throughout my program. Thank you for all of the opportunities that you have shared, the experiences that you have created, and the kindness you have shown me during this process. You have provided an incredible example of how to selflessly support students, which I will always remember and intend to pay forward.

Dr. Bridges-Rhoads, thank you for your transparency and support. Thank you for the gift of your time. You have always encouraged me to show up as my full self and never to neglect parts of who I am and how I have felt during this process. Thank you for allowing space for me to grow, discover and make mistakes. Thank you for your patience, kindness, and candor.

Because of you both, I have always known that I was never alone during this process. Thank you for reaching out to me when I needed support, and for reminding me that I would make it to the end. Finally, thank you both for your thoughtfulness. I cannot begin to express my gratitude for every card, phone call, text message, encouraging post-it note, voice mail, book, comment, experience, collaboration and the countless other ways that you have gone above and beyond to demonstrate your commitments to my professional and personal growth.

Committee

Dr. Muhammad, thank you for your example of strength and authenticity. Thank you for reminding me of why the work that we do matters. Thank you for the many hours you have shared with me in mentorship. Thank you for writing with me, encouraging me, for sharing your experiences and welcoming me into a sisterhood that I will forever cherish.

Dr. Truscott, thank you for working alongside me to design my research. Your thoughtful suggestions have always guided me towards clarity and improvements in my work. Thank you for all of your advice, your intellectual contributions, kind words and your time.

Co-Researchers/Participants

Thank you for giving of yourselves and your time. Thank you for trusting me with your stories.

Friends

Michelle, Bestie, thank you for being a friend. Thank you for your understanding, encouragement, love, persistence, and edification. You a real one!

Andrea, Mario, Mia, Quintin, Chrissy, Shaneeka, Glenda, Xiao, Courtney, Adrian N., Adrian D., Kristy, Nicola, Melissa, Xiao and countless others, I say your names because at some point each of you has given me a nudge in the right direction. I thank you.

Last but not least, thank you to each and every student that I have been honored and blessed to serve. I thank you for your light, your curiosity, your boldness, and your vulnerability. Thank you for challenging me to get better and for the gratitude that you have shared.

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1 REPRESENTATION MATTERS: BLACK FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGIES IN CRITICAL LITERACIES RESEARCH

This dissertation follows in the footsteps of numerous scholars who have called for explicit and intentional integration of Black women's experiences, knowledge, and wisdom into academic research (Collins, 2000; Cite Black Women, 2017), and more specifically into educational research (Dillard, 2018; Evans-Winters, 2019; Muhammad et al., 2020; Richardson, 2006). It is well documented that Black women have unique knowledge and wisdom, which is produced through our[1] everyday experiences navigating both oppression and privilege occurring at the intersection of race and gender as well as other social locations (Carbado et al., 2013; Collins, 2000; Cooper, 1988; Crenshaw, 1990; Hancock, 2016; Stewart, 1987; Truth; 1998). Those experiences[2], of course, are not the same for all Black women as we are not one monolithic group. Rather, our combined perspectives are grounded in our rich history of resistance, innovation, and thriving in the face of adversity, and this combined perspective forms a collective way of knowing that is useful for producing knowledge that can lead to librerating practices (e.g., agency and self-definition). Yet, as Collins (2000) and others (Boveda, 2019; Griffin, 2012; Patterson et al., 2016) have pointed out, Black women's unique ways of knowing are rarely emphasized in academic research, whether it be as a ground for how knowledge is produced or what and who we research about. The result is a recognition of the limited capacity of research to be inclusive of contributions of Black women and an accompanying demand to highlight those contributions.

[1] I use the word "our" throughout the dissertation to acknowledge my own positionality and social locations when referring broadly to Black women's ways of knowing and Black women educators, given my experiences as a former elementary educator and current educator of practicing and preservice teachers. I use the word "their" when referring to specific Black women such as the participants in this study.

[2] Individual and collective experiences may also be identified as individual and collective standpoints.

This chapter builds upon one such demand issued by Cite Black Women (2017), which aims to intervene in the ways that Black women's ways of knowing are circulated, cited, and centered in the Academy. Christen Smith, who founded the Cite Black Women initiative in 2017, calls for researchers to go beyond a mere mention of race and/or gender in scholarship and instead integrate our ways of knowing into the CORE of the work (e.g., the syllabus and instruction, the methodology, and the epistemological orientation). In other words, it is not enough to give a cursory nod to Black women as one of many in a string of citations or to mention race and gender as a descriptor of participants. Instead, the work is to intentionally acknowledge that our ways of knowing, grounded in our experiences, cannot be separated from the work that Black women do or the knowledge produced about Black women. In the vein of Cite Black Women, my broad goal in this chapter is to critically examine and to draw attention to the ways in which Black women's ways of knowing are integrated into research about pedagogy in education.

Similar to the trends in the broader academy, the field of education has for too long been grounded in a White, male and Eurocentric perspective that, intentionally or not, shapes both research, curriculum and pedagogy to reflect those interests (Collins, 2003; Milner, 2013; Dlamini, 2002; Pérez & Saavedra, 2017). Cynthia Dillard (2000), for example, describes that when academics conduct educational research that does not attend to knowledge as raced, gendered, and embodied through social identities, particularly with communities of color, they ignore a necessary obligation or responsibility to the researched community to become aware of multiple ways of knowing which may be necessary for working with people of color. Additionally, their inattention to the unique perspectives of communities of color results in missed opportunities to engage in research that can "better serve [Black women's] personal

growth…[and] our cultural communities, nation, and all of humanity" (Love & Evans-Winters, 2015, p. 1). In other words, epistemic orientations in research are not neutral, apolitical or ahistorical, and serve as sites of possibility and/or oppression (Collins, 2000; Dotson, 2015).

Attempts to dismantle those foundations include calls to use diverse theories and methodologies in education, specifically those that allow researchers to consider everyday experiences as useful for centering the voices of members of marginalized groups (e.g., Love & Evans-Winters, 2015). Further, in the field of elementary education, where this dissertation focuses, it is well documented that such a shift is necessary, in part, since educators' deficit perspectives of children of color are often grounded in systems of knowing that privilege Euro-American perspectives (e.g., Burman, 2008; Cannella, 2005; Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Pérez & Saavedra, 2017). For instance, there has been a push toward acknowledging and engaging in literacy practices that are equity based and historically and identity centered in order to draw attention to the historical genius of Black and Brown women and children (Muhammad, 2019; Sealey-Ruiz, 2016).

In this chapter, I work to shift the epistemological focus in education by examining how Black women's ways of knowing are made integral in a body of research that has a wide circulation in elementary education—research related to implementation of critical literacies. Critical literacies has various approaches in education (hooks, 1994; Mosley, 2010; Muhammad, 2012) but broadly commits to engaging in praxis to transform inequities and oppression in society (Freire, 1970). Although critical literacies research has an explicit focus on dismantling educational inequities, similar to much educational work, its ground remains rooted in white, European male ideas. Decades of critiques have pointed to the patriarchal (e.g., Ellsworth, 1989) and racist (e.g., hooks, 1994) grounding, for instance, but there has not been a systematic

exploration of how critical literacies research integrates Black women's ways of knowing. As I describe below, critical literacies is a fruitful space for the examination of Black women's ways of knowing because of our historical and current engagement in liberating practices. This chapter addresses that gap by asking the question: How are Black women's ways of knowing integrated in critical literacies research with participants who are Black women educators? It is my hope that a focus on Black women educators will not only increase our visibility in academic spaces, but also provide support for those who feel "isolated and politically embattled as scholars" (Love & Evans-Winters, 2015, p. 2).

Before I outline the methodology, findings, and implications of this particular study, it is important to note that while Black women's combined perspectives form a collective standpoint, I do not use them to essentialize our experiences. Although each person has our own unique standpoint based on our personal experiences and beliefs, collective standpoints exist because they are useful for resistance and occur from similar experiences of oppression and marginalization. As such, they often shift and change according to social circumstances, and are "culturally specific, resilient lifelines that can be continually refashioned in response to changing contexts" (Collins, 2000, p. 60). Standpoints are not prescriptive, normative, or standard perspectives that Black women, or anyone else, *should* take. Rather, they are resources upon which we can draw to inform the ways that we can resist oppression and marginalization today.

I also want to acknowledge and make explicit that because I highlight Black women's resources for resistance, this work has broader implications for how Black women live and thrive in the world. As a Black woman researcher and educator, I decided to research alongside Black women as a result of the convergence of many things, including what is happening in the world, my own life experiences and the positioning of Black women in U.S. society as well as what is

occurring in academia and the field of education. Some examples include the lack of concern for Black women's pain and suffering which is evidenced by disproportionately high rates of maternal morbidity (Novoa & Taylor, 2018) and the lack of perceivable action in response to the murders of Breonna Taylor and Sandra Bland (North & Cineas, 2020). These examples cannot be separated from my own positionality and concern for my own well-being and the well-being of Black women I love and those whom I may not know, which, as I describe in more detail later, are characteristic of the methodologies that I use in this work.

For the remainder of this chapter, I describe an analysis I conducted of academic literature related to critical literacies research and Black women educators in elementary education. My aim is to both offer a sense of the extent to which Black women educators' ways of knowing are associated with the term *critical literacy* and also to identify fruitful strategies that critical literacies researchers can use to integrate Black women's ways of knowing into the knowledge base and practices of critical literacies. I begin below by situating this analysis within the broad traditions of critical literacies research and pedagogy, with a specific attention to the need for intersectional identity focused research that includes a focus on Black women educators. Next, I describe the theoretical and methodological framing of this chapter, which is grounded in Black feminist theories (e.g., Collins, 2000) and Black feminist methodologies (e.g., Evans-Winters, 2019) as well as other qualitative methods. I, then, detail the findings from the review of literature, focusing my analysis on three studies where Black women educators' ways of knowing are central to the research on critical literacies. Finally, I provide a discussion looking across those studies and offer implications, which point to a need for researchers, specifically those working alongside Black women educators, to consider adopting

epistemological orientations that may centralize the unique ways of knowing produced by Black women educators.

Critical Literacies and Black Women's Knowing

The term critical literacy, itself, or its plural form which I use in this dissertation to draw attention to the multiple and complex forms that literacy practices can take (hooks, 1989; Luke & Woods, 2009; Morrell, 2015; Richardson, 2007), is widely used in education. A Google search of critical literacy and education, for example, produced over 700,000 hits. When I searched only Google Scholar, it produced over 45, 000. As previously mentioned, critical literacies encompasses many approaches to challenging dominant ideologies and social structures that lead to inequities. Grounded in critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1970), definitions have varied to include aspects of interactions with texts, curriculum design and pedagogical methods, as well as methods of activism with broader daily life. What is common about critical literacies is a focus on resistance through critiques and challenges of inequitable structures in society. Luke and Woods (2009), for example, emphasize that reading the world (Freire, 1970), or "seeing its patterns, designs and complexities, and developing the capacity to rewrite, redesign and reshape it in communities' interests" (Luke and Woods, p. 1, 2009), are some of Freire's initial goals for critical literacies practices.

To meet these goals, critical literacies, as it is carried out in education, often combines an attention to language (through talk as well as print and digital texts) with social and cultural analyses (Luke & Woods, 2009). This work includes a recognition of the power of textual analysis for (re)designing the world in which we live, as well as the centering of marginalized perspectives and an attention to complexifying educational goals to address ideological critique and cultural analysis. Critical literacies, for example, have been used to teach students to not take

for granted information that is communicated through texts, such as through their school curriculums and the media, and instead to critically examine how texts can contribute to the centering or marginalizing individuals/groups in society and also to understand how to use texts to (re)design and (re)imagine a more equitable society (Freire, 1970; Freebody & Luke, 1990; Mosley, 2010).

The use of critical literacies spreads into the broad curriculum through all subjects, such as in science through the examination of environmental justice and in social studies through the centering of marginalized perspectives of historical accounts. However, critical literacies work has had a particularly salient impact in literacy classrooms (Comber et al., 2001; Labadie et al., 2012; Park, 2011), expanding definitions of modes of literacy to include digital and visual texts, and literacy instruction beyond functional reading skills such as decoding and reading comprehension (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; McArthur, 2016; Soares & Watson, 2006). Wallace (2001), for example, demonstrates how teachers use questioning and think-aloud strategies to encourage students to challenge the dominant ideologies represented in curricular texts and envision them from marginalized perspectives. Also, Campano et al., (2013) demonstrates how African American elementary aged boys' problematize negative stereotypes of themselves, their school and their city, choosing instead to reimagine them from their own perspectives. Similarly, Love (2014) uses rap/hip-hop as a medium for Black students to critique social perceptions of Black youth and create their own counternarratives.

Critiques of critical literacies have long called for approaches that can better address patriarchy and sexism, which was not the focus of Freire's initial critical literacy conceptions (Ellsworth, 1989; hooks, 1994), and more recently there have been calls to include the unique intersections of social locations such as class, race, and gender (Love, 2017; Muhammad, 2019;

Muhammad et al., 2020). Those calls point to the lack of critical literacies research that illuminates Black women educators' critical literacies practices, which is particularly problematic given critical literacies research because of its commitment to addressing the silencing of marginalized individuals and groups by (re)centering their perspectives. Much of the critical literacies research that does address educators' social locations or identities, however, examines how White educators navigate their lives, school systems, and instructional practices (Flores-Koulish & Smith-D'Arezzo, 2016; Montgomery, 2014; Sweeney, 1997). Other examples include critical literacies research that focuses only on educators' practices but does not identify or examine the meaning of educators' social locations (gender, race, religion, nationality, language, etc.) for their practices (Cooper & White, 2012; Harrison, 2018; Kohfeldt et al., 2016). Further, there is concern that the focus on individual forms of oppressions such as classism, sexism, or racism in some critical literacies research may distort representations of Black women's experiences because these types of analyses do not allow for the visibility of simultaneous oppressions and privileges at the intersections of multiple power structures (Sykes, 2011).

This identity-focused intersectional work is particularly important right now given the recent uprisings of social justice movements across the world, such as Black Lives Matter, which is in response to social unrest due to racism and law enforcement officers' abuses of power. A movement created and led by Black women, Black Lives Matter (2020) is only one example of what society stands to gain from attending to the leadership and contributions of Black women toward social justice. As described in the introduction, for example, the work of the Cite Black Women (CBW) collective represents Black women's unwillingness to remain silent in the face of the erasure of our contributions toward research, regardless of whether or not the

marginalization of Black women's voices is intentional. Therefore, it is imperative that researchers provide diversity of practices, methods and methodologies as representations of this type of identity focused critical literacies work. I do this by focusing on the ways of knowing of Black women educators.

Black Women Educators

I approach the call for a more intersectional identity-focused critical literacies research by focusing on Black women educators. Black women educators have a rich history of advocacy for educational justice and civic education (Dillard 2006; Muhammad et al., 2020). Black women's literary societies, as an example, were places of community, collaboration, and literacy education that supported Black women's goals of liberation and social justice for themselves and the youth of their communities (Muhammad, 2012). Further, Roseboro & Ross (2009), argue that Black women educators have a "historicized disposition toward librating education" that cannot be separated "from [our] lived experiences of multiple and competing forms of oppression (p. 19)." In their analysis of Black women educators' care practices, they explore how Black women's pedagogies are in many ways "inherited, consciously and unconsciously, as we watched our mothers, grandmothers, and great grandmothers, educate in unfathomable circumstances" (p. 19). Those inherited pedagogies include a way of understanding texts and engaging in social and cultural analyses that is informed by our descendants, causing us to "gaze in ways that would interpret, erase, and transcend" inequities through our resistance of dominant ideologies and taken-for-granted social "norms" (p. 20).

For the purposes of this chapter, Black women educator's inherited pedagogies afford us with a unique positionality for attending to critical literacies. As described above, critical literacies focuses on the novel methods of resistance that our collective wisdom provides. What

is more is that critical literacies takes on an inherently novel form when practiced by Black women – one that is informed by our unique perspectives due to their social locations and an inherited pedagogy of resistance. Often in professional spaces dominated by White women, for example, Black women educators must negotiate their personal experiences based on their social locations with their teaching and instruction. This prompts a curiosity about their methods and much can be learned about the unique strategies that they employ to cope and thrive. Therefore, it is wise to examine the ways in which Black women's critical literacies practices are integrated in critical literacies research. As I describe in the next section, I do this by drawing upon Black feminist theories.

Black Feminist Theories and Black Feminist Epistemology

As I described in the introduction, this chapter builds upon initiatives such as Cite Black Women, which call for the integration of Black women's perspectives into the CORE of academic scholarship and social justice activism. That is to say, it is not enough to simply mention Black women in syllabi, cite us in work, or mention our demographics as participants in research studies; rather, there should be intentional integration, or a centering of Black women's perspectives, as related to their social locations, into research. In order to identify and understand how Black women's ways of knowing are integrated in critical literacies research, I drew upon Black feminist theories to develop the concept of integration. Broadly, Black feminist theories aim to provide organizing structures that make the individual and collective experiences[1] of Black women visible (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1984; Lorde, 2012).

Importantly, the assumptions that inform Black feminist theories are foundational to this study—and my work more generally—because they do not allow for blanket victimization of Black women. By nature of its basis in theories of intersectionality, Black feminism

acknowledges that “all individuals and groups possess varying amounts of penalty and privilege in one historically created system” (Collins, 2000, p. 246). This notion is essential to the work done in this chapter because it acknowledges the social oppressions imposed upon Black women without essentializing our experiences or naively assuming that we cannot participate in the marginalization of other individuals or groups.

The Black feminist theory that I draw upon for this study, Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000), aims to make Black women’s collective and individual experiences visible through a grounding in Black feminist epistemology, which according to Collins (1990) provides conditions under which Black women produce knowledge about our lives and recognize it as valid. Black feminist thought, in other words, is theory grounded in the everyday experiences of Black women and our tools and strategies for understanding and validating those experience are our epistemologies. Those epistemologies can take many forms, such as conversing with each other, acknowledging and affirming our emotions, keeping our moral and ethical commitments central to the knowledge we produce, and thinking about how our individual and collective experiences matter in the world and our daily lives as well as how they matter specifically for resistance against oppression. As such, Black feminist thought holds assumptions that encounters and interactions resulting from our social locations should be integral to the research in which Black women are included.

Knowledge claims, for example, that are absent of practical images and emotive engagement do not create conditions conducive for the development of Black feminist thought. Similarly, a qualifying process of dialogue within communities of Black women and personal accountability through moral and ethical commitments are required to validate knowledge possession. Dialogue, emotion, and lived experiences are not typically valued as epistemological

requirements by traditional, Eurocentric White epistemological frames, resulting in an "entrenched positivism" in research practices that exclude the values of Black women as knowledge producers and participants in critical literacies practices (Collins, 2000, p. 256). Importantly, as Collins (1986) points out, a focus on Black feminist epistemology allows for an accounting for our "outsider within" status (Collins, 1986, p. s14) that recognizes the value of our unique and intersectional social positioning, which is useful for academic research. By not examining the ways that our social locations contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege, represent collective standpoints, or express moral/ethical commitments and ethics of caring, critical literacy research may forfeit the advantage of the dynamic of an outsider within perspective (Collins, 1986; Thomas et al., 1999), which may be especially valuable for resisting social injustice and practices of critical literacy. Therefore, achieving the goal of Black women educators' visibility and integration into critical literacies research requires attending to epistemological orientations in the research.

In the next section, I explain how I drew upon Black Feminist thought and epistemologies to guide the ways I analyzed literature related to Black women educators and critical literacies research. Specifically, I explain how I drew upon Black Feminist thought in two primary ways: first, I used it to frame the ways I distinguished between critical literacies research that only mentions Black women's social locations or demographics and those that integrate their everyday experiences on account of race and gender into the core of the research. Second, I explain how I used Collins' (2000) descriptors and criterion of Black feminist epistemology to help me analyze the integration of Black women educators in critical literacies research.

Methodology

To attend to the integration of Black women educators in critical literacies research, I needed methodology that also makes Black feminist thought and epistemologies central to the work. Therefore, I drew upon Black feminist methodologies, which are grounded in qualitative approaches, to design and carry out this study (Patterson et al., 2016). Black feminist methodologies privilege and center the ways of knowing of Black women in all aspects of the research. Thus, the methods of this review do not adhere closely to one specific design for reviews of literature or analysis of texts; rather, as a Black woman researcher, I employed a combination of research techniques and methods of data collection and analysis to complete this study as well as an attention to my social location and lived experiences. This work includes drawing from a wide range of research literature on different methods to review literature and analyze data, drawing on the resources around me such as a research librarian to talk regularly about my study, being in constant conversation with other scholars, and also writing alongside my continuous reading of Black feminist literature. All of these experiences have informed the methodological design of this study.

Although I provide insight into the process of methodological design, complete transparency is not desirable or possible because the theories researchers draw upon impact the ways that researchers think about and disclose information about their methodologies (Bridges-Rhoads, Hughes, & Van Cleave, 2016). My work in this chapter is informed by Black feminist thought, which allows me to bring my personal experiences and historical knowledges into the research, all of which matter greatly to how and what I analyze, but all of which are not disclosed here due to a number of considerations, such as personal considerations and dissertation timelines. Further, it is important to note that this study was written in the midst of a global

pandemic from the novel coronavirus that disproportionately impacts people of color and Black Americans (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). At the same time, the writing took place in the midst of a civil rights movement for Black lives (National Geographic, 2020). The convergence of these two events certainly impacted the writing of this dissertation in ways that I do yet understood and/or have not yet processed, including for example, my growing understanding of potential implications for this work and the effects of continuously processing, feeling, and sometimes pushing aside new information related to Black lives in the media and elsewhere in order to live my daily life.

Empirical Background

This study builds upon a traditional review of critical literacies research that I conducted during my dissertation prospectus that broadly summarizes empirical studies with participants who are teachers. Traditional literature reviews often present a comprehensive background of literature related to a topic that is used to summarize and analyze research literature to identify gaps or directions for future research (Danson & Arshad, 2012). After conducting a traditional literature review, I found that empirical studies examining teachers' critical literacies practices generally investigated their instructional practices (as opposed to personal practices) and fell within one of the following broad categories: (a) studies of critical literacies in education broadly that do not explicitly identify teachers' social locations (e.g., Cooper & White, 2012; Harrison, 2018; Kohfeldt, Bowen, & Langhout, 2016; Medina & del Rocio Costa, 2013; Stribling, 2014); (b) studies in elementary education that examine the impacts of social locations on critical literacies practices of White educators (e.g., Flores-Koulish & Smith-D'Arezzo, 2016; Montgomery, 2014; Sweeney, 1997); (c) studies that identify Black women teachers doing critical literacies work outside of elementary education contexts (e.g., Baker-Bell et al., 2017;

Rex, 2006); or (d) studies that identify Black women teachers doing critical literacy work within elementary education contexts (e.g., McArthur, 2016). The results of this traditional literature review in my prospectus revealed multiple themes among critical literacies research about teachers and their practices, including a dearth of published empirical literature on Black women educators' critical literacies practices in primary and elementary grades K-5, which is an area of interests because of what research has suggested about the value of critical literacies instruction for young children (Vasquez, 2014). Therefore, I used the results to identify a line of inquiry for this paper that would investigate representations of Black women's critical literacies practices through examinations of Black feminist epistemologies, specifically in elementary and primary education contexts.

Design

For the purposes of this dissertation, I focus on Black women educators' integration in literature that claims to be associated with critical literacy or its plural form. In other words, I focus on the literature that mentions critical literacy as opposed to focusing more broadly on ideas and practices that are certainly relevant to the theorization and pedagogy of critical literacies (e.g., anti-racism, abolitionist teaching). I also decided to focus on academic articles rather than books or blogs and webinars, the latter of which are proliferating given the current political climate. This focused design is both an asset and a limitation. The focus on the term, critical literacy, itself, allows me to focus on how Black women are associated with or present in what is counted or identified as critical literacies in professional literature. It also provides a grounding for Chapter Two of this dissertation, which is an empirical study that draws upon Black women educators literacy practices with the aim of broadening the ways critical literacy work is theorized and enacted. However, the focused design also limits the possibility for

understanding how other movements such as abolitionist teaching (Love, 2019) aim to dismantle educational inequities are also related to and grounded in what might be termed critical literacies and could become part of the broader understanding and definitions that get written into curricula and circulated in daily conversations among teachers about how to enact critical literacy.

Methods

Although reviews of literature are not inherently critical, I take a critical approach by utilizing Black feminist theories and methodologies to inform the methods design. For example, as I describe below, I inquire about both when and how Black women are represented in critical literacies research by examining how researchers address the criterion of a Black feminist epistemological orientation. However, I also reference a number of review methods to help guide my process of organizing and analyzing. Levac et al.'s (2010) five steps for scoping reviews, for instance, were useful for providing an organizing frame that would allow for a broad view of the scope of the terms critical literacy and critical literacies as it relates to Black women. The steps served as a guide for data collection and helped me to identify and clarify research questions, identify relevant studies, collaborate with others, and represent and disseminate the data in ways that foreground implications for research. At the same time, I took them up as necessarily complicated, context specific, and interrelated, as I describe in relation to each step below. The steps are:

1. Identifying the research question by clarifying and linking the purpose and research question
2. Identifying the relevant studies using a three-step literature search in order to balance the breadth and comprehensiveness
3. Careful selection of studies using a team approach

4. Charting the data in a tabular and narrative format
5. Collating the results to identify the implications of the study findings for policy, practice or research

In the next sections, I explain each step of the data collection process with special attention to the moments of tension and uncertainty in which the methodological flexibility of Black feminist methodologies was useful for adjusting my approaches.

Step One: Identifying the Research Question

I began this inquiry with a general curiosity about what is known about Black women in critical literacies research. My curiosity stemmed from my own reading and positionalities as a Black woman and former elementary school teacher. I knew that my own experiences based upon my social locations had influenced my engagement in critical literacies practices, yet when I searched literature for use of the term "critical literacies" and Black or African American women, I found few examples that explicitly centered our practices and examined how we are related to our social identities. This was particularly perplexing to me as a former educator who engaged in critical literacies practices with my students, and I knew from my own experiences that my enactment of critical literacies with the students in my classrooms was often specific to my own historical and current experiences as a Black woman. The dearth of literature was confirmed through the traditional literature review that informed this study.

As I narrowed my inquiry from the very broad question of what is known about Black women's integration in critical literacies research I continued reading and thinking to inform the revisions of my research question. I considered social movements such as Cite Black Women coupled with understandings of Black feminist thought that call for problems of erasure to be addressed as problems of epistemology (Collins, 2000). I used all of these to inform the

development of my new research question, which had wording that changed up until the final moments of writing this chapter: How are Black women educators' ways of knowing integrated in critical literacies research with Black women elementary educators as participants? My acknowledgement that the research questions was developing and shifting throughout is one way that I draw attention to the fact that Black feminist methodologies make space for the ongoing lived experiences of Black women, which in this case included my continuous reading and conversing with family, friends, and others that shifted the question.

Step Two: Identifying the Relevant Studies

Guided by Levac et al.'s (2010) suggestions for collaboration, I worked with a university educational librarian to create search terms that were specific to the questions and goals of this study. We met face-to-face three times over the course of the study to review databases, experiment with search strings, and clarify the sample of studies that were used. Subsequently, we corresponded through email to resolve discrepancies or to troubleshoot questions about the search results. For example, I knew from my own reading that a certain study should have been included in the results based on the search criteria, but it did not appear in the identified studies. I emailed the librarian for insight and she was able to show me how to add an additional database to the search that populated results that included the study in question. Because the purpose of the study was, in part, to inform future empirical research, I limited the scope of data search to include only empirical research that has already been conducted and published in the field of critical literacies as it relates to Black women educators. Similarly, because my research questions identify a target population and context, I focused the data search by using terms such as critical literacies, Black, African American, Teacher, Primary, and Elementary. I also used Boolean operators to help further clarify relevant research terms and the thesaurus function to

capture all terms related to grade level context. A list of key search terms and thesaurus terms is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Initial Key Search Terms

Search Terms and Thesaurus Terms
"critical literac*" OR "critical racial literac*" OR "critical inform* literac*" OR "critical media literac*" OR "critical pedagog*" OR "urban critical pedagog*" OR "urban critical literac*" OR “racial literac*”

I used a compounded search to simultaneously query databases PsycInfo, Academic Research Complete, and ERIC via EBSCOhost for terms that are explicitly or inferentially related to critical literacies. Inferential terms and explicit terms were largely informed by my own reading, collaboration with others, and the results of a less targeted review of critical literacies research. I identified explicit terms as those that named the construct of critical literacy in specific terms and included “critical literacy,” “urban critical literacy,” “critical media literacy,” “critical pedagogy,” as well plural iterations of each word such as “critical literacies,” “critical media literacies,” etc. Inferential terms were those that did not explicitly use the phrase or words “critical literacy” but were similar in either construct or meaning. One example is the term “racial literacy” which is similar in both construct and meaning. “Racial literacy” is similar in construct to the term “critical literacy” because its practices are used to address issues of race and racism. “Racial literacy” is related to “critical literacy” because the issues of power that are critiqued through critical literacies may be related to race (Wolk, 2003).

This search produced 2,783 results. After the initial search, I refined the search string to further narrow the component of study by explicitly requiring the presence of terms “Black,”

“African American,” or “Women,” and requiring it to be paired with the terms “Teacher” or “Educator” or “Instructor.” Black feminist theories use the term Black to include various groups throughout the African diaspora which includes participants who may have been classified as “African” or “African American”. The search yielded 396 articles and key search terms for this search string are located in Table 2.

Table 2

Adjusted Key Search Terms

Search Terms
"Black women" OR "African American women" OR "Black" OR "African American" OR "Black Feminist" OR "Black Feminist Thought" OR “Teacher” OR “Educator” AND “Teacher”

Step Three: Careful Selection of Study

Study selection was an iterative process, where I constantly compared the content of identified studies to other studies, the developing research question, and purpose of the study. Although Levac, et. al. (2010) recommended selecting studies with a team, I did not engage in collaboration with a team beyond my work with the university librarian to select studies for this review. In addition to constraints on time and funding as identified by Levac, et. al. (2010), constraints on personnel may impact the researcher’s conduct of literature review. In addition to these considerations, I was bounded by the fact that the expectations of dissertation studies often necessitate that work is conducted by the degree-seeking individual rather than as a part of a team (Van Cleave & Bridges-Rhoads, 2013). Therefore, for this aspect of step 3, I defer to Arksey and O’Malley’s (2005) assertion that individual decisions are sufficient for careful study selection.

I used search filters to further narrow the number of results. Filters provided results that were empirical, peer reviewed, conducted in an elementary/primary school setting, included the term teacher/educator, and published between 1990 and 2019. The year 1990 captures the simultaneous entry of Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory into legal scholarship and Patricia Hill Collins' publication of scholarly literature on *Black Feminist Thought*. Both are historical markers of significance because Black feminist theories and theories of intersectionality were made available to be used in critical literacies research; although intersectionality-like thought has been part of social and intellectual theorizing for many years (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

Because the focus of this review is on the integration of Black women educators' as participants in critical literacies research, theoretical and conceptual articles were excluded from the component of study for reasons described above. The filtered search yielded 84 articles. From the results, I used the titles and abstracts to exclude articles that were discovered in the search only because they included keywords and where the uses of the terms were not at all related to the participants, concepts or theories in the study. As an example, "Unlocking the Cage: Empowering Literacy Representations in Netflix's Luke Cage Series*"* (Toliver, 2018) includes the word literacy in the article but does not include teachers, educators, or instructors as participants. Other examples include articles that mention the term educator or teacher but do not focus on their practices, identities or experiences in any way. As an example, "The Brown Face of Hope" (Meier, 2015) accounts for concepts related to teachers and teaching; however, the article's focus is children's literature. Additional examples of keywords that were present but did meet inclusion criteria were related to author affiliation (e.g., "Assistant Professor of *Teacher* Education"). Some of the unrelated articles that included key search terms were included in the

initial sort and all were read if they were possibly related. Those that were closely related were only excluded after they had been read. The term "teacher" vs. "teaching" identified articles that were more closely related to the inclusion criteria because the focus of the articles was on individual teachers, rather than just their practices. Often, if authors wrote about teaching, they rarely included information about participants' social locations. The remaining articles totaled 47 and were published between 2001 and 2020. I read each article and sorted them into one of two categories: participants included Black women educators and participants did not include Black women educators. The sort yielded 6 articles. A full list of inclusion and exclusion criteria are listed in Table 3.

Table 3
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria		
Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Time period	1990-2019	Studies outside of these dates
Language	English	Non-English
Type of article	Empirical research published in a peer review journal	Research that is not empirical or peer reviewed
Participants	Black women (BW) educators	Participants who are not BW
Literature Focus	Meaningful use of CL or related term	Meaningless use of term
Study Focus	Participants' literacy practices and social locations	All other CL topics (e.g. students' practices and curriculum design

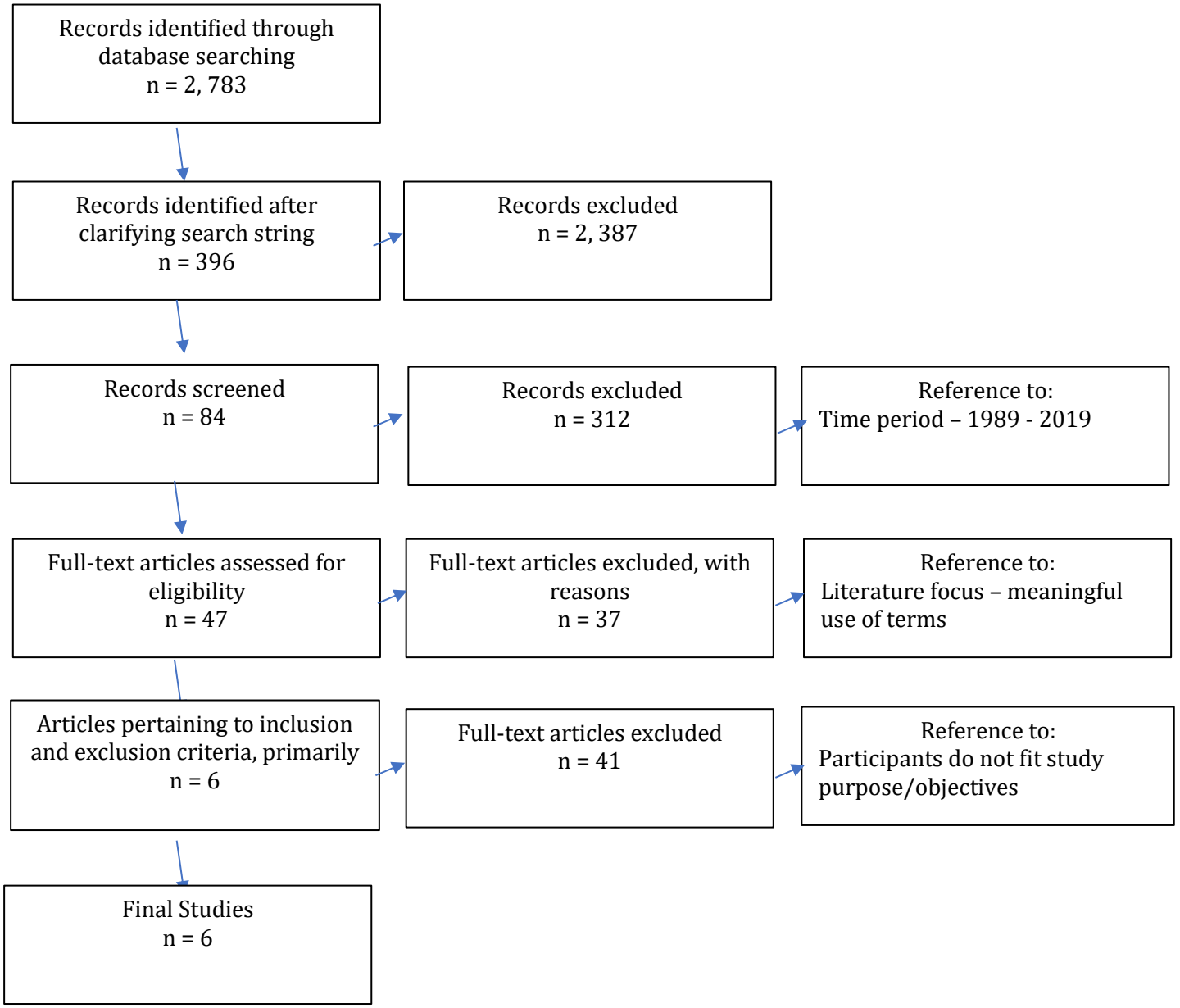
To begin my synthesis and analysis, I reread each article for an initial understanding of the aims, theoretical grounding, and methodologies of the articles. I also wanted a general sense

of how the authors talked about Black women in the studies. I found articles met the inclusion criteria, particularly by having Black women as participants, but they varied in the degree to which they included information about Black women's social locations. I put them into one of three categories. 1) mention: for articles in which the authors used the terms "critical literacy" or a similar term *and* identified participants' social location(s) at least once in the article. For this category, some studies only mentioned Black women's race and gender in the sections describing participant demographics while others explained how their identities mattered for their critical literacies practices. I did not assume that the researcher did not carefully consider social locations in their work, but was looking for explicit integration that demonstrated a centering of Black women's standpoints through a Black feminist epistemological orientation. 2) integral: for articles in which the authors met the criteria for the category mention *and* provided additional information or discussion about participants' social locations beyond one mention. I describe this category in more detail in the next step; 3) different context: for articles use the terms "critical literacy" or a similar term *and* do not provide any specific information about participants' social locations.

The articles that are the focus in the findings come from the integral category, which resulted in a focus on empirical articles that integrate examinations of Black women's critical literacies practices with how their social locations inform their resistance to dominant and harmful ideologies. Figure 1 is a PRISMA diagram of the article selection process that is guided by the search criteria listed in the Preferred Reporting of Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses Statement (Moher et al., 2009).

Figure 1

PRISMA Diagram of Study Selection Process

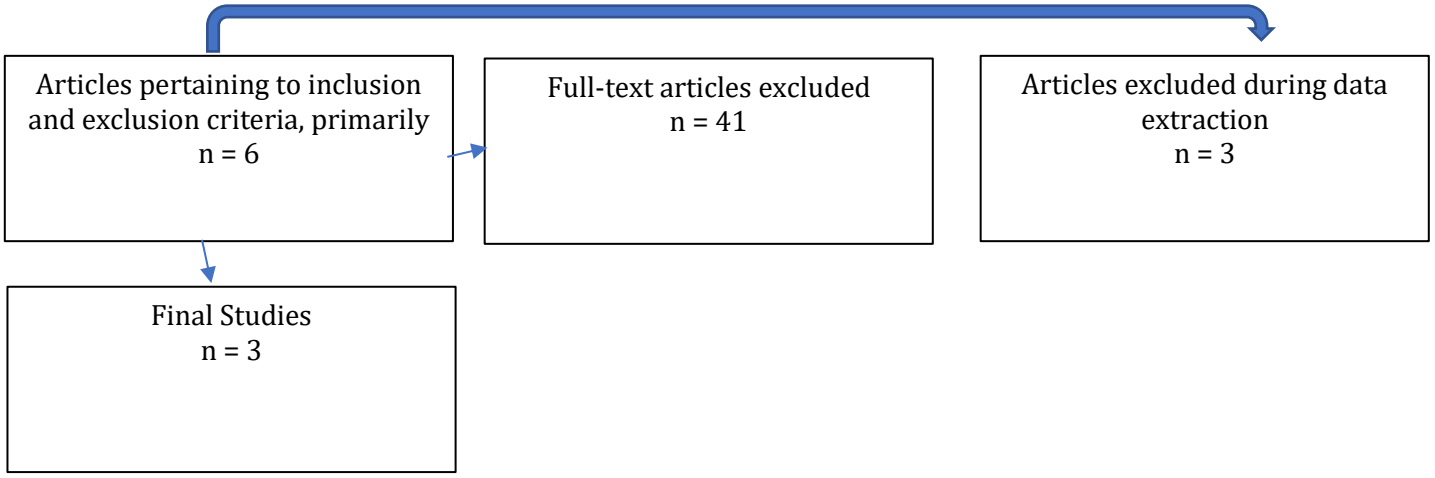


Step Four: Charting the Data

As part of the iterative process of data analysis, I selected only the three articles that integrated examinations of critical literacies practices and Black women educators' social locations to address the following analytic questions: *How are Black women educators*

represented as participants in critical literacies research, and professional literature? In what ways do authors draw upon Black feminist epistemologies when writing about Black women educators in critical literacies research? An updated PRISMA diagram is provided as Figure 2.

Figure 2
Adjusted PRISMA Diagram



It is important to note that regarding analysis, I am aware that the articles in the sample were published under certain circumstances and conditions, and with respect to specific guidelines and requirements. I approached this analysis in the spirit of Bridges-Rhoads et. al.'s (2016) methodological transparency which reminded me that "any reading is situated in a network of epistemological, political, and practical factors" and that it is important to give "authors the benefit of the doubt when judging methodologies" because authors produced the text with a specific kind of transparency in mind (p. 12). In my analysis, my aim was not to judge or evaluate these articles--rather, I bring questions to them about how methods and methodologies are working to center Black women and their critical literacies practices.

An Analytic for Integration. To take up my analytic questions for analysis I identified as integral, I used the four tenets of Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 2000), each related to

knowledge production or possession. The four criteria of Black feminist epistemology may be met by either researchers, participants, or both. As summarized by Dotson (2015), they are:

1. a criterion on meaning, which takes lived experience and 'practical images' as important for grounding and making knowledge claims (Collins 2009, p. 276);
2. a criterion for assessment, which refers to vetting knowledge through dialogue with and among one's community/communities (Collins, 2009, p. 276);
3. criteria for members of one's community/communities, which articulates forms of competence required for members of a given community of knowers (Collins, 2009, p. 281); and
4. a criterion on knower adequacy, which stipulates that those making claims to knowledge need to also have moral or ethical connections to those claims (Collins, p. 284, 2009). (p. 2327)

It's important to note also that these criteria are not mutually exclusive nor do they occur discreetly separate from one another. Rather, they work in tandem to increase the visibility of Black women's standpoints on critical literacy as a method of resistance.

Criterion of Meaning. A criterion of meaning values lived experiences and practical images as important for grounding knowledge claims. Collins (2000) states that experience is the line that denotes knowledge from wisdom. This suggests that you may know something but you are not wise about it until you have experienced it. Therefore, the criterion of meaning requires wisdom, or experience, and more than an intellectual understanding to produce and validate knowledge of and about Black women. I identified a criterion of meaning in the sample by examining how researchers elicited information about participants' personal experiences through interviews and other forms of data collection. I also examined how researchers described

how they came to their research, for example if their personal experiences informed their topic or decision-making during the research and dissemination processes.

Criterion for Knower Adequacy. A criterion for knower adequacy is about connectedness and requires that knowledge be vetted through dialogue within one's community. This criterion is important for highlighting that new knowledge claims among Black women are worked out among members of a community (Collins, 1986). For studies in the sample for the research in this paper I looked for evidence of email or verbal communication between and among Black women about literacies practices as well as collaborative methods, such as focus group interviews.

Criterion for Members of One's Community. Criterion for members of one's community/communities is related to an ethic of caring. This includes a recognition of emotion and attention to empathy during the research process. This criterion is important because it invites emotions of participants/researchers into the research process and recognizes them as important for knowledge production. I identified this criterion by highlighting when emotions or empathy were discussed or expressed by either the researchers or participants. This could be, for instance, through the use of data solicited in interviews or informal conversations.

Criterion for Assessment. Finally, a criterion for assessment refers to the researcher and participants' personal accountability for their knowledge claims. This is important because ideas are not divorced from those who create them. This level of transparency provides information about individual's core beliefs that are useful for understanding knowledge claims. I identified this criterion by looking for evidence of researchers' statements about positionality/subjectivity and information on participants' personal stances/claims about critical literacies practices or education more broadly.

Step Five: Collate and Report Findings

I conducted multiple readings of the articles, using Black feminist though to inform my analysis. Levac, et. al. (2010) suggests findings be reported in consideration of the purpose of the study, rather than arbitrarily, and that meaning should be applied to the results. Because the purpose of this study is to inform future research related to Black women's critical literacies practices, I have reported the findings related to a dearth of literature on Black women's practices and the implications for future research. Regarding meaning within a broader context, I argue a case for why more research should be done on this topic and present suggestions for how future critical literacies research could extend the depth and quality of critical literacies studies as they relate to Black women participants.

Findings

Through the theoretically informed process I described above, I selected six studies that meet the criteria for inclusion and identified participants' social location(s) at least once in the article. Of the six studies, I assigned one article to the category "mention" (Souto-Manning & Price-Dennis, 2012) because the authors identify participants' social locations, but do not disclose how their positionalities are useful for understanding their engagement with critical literacies. For example, although Souto-Manning & Price-Dennis (2012) provide information that identifies a participant as "women" (p. 88) and "African American" (p. 89), they focus on factors other than how her social locations inform her critical literacies practice.

As mentioned previously, this is problematic because it obscures the value of Black women's unique standpoints for advancing critical literacies' goals of challenging dominant ideologies, and it perpetuates a problem of epistemology that marginalizes Black women's ways of knowing. It is also indicative of a larger social issue that reflects a devaluing of Black

women's lives and voices. However, I also found three studies where Black women's representations were integral to the research that was conducted.

In this section, I discuss these three studies that demonstrate ways of centralizing Black women's ways of knowing into critical literacies research. I begin by discussing each study individually, demonstrating some of the ways the researchers/authors make Black women's ways of knowing integral to their work. I weave in the four criteria for epistemology described in the methodology section in order to help explain how the integrated knowledges are represented as Black feminist epistemologies. Next, I discuss all three studies together, thinking across them to make connections among all authors' attempts to integrate Black women's ways of knowing into critical literacies research. Finally, in subsequent sections I discuss what can be learned from these observations, and why they matter for research and education.

Study One

In their article entitled, *We've Been Doing it Your Way Long Enough: Syncretism as a Critical Process,* Susi Long, Dinah Volk, Janice Baines, and Carmen Tisdale (2013) use "classroom illustrations" and "teaching and learning examples" (p. 430) to explore the critical pedagogy and culturally relevant practices of Carmen and Janice, two African American elementary teachers in South Carolina. The researchers analyzed data collected through conversations with Carmen and Janice and artifacts from their instruction such as lesson plans and materials that they used to supplement their curriculums to complete this study. Findings represent the teachers' work to help students make connections to their African heritage, after the teachers engaged in a month-long professional development experience in Sierra Leone. Carmen and Janice are also co-authors of this study and identify throughout with pronouns she/her. The other co-authors do not disclose their racial or gender identities, but identify as university

educators and refer to the collective authorship team as “we” throughout the article. The article focuses on how Carmen and Janice used their personal experiences abroad as a catalyst for implementing instruction that was culturally relevant for their African American first and second grade students. The professional development focused on making connections between language, knowledge and cultural traditions of Sierra Leone and the United States, and the teachers used concepts of critical pedagogy and critical syncretism to shift the power from their White, middle class curriculum to incorporate elements that more closely resembled the histories and identities of their students and school communities.

This study integrates Black women’s ways of knowing in two main ways, by including the participants’ roles as co-researchers and by foregrounding historical and current experiences in their explanations of critical pedagogy practices. Integration is also demonstrated by the co-researchers’ attention to the ways that participants’ emotions/feelings and ethical and moral commitments influenced their instructional practices and curriculum choices. As I describe below, all of these decisions are important for demonstrating Black women’s ways of knowing.

First, as stated above, the co-researchers in this study identify participants’ dual roles by stating that “[t]he authors of this article [are] two classroom teachers (Carmen and Janice) and two university educators (Dinah and Susi)” (p. 419). Because the focus of the data collection and analysis is on Carmen and Janice, this dual role as both researchers and participants allows the integration of their knowledge as Black women into the article in multiple ways. The researcher-participant role allows the authors to prioritize a reflexive stance in their work, for instance, by examining and writing about how the author’s own positionalities matter for the research that they conduct. Throughout the article, for example, it is clear that Carmen and Janice’s commitments to creating contexts that value and cultivate the knowledge and background that

students bring to their classrooms comes from a place of personal responsibility and accountability because the researchers share their goals with the readers. When discussing Carmen and Janice's own educational encounters, personal feelings of pride framed how they made sense of and used the trip they took to Sierra Leone to inform their desire to educate their students about African heritage. They state, for example:

> Carmen and Janice were dedicated to using the Sierra Leone experience to contradict negative and inaccurate stereotypes about Africa for their students and for them to build a sense of pride in their heritage. Recognizing this as a missing piece in her own educational life, Carmen explained that while she has a very strong sense of family and pride in being African American, her schooling did not provide her with a sense of her African heritage. It was this feeling of connection with and pride in heritage that Janice and Carmen wanted to bring to their first and second graders, African American students who were regularly seen through a deficit lens by the community outside their own. As Carmen said: 'It will make a difference for my students and how they feel their significance in the world.' (p.425)

In this sense, the authors use their role as both researchers and participants to write with their privileged status as outsiders within (Collins, 1986) because they are speaking from a place of knowledge about their own practices, histories, and beliefs. At the same time, as researchers, they can locate how their experiences are meaningful and where they fit into ongoing conversations in education that are outside of their immediate context, which in this case relates to practices of culturally relevant pedagogies and critical literacies. This is related to a criterion of assessment (Collins, 2000) because it demonstrates how personal morals and ethical

responsibilities may be incorporated into research in ways that address the fact that who produces ideas matters just as much as the ideas themselves. This is important because it is a way to make visible that this type of reflexive and historical knowledge that is specific to Black women in dual roles as researchers and participants is valid and should be integrated into the research process.

In the excerpt, the authors also draw attention to how Carmen and Janice's personal connections to their African heritage propelled them forward in their work against the dominant narrative perpetuated by school curriculums that did not acknowledge African heritage. The authors make evident, through their discussion, how these personal experiences also informed Carmen and Janice's engagement in critical literacies practices and presented their students with alternative perspectives of Africa as well as their own neighborhoods. The authors further connect their experiences to their work in critical literacies, for example, by integrating how Carmen and Janice express that their goals to support students' pride in their heritage, particularly in school settings, stemmed from their own lack of exposure to African heritage during their schooling years, suggesting that their critical literacies practices are in fact related to their experiences as Black women:

> The students' African American neighbourhood of low-income housing projects was typically defined by the wider community in terms of poverty, gang presence and drug use, rather than by its history as a community of influential artisans, politicians, activists and professionals. Creating contexts in which community knowledge – from the local community to West African heritage – were valued as essential rather than incidental to curricular design led to and reinforced students' pride in self, family and heritage. (p. 431)

The use of experience to inform critical literacies reflects a criterion of meaning by demonstrating how the co-researchers and participants used their experiences to produce knowledge about how to create a teaching context in support of critical practices. Carmen and Janice's experiences also contribute to demonstrating a criterion of one's own community as their professional development trip is connected to their feelings of pride about their heritage and their desires to create supportive contexts for their students.

Although the authors integrate Carmen and Janice's ways of knowing throughout the text, the nondisclosure of the racial identity of Dinah and Susi, the other co-researchers, raises questions about how their positionality matters for their work with Black women teachers. As an example, when discussing the authors' aims to analyze critical pedagogy and culturally relevant practices in relation to the classroom practices, the authors include a collective statement about the literature and point to "what we believe" (p. 419) about the necessity of attending to power structures. Unpacking the "we", by disclosing how Dinah and Susie's social locations informed their work with Carmen and Janice may have provided additional opportunities to further integrate Carmen and Janice's perspectives. The extent to which "we" reflects normalizing epistemologies and subsumes Black feminist epistemologies is unknown; therefore, revealing differences among the two may have provided additional insight into the unique ways that Black women's ways of knowing informed this critical literacies research.

Study Two

The second study which is entitled *From rhymes to resistance: Hip-hop as a critical lens in promoting socially just teaching* by Crystal Shelby-Caffey, Lavern Byfield and Stephanie Solbrig (2018), reflects the critical literacies practices of "three educators from very diverse backgrounds who have experiences at elementary and college levels" (p. 70). At the time of the

study, Crystal Shelby-Caffey and Lavern Byfield are pre-service teacher educators and former elementary educators, and Stephanie Solbrig is a fifth-grade elementary school educator. Additionally, each author has experience teaching in both urban and rural settings, and "has direct responsibilities related to training new, mostly white (and female) elementary teachers" (p. 70).

In this study, authors identify Shelby-Caffey and Byfield as "women of colour who have faced and fought marginalisation in various aspects of our lives" and Solbrig as a "white woman who has witnessed and combatted injustices" (p. 70). Although neither Shelby-Caffey or Byfield directly self-identity as Black women, in the article they talk directly about their positionality as women of color in relation to their African American students. For this reason, I inferred their identities in relation to the term Black women, but I also note that this raises questions about whether and how this article is actually related to the experiences of Black women. I include it here because it brings attention to the fact that what can be known and understood about Black women's integration in any body of literature is dependent on the stability of presumed categories of racial existence, which are always contingent upon current and historical circumstances as well as the preferred identity categories of the individual. For the purposes of this chapter, I keep this article in the integral category because I see it as a fruitful space to learn from in relation to how social locations can matter in relation to the uniqueness of self-definition among Black women and women of color more broadly.

The authors examine their own instructional practices and provide reflections on their "attempts to engage students in critical literacy using hip-hop music and culture as a platform and to prepare others to do the same" (p. 70). Shelby-Caffey and Solbrig reflect on their approaches to lessons that they have used (Shelby-Caffey) and use (Solbrig) with students in

elementary classrooms, and Shelby-Caffey and Byfield reflect on approaches that they use in literacy methods courses for pre-service teachers. The researchers draw upon two lessons as example, drawing upon their reflections of students' responses and artifacts to draw conclusions about the usefulness of hip-hop music and culture for approaching elementary and pre-service education with a social justice-oriented lens.

Shelby-Caffey et al., (2018) highlight the potential of hip-hop engagement for engaging in critical literacies with elementary and post-secondary students when (1) a culture of inquiry guides learning, (2) students are urged to engage in critical analysis, and (3) roles of teacher and learner are reversed. They use Freire's (1974) definitions of critical literacies and critical consciousness, claiming that critical literacies include both personal and professional actions/interactions. They also align the goals of socio-political critique of critical pedagogy and hip-hop music to design experiences for students to engage in social critique.

The researchers integrate Black women's ways of knowing into their study of critical literacies practices in several ways such as referencing participants' experiences and moral and ethical beliefs, as well as incorporating the ways that they engaged in dialogue with other Black women during the course of the study. Also, similar to Study One, the researchers' dual roles as participants provide an outsider within perspective (Collins, 1986) as well as the additional advantage they claim by identifying as educators and researchers:

> Separately and collectively, we have each shared and examined our journeys and how these have influenced who we are as educators. It is through these shared explorations that two of us came to discuss our experiences as women of colour who have faced and fought marginalisation in various aspects of our lives…This combination of experiences continues to influence our perceptions of our work

> with children, families, communities, colleagues, and those entering the field of education. (p. 70)

In this excerpt, the researchers/participants share how they have come to this topic of practicing critical literacies with students of color through their personal experiences. Additionally, this example also demonstrates the researchers' attention to dialogue through their explicit mention of "shared explorations" and discussions of "our experiences as women of colour". Similar to Study One, the collective term "our" raises questions about the ways in which Shelby-Caffey and Byfield's ways of knowing were or were not distinguished from Solbrig's. The authors make the decision to disclose the race of each co-researcher and note that each one's experiences, although different, have worked to shape their views of education and research. For example, they provide details about Solbrig's shifts in thinking; for example, stating that she had just learned that "African American author Jacqueline Woodson is a descendant of Thomas Jefferson" and other information that she " had never encountered in any textbook" that were relevant to historical social critique (p. 75). This explicit connection to Solbrig's journey toward critical literacies practices is useful for enhancing the reader's understanding of her critical literacies practices. This raises questions about what readers might learn from a similar type of explicit disclosure related to Shelby-Caffey and Byfield's experiences and encounters as elementary teachers and pre-service educators and what additional insight may have been provided about Black women's ways of knowing.

In the excerpt, the authors demonstrate an attention to experiences and dialogue, reflecting both the criterion of meaning and criterion of knower adequacy that Black feminist epistemology recognizes as beneficial for producing knowledge about and by Black women. The example also demonstrates how the criteria are not mutually exclusive and are often overlapping;

for example, participants engaged in dialogue among other Black women about their experiences, meeting both criteria of meaning and knower adequacy. By disclosing their approaches to dialogue related to this study, readers can see how researcher-participants have come to study the topic of critical literacies and hip-hop music and culture, and add nuance to their valuation of their claims.

As an additional example, the authors provide a statement about foundational beliefs about literacy education. They shared:

> We believe [students ranging from kindergarten to doctoral level] deserve literacy instruction that is embedded throughout the curriculum and draws upon their knowledge, challenges them to think critically and prompts them to act. It is possible to meet the needs of our diverse students, whether it be in elementary classrooms or teacher education programmes, through dynamic methods that develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions required to be successful in life. (p. 80)

This statement reveals an ethical stance that according to Collins (1990) is useful for determining the validity of knowledge claims. Importantly, this statement addresses a criterion of assessment by integrating Black women's perspectives on the responsibility of teachers and curriculum designers to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Study Three

The third study, *Enacting Critical Pedagogy in an Emerging South African Democracy: Narratives of Pleasure and Pain,* by Juliet Perumal (2016) occurred in the context of a post-apartheid South Africa and focuses on examining the tensions between the expectations of teachers to teach for a democratic education, such as through critical literacies and pedagogies,

and their personal experiences of oppression and marginalization. Perumal analyzed data from 90-minute-long interviews conducted with 18 teachers and principals who she identified as African and people of color. I focus my analysis on the participants who either self-identity or are identified by the author as Black women, in part, through she/her pronouns . In the author biography, Perumal uses the pronouns "she" and does not further describe her social locations including her race and gender. The broad goal of Perumal's study is to take up tensions that educators experience between critical literacy theory and practice, particularly the "discourse on critical pedagogy that urges teachers to denounce feelings that render them weak in the face of hardship or feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of transformative teaching" (p. 79). She examined teachers' lived experiences through their personal narratives of pleasure and pain to form an argument for a "re-visitation of the tenets of critical pedagogy" (p. 761).

Unlike the previous studies, the researcher does not also engage in the study as a participant; however, she integrates Black women's ways of knowing in a number of ways, first and foremost in her theoretical and methodological framing that aims to highlight participants' sense of moral obligation as educators as well as their emotions tied to their experiences. For example, Perumal grounds her study in hooks' (1994) and Yoon's (2005) conceptions of critical literacy as related to teachers' emancipated identities that require teachers to identify their own internalized feelings as they engage in critical literacy work alongside their students. It is from this orientation, one that values emotion, morals and ethics, that she designed her research study to foreground the ways that teachers' social locations to their practice by exploring the relationship between their experiences of marginalization, emotional stances, moral positioning, and ethics to their experiences with critical literacies instruction.

For example, Perumal accessed participants' experiences through interviews in which participants "recounted first-hand experiences of race, class, and gender discrimination" (p. 751). She referred to these as narratives of pain and used them to make visible the difficulty critical literacies work for marginalized educators of color. Exposing participants' narratives supported Perumal's claims for a re-envisioning of critical literacies that integrates teachers' personal experiences of marginalization and the need for their emotional and spiritual support. When talking about the implication of her finding, she states that it:

> implies the urgency for educational stakeholders and partners to provide the material, emotional, and spiritual support requisite for educators to service their pedagogical calling with ethical fidelity. Attention not just to the minds but to the body, soul, and spirit of teachers and their holistic wellbeing should constitute an integral part of continuous teacher professional development and care. (p. 761)

The recognition of the importance of emotion in the participants' ways of knowing is reflected in a criterion of one's community which Perumal (2016) heavily relies upon to make visible the experiences of Black women who participated in her study. She also ties the emotional to spiritual in important ways that make visible the ways that cultural and traditional practices contribute to knowledge production. As another example, Perumal (2016) also highlights the ways that participants invoked their own personal literacy practices such as "interceding with prayer requests with prayer requests of teachers and students, reading motivation literature, and prayer for wisdom and guidance" (p.761), and she calls for a reconsideration of critical literacies tenets that reflect their personal experiences and practices.

Additionally, Perumal includes dialogue between participants about their experiences as central to the work; for example, in the analysis she provided what appears to be a conversation

between two participants, Freda and Leslie. She stated, “Freda reported on the abduction of two students, and Leslie proceeded to report on episodes of violence that rocked the community” (p. 56). In another example, Perumal notes:

> Freda indicated that she receives up to five applications per week for social grants. Leslie provided the following description of the socio-economic context: Our school is situated in Eldorado Park...if you go to the police station...they will tell you we first need back up before we go in there” (p. 755).

Although Perumal does not specify the extent of Freda and Leslie’s conversation, the excerpts allude to participants’ shared discussions about the context in which they teach. In the first example, the participants seem to be building a collective understanding about violence/safety of their school community. Also, Leslie’s use of the collective “our” indicated a shared ownership of the school space. One of the main purposes of dialogue according to a criterion of knower adequacy is the outcome of constructing new knowledge within a “community of knowers”. The extent to which Freda and Leslie constructed new knowledge about their shared work/school environments is unclear; however, additional insight into interview transcripts could further reveal the depths of this conversation.

Finally, Perumal writes about the empathy and compassion that she had for the participants in this study as they shared with her very personal and painful stories of their lives. For example, she shares:

> Many times, I had to turn off the audio recorder because of the pain that these educators reflected on during their interviews. Less often they would laugh through their tears as they reflected on the joy, triumph, and pleasure that they derived from their work. (p. 750)

This attention to Perumal's empathy raises questions about the role of Perumal's social locations in her expressions of empathy. It brings to light questions about the ways that participants' stories are told, given the researchers' positioning as a White woman. Ultimately, I wonder how Perumal's social locations may have impacted the ways in which Black women's knowing is presented in this study.

Perumal (2016) also discloses how participants themselves evoked an ethic of caring and moral obligation. For example, she shares, "Many of the participants felt passionate about their jobs and were driven by a moral obligation to intervene positively in the lives of the children" (p. 754). This is an additional example of the interconnectedness of the criterion of a Black feminist epistemology. Perumal and the participants in this study share their experiences of pain and also provide comfort to one another through their dialogue. Similarly, their conversations about their passion for education and excitement about teaching occur simultaneously with their revelations of their moral and ethical obligations as educators.

Discussion

As I reconsider the goals of the Cite Black Women initiative (2017), which seeks to increase the visibility and integration of Black women in academic spaces, I am reminded of both the need for and the multiple ways that space can and must be created for Black women to be seen, heard, and understood. The authors in each of the three studies highlighted above hold space for Black women's experiences by sharing their words, in their own voices about how their everyday experiences impacted their engagement with critical literacies. This way of theorizing, through everyday experiences, is the cornerstone of Black feminist thought and results in a centering of Black women's perspectives in these investigations of critical literacies. Collins (2000) suggests that when we theorize with respect to the everyday, it honors the ways that

Black women's social locations are enmeshed with every aspect of their lives. Therefore, critical literacies research that analyzes educators' practices with little or no consideration of our social locations marginalizes the experiences of Black women educators. In essence, by centering Black women's perspectives on their own marginalization and resistance in their studies of critical literacies, Long et al., (2013), Shelby-Caffey, et al., (2018), and Perumal (2016) are willing to acknowledge the value of Black women's ways of knowing and their significance to Black women's practices of critical literacies.

Integrating Black women's ways of knowing through a Black feminist epistemology also provides context to enhance understandings about why Black women engage in critical literacies the way that we do. This is particularly valuable when working with Black women because of the intersecting nature of our social locations. For example, Shelby-Caffey et al., (2018) specify that their dialogue about experiences of marginalization as women of color served as the catalyst for their work to support students' experiences with social critique through hip-hop music and culture. Similarly, we understand as consumers of research that Carmen and Janice's (Long et al., 2013) experiences as school-aged Black girls and currently as Black women serve as the impetus for their work to change their 1st and 2nd grade curriculums. In a different way, Perumal (2016) explains the barriers that participants in her study faced when designing and implementing critical literacies instruction as a result of their experiences of oppression and marginalization. Here we are able to see how Black women navigate these different situations; for example, by redesigning curricula to be more culturally responsive (Shelby-Caffey, 2018; Long et al., 2013) or by engaging in personal practices to sustain mental and emotional well-being (Perumal, 2016), which may inform how others can navigate similar terrain.

Because Black women's ways of knowing reflect our experiences, dialogue, moral and ethical obligations, and emotions, a view of critical literacies that does not account for these aspects of everyday living is insufficient for fully capturing Black women's critical literacies practices. Researchers' explanations of how dialogue with other Black women inform their theoretical and methodological decisions for example, provides support for expanding views of critical literacies practices. For example, Shelby-Caffey, et al., (2018) describe how dialogue about their personal experiences with hip-hop music and culture led them to study critical literacies work centered on hip-hop as a tool for social critique. Similarly, Perumal's (2016) inquiries about participants' personal literacies practices such as prayer, meditation and spiritual readings, which functioned as counternarratives to the messages that they received about themselves in society, invited a conversation of what gets counted as critical literacies.

When Black women acted in dual roles as both researchers and participants, they included their personal experiences and ethical stances in their research. As an example, Long et al., (2013) and Shelby-Caffey et al., (2018) both drew upon personal experiences to inform their approach to critical literacies research and they both disclosed their personal ethical positions on literacy education in their papers. In this way, Black women were able to draw upon both intellectual knowledge and experiences or wisdom to inform their research. This was demonstrated through their descriptions in analysis that often included reflexive statements on how their positionality informed their research.

The degree to which researchers integrate Black women's ways of knowing varies and while there is no blueprint on how to center Black women's ways of knowing, a Black feminist epistemology is useful for understanding how Black women's perspectives are represented. This raises questions about the potential of beginning research by and about Black women with these

criteria in mind. Rather than retrospectively examining research for these epistemic orientations, what would or could be achieved if researchers designed and carried out studies that foreground experience, dialogue, morality and ethical accountability, and emotions and empathy in mind?

Implications

The implications for this research are largely for researchers who produce and circulate information about critical literacies studies. It is important to consider the ways in which Black women are represented as participants in this body of literature and one way to attend to that concern is through an epistemological orientation that seeks to intentionally center Black women's ways of knowing. Researchers may benefit from considering the criteria of a Black feminist epistemology as we design, develop, implement, and communicate information about Black women educators' literacies practices in the field of critical literacies studies.

Consider Experience as Valuable

Experiences are valuable to knowledge production because they add depth to knowledge, elevating it to a level of what Collins (2000) refers to as wisdom. Wisdom is important because it incorporates the unique perspectives of Black women into knowledge about critical literacies which is useful for developing critical literacies in resistance to dominant and exclusionary narratives about groups who are marginalized at intersections of inequity. Researchers may consider the value of experience by designing data collection methods such as interview and observational tools that elicit information about participants' experiences, and then explain how they are related to practices of critical literacies. Additionally, researchers themselves may disclose how their personal experiences brought them to study critical literacies through statements of positionality or in introductions to their work.

Engage in and Encourage Dialogue Among Black Women

Because the criteria of Black feminist epistemology are overlapping and interconnected, researchers may also access dialogue among communities of Black women through their research design. For example, facilitating small group discussions such as focus groups or sista circles (Dunmeyer, 2020) provides opportunities for Black women to co-construct knowledge about critical literacies and also to share their experiences of marginalization and resistance. Also, when researchers themselves are Black women, engaging in dialogue with participants during interviews that are semi-structured or have open-ended questions may support the flow of conversation and limit a rigid question-answer dynamic between the researcher and participant. Researchers may also encourage participants to consider and respond to one another's perspectives by cultivating environments of compassion and collaboration (e.g., through group norms and protocols for addressing differences of opinion).

Attend to Emotions and Empathize

Researchers may attend to participants' emotions by designing data collection methods that elicit information about their feelings such as through interview questions, journal/diary entries, and photo elicitation. Disclosing this information in the research paper provided a necessary look into how Black women are impacted by experiences of oppression and marginalization which inform how they respond through literacy practices as resistance (Staples, 2020; Love, 2017). Also, researchers may demonstrate empathy in their encounters with participants, such as during interviews and focus groups. The researcher's ability to empathize supports their connection with participants and is necessary for conducting social justice-oriented research (Staples, 2020). Additionally, researchers should be aware of how their own emotions may influence their critical literacies research, particularly when they also function as

participants in the study. When this is the case, reflexivity is a useful tool for examining how their own emotions impacted aspects of the research.

Disclose Personal and Moral Stances on Literacy Education and Research

Disclosure of personal and moral stances on literacy education provides additional information for consumers of research to evaluate knowledge claims. The move to reveal personal and ethical positions works to center Black women's ways of knowing by providing additional credibility to our stances on critical literacies practices of resistance. It also produces a version of Black feminist thought that offers more than insight into everyday experiences, but also beliefs which may inform their critical literacies practices. Because Black feminist thought is produced by a Black feminist epistemology, it is imperative that researchers consider the various ways that their work is influenced by their own personal and moral ethics as well as those of their participants.

Engage with Black Women as Co-researchers

Black women's roles as co-researchers and participants is invaluable because it positions us in ways that allow for the centering of our perspectives from the onset of the research process. When Black women's ways of knowing inform the research design, there is the opportunity for integration of their experiences and dialogue with other women to inform critical decisions about theory and methodology. Similarly, our affective expressions and personal and ethical commitments are interwoven throughout the research design in intentional ways that are evident throughout the research process as demonstrated by the research of Long et al., (2013) and Shelby-Caffey et al., (2018). Additionally, encouraging and supporting Black women educator participants to co-author research and not only engage as participants, may increase our

proficiency with the research process and create more opportunities for Black women educators to engage in academic research.

Researcher Self-Disclosure of Social Locations

Finally, there is also a need to self-disclose as a researcher. In all three studies, I identified opportunities for the researchers to make their social locations more explicit. This raises questions about what else may be learned about research with Black women and critical literacies more generally when researcher's attend to dynamics that are created by differences and similarities among co-authors and participants in research partnerships. Intentional self-disclosure, particularly for White women engaging as co-researchers with Black women participants, supports a posture of inquiry and attention to the presence and impact of epistemic orientations, particularly those which may be intertwined with dominant research methods and theories. In Chapter Two, I take up the meaning of positionality in this way by explaining how my own positionality matters for my work with Black women who are also educators.

Conclusion

There is some evidence that critical literacies research has centered the perspectives and practices of Black women educators, but there is potential to increase the amount and enhance the quality of representations of this population. As this chapter demonstrates, it is important for researchers doing work with Black women to take up the process of inclusion of Black women's ways of knowing as multi-faceted. Researchers, for instance, should address representation, which can increase the presence of Black women as participants in critical literacies research through strategies such as mentioning our social locations in the research. However, these strategies do little to integrate our experiences into research in ways that push the boundaries of traditional research. Researchers must also do the work of centering, which requires specific

attention to considering the ways in which Black women's critical literacies are informed by our experiences as a result of our social locations. Failing to ground studies with Black women educators that allow for and encourage our processes of knowledge production and validation, through emotional articulation and moral connections, for example, limits the quality of representations that can occur. Further, a failure to conduct research that is multi-disciplinary, diverse in its theoretical and methodological orientations, critical about representation, and used to inform action can reinscribe the inequities that critical consciousness and critical literacies practices seek to address.

Although researchers may conduct studies that seek to offer perspectives of Black women in critical literacies studies without grounding them in a Black feminist epistemology, this chapter demonstrates how Black feminism "provides a culturally congruent epistemology" (Mowatt et. al., 2013, p. 644) that can advance the ways research is done with Black women educators in critical literacies research. The guidelines for research with Black women and Black feminist epistemologies used in this analysis represent opportunities to address the invisibility and erasure identified within initiatives such as *Cite Black Women* by introducing both a structure and a tool for highlighting complexity of representations of Black women's ways of knowing. The analysis in this chapter, for example, demonstrates how Black feminist theories provide a lens that challenges Eurocentric, dominant, and exclusionary research practices, and serve as a guide for engagement in respectful and responsible research practices related to critical literacies. In other words, similar to *Cite Black Women*, Black feminism provides tools for resistance that are grounded in the ancestral practices of countless Black women's refusal to be rendered invisible and forgotten. In this way, Black feminist theories have the potential to expand critical literacies research to consider issues of equity specifically related to

intersectionality. Importantly, this chapter has also demonstrated that Black feminist methodologies offer a level of methodological transparency that may be useful for researchers, consumers of research, and participants in research. In Chapter Two, which is also theoretically and methodologically grounded in Black feminism, I demonstrate one example of how the findings of this review may be taken up in important ways in critical literacies research to challenge the ways that Black women are (re)presented in critical literacies.

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2 CRITICAL AND EXTRAORDINARY: A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF BLACK WOMEN EDUCATORS' LITERACY PRACTICES

Derived from traditions of critical theory (Horkheimer, 1937/2002), critical literacies have been broadly and extensively defined by theorists and literacy educators (Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002). Grounded in Marxism, critical literacies theories and practices are generally concerned with democracy and liberation for oppressed people and have centered historically on economic inequities related to issues of class. As described in Chapter One, critical literacies are neither grounded in Black feminist theories nor do they utilize Black feminist epistemological approaches. Thus, critical literacies theories and practices do not always consider the complexities of intersecting domains of power that affect the lives and pedagogies of Black women educators. In fact, critical literacies research is often predicated upon, designed, and presented in ways that obscure the literacy practices utilized by Black women to resist marginalization.

In this chapter, I offer an alternative to critical literacies, what Staples (2020) refers to as "extraordinary literacies," as an analytical guide for identifying and understanding Black women educators' literacy-related methods of resisting oppression. I demonstrate how extraordinary literacies, literacy practices that sustain the well-being of individuals and groups who experience marginalization and oppressions, can function as an effective construct for illuminating ways in which Black women educators employ our own literacies as resistance to forms of oppression that we experience. Grounded in Black feminist theories, this method of inquiry is well-suited to recognize both the unique ways that Black women educators encounter power structures and the literacy-based methods of resistance we employ.

Although both critical literacies and extraordinary literacies share the goal of addressing social inequities and promoting justice for marginalized and oppressed groups, they are fundamentally distinguished from one another by the fact that extraordinary literacies privilege Black women's ways of knowing and our experiences by acknowledging forms of literacy that are not often taught in schools (e.g., scripture readings, freestyle battles, and mediation). Critical literacies, on the other hand, while concerned with exposing relations between power and language, do not always operate from a perspective that intentionally centers Black women. To be clear, my goal in this chapter is not to dismiss critical literacies theory and practices. Instead, I intend to demonstrate how extraordinary literacies can expand existing conceptions of literacy practices that promote justice and help educators and researchers gain greater access to the sophisticated intellectual and activist practices of members of marginalized groups, specifically, Black women educators. The research questions that guided this inquiry are:

1. How do Black women who are educators employ extraordinary and critical literacies to address oppression and marginalization?
2. What are the affordances of extraordinary literacies for Black women who are educators as well as for critical literacies research more broadly?

Although these questions focus on Black women who are educators, it is important to note here that the participants of this study did not necessarily separate their educational lives from their personal lives in the way I anticipated when I designed the study. As I describe later in relation to both methodology and findings, I asked participants direct questions about their instructional practices and experiences within schools, while also giving them free reign during interviews and group discussion to discuss what they felt was most pressing or important. Participants continually chose to revisit aspects of their personal lives, sometimes making direct connections

to their roles as educators and their experiences working with youth, and sometimes they did not. In my role as a co-researcher who worked alongside participants to construct knowledge about their literacies practices, I was continuously learning with them how literacies matter in lives and schools. The theories I use to ground this research, which I describe in more detail below, attend to the everyday lived experiences of Black women and the ways that our social locations are tied to often inseparable contexts where we engage as Black women. In other words, at any one point, we must be all of who we are. Therefore, to ask research questions about Black women who are educators, it does not necessarily mean that I am focused on classroom practices. This is an asset for educational research in that it draws attention to the ways that researchers may unintentionally draw boundaries between aspects of lives that participants themselves may not delineate.

It is important to also note that by including critical literacies as part of my research questions I did not seek to determine how participants were taking up traditional critical literacy practices as they are explained in Chapter One. However, I engaged with the idea of critical literacy throughout the analysis process, thinking it alongside empyreal logics, which I describe later as the foundational logic informing extraordinary literacies, and the ways in which extraordinary literacies deepen or expand ideas about what is thought of as critical literacies practice. In the pages that follow, I discuss these narratives through the lenses of both critical literacies and extraordinary literacies to demonstrate the ways in which extraordinary literacies can uniquely address social inequities and promote social justice for marginalized and oppressed groups.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

In an effort to capture the multiple ways of defining and understanding critical literacy, Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) have identified four dimensions of critical literacies: disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on the sociopolitical, and promoting action toward social justice. Both disrupting the commonplace and interrogating multiple viewpoints examine relationships between language and power through oral and written texts. They are distinguished by the fact that disrupting the commonplace involves studying texts to determine how individuals and groups are positioned and how language shapes identity; interrogating multiple viewpoints, on the other hand, requires examinations of competing narratives of events, specifically those described by marginalized people. The third dimension, the sociopolitical climate, is defined through Lewison et al.'s (2002) framework in that it focuses on the sociopolitical, which recognizes the potential of literacy engagement for political participation, and promotes action toward social justice that involves using language to transform social and cultural life.

Together, these four dimensions acknowledge levels of consciousness and direct actions that individuals can take in order to engage in critical literacies and social justice work. However, it is important to note that each dimension is related to exterior lives, political systems, and the physical world; they do not describe or attend to harms that individuals may suffer in their interior lives. One way to expand understandings of the depth of oppressions and potential of critical literacies practices, then, is to consider the value of interior lives for critical literacy education and practice.

Extraordinary Literacies and Empyreal Logics

Extraordinary literacies, according to Jeanine Staples (2020) are the organizing principles that guide individual acts of resistance against oppressions and that assume the inextricably interconnected presence of spiritual, physical, and mental worlds. This is an essential departure from critical literacies as it assumes that although encounters of oppression and marginalization may primarily manifest themselves in the material or physical (e.g., workplace discrimination, sexist comments, racial slurs), they are the result of spiritual and mental conditions that produce such actions. Extraordinary literacies can include traditionally labeled literacy practices like journaling, letter writing, and poetry, but they are also more expansive practices that seek to address and express the conditions of interior (mental and spiritual) lives. Therefore, extraordinary literacies may also include breathing techniques, mindful eating, prayer, yoga practices, and hip-hop/soul cyphers. As I describe in the findings, for example, for participants in this study, extraordinary literacies included church attendance, cognitive behavioral therapy, text mining, laughter, and dance.

Extraordinary literacies are grounded in empyreal logics, which are often principles of spirituality used as references to guide behavior. While empyreal logics may be commonly known as religious or spiritual beliefs, they are not necessarily tied to deities, religious affiliations, or spiritual laws. Empyreal logics are grounded in Black women's historical literacy traditions and are evidenced in actions toward liberation. According to (Staples, 2020), individuals use empyreal logics to both guide their decision-making when responding to injustices and to determine the nature of their enactments of extraordinary literacies.

Black women have used extraordinary literacies for centuries to resist their oppressions and marginalization. For example, as noted in Chapter One, Black women have used their

membership in literary societies to critique their exclusion from (and advocate for) participation in social practices like voting, as well as property and business ownership. Similarly, Black women such as Sojourner Truth and Maria Stewart spoke from an intersectional perspective on a variety of issues concerning Black women, foregrounding their societal critiques within their understandings that power systems were interconnected and interwoven throughout their lives.

For this study, I use empyreal logics and extraordinary literacies as tools for the study of complex, intersectional, analyses of power and expansive views of literacy practices.
The goal of empyreal logics is to address the "root causes" of oppression through the use of epistemologies that value knowledge production grounded in experiences of both the interior (spiritual and mental) and exterior (physical) lives of Black women. While it is important to address macro- and micro-aggressions of physical and mental violence, it is essential to also attend to the figurative deaths, those unseen wounds that fester because they go on untreated. While victims of oppression often experience physical harm or even death (as is true in the cases of Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, and, more recently, Ahmad Arbury and Breonna Taylor), empyreal logics suggest that both perpetrators and victims of oppression also continuously suffer "figurative deaths" or a "relentless range of anti-subject bias, social rejections, moral abandonment, demoralizing body critiques, and more" (Staples, 2017, p. 40). In short, the harms experienced during encounters of oppression and marginalization extend beyond one's soma to impact the soul, mind, and psyche.

Theories of Black Feminist Thought

By seeking to expose and address the "root causes" of social oppressions attributed to humans' interior lives (or matters of the soul and spirit), empyreal logics are unique because they are grounded in Black feminist theories that validate Black women's experiences as knowledge

producers. Not surprisingly, then, this study employs a Black feminist theoretical framework, with Black feminist thought as its foundation. This framework suggests that, due to our social locations (social identities that are often used to classify individuals, influence social engagement, and personal and collective experiences), Black women (a) have unique and intersectional experiences that simultaneously reflect privilege and oppression, (b) engage in practices of self-definition and expressions of agency in response to negative stereotypical tropes, and (c) share a collective standpoint that can be helpful for identifying methods of resistance in the fight for liberation and equity (Collins, 2000).

Black feminist thought is a critical social theory with foundations in Afrocentrism, critical, and feminist theories. It is referenced primarily as a critical social theory in this study for two primary reasons. First, it reconceptualizes power relations as interconnected, oppressions as intersecting, and resistance as individual and collective action based on Black women's shared experiences or standpoints (Collins, 2000). Second, when used as a theoretical referent for qualitative research, Black feminist thought addresses epistemological concerns that critique narrowed views of knowledge. Using it to inform this study acknowledges Black women's social experiences of oppression as intersecting, as well as their potential to use agency to resist being oppressed. Black feminist thought also values Black women's experiences, as expressed through their narratives, as instrumental in the process of knowledge production. Collins (2002) asserts, that "offering U.S. Black women new knowledge about our own experiences can be empowering. But activating epistemologies that criticize prevailing knowledge and that enable us to define our own realities on our own terms has far greater implications" (p. 273). In addition to reconceptualizing power and resistance in ways that illuminate experiences of Black women and

other similarly oppressed groups (CRC, 1977; Collins, 2000), Black feminist thought challenges epistemological foundations of qualitative research practices.

Intersectional Identities, Agency, and Standpoint

The use of the term "social locations" reflects the influence on this study of theories of intersectionality. Theories of intersectionality maintain conceptions of power that exist in a matrix of domination (Collins, 2000). The matrix of domination is a system of power that occurs at various levels, including structural (e.g., political systems and laws), disciplinary (e.g., specific rules within companies and organizations), interpersonal (e.g., through person-person engagement and interaction), and hegemonic (e.g., taken-for-granted ideologies that allow for the maintenance of the other levels).

People who identify as Black women, such as the participants of this study, maintain racialized social locations as Black or African American and gendered social locations as women. Therefore, we experience the impact of social "-isms" in contemporary U.S. society like racism and sexism in unique ways because of our multiply and uniquely marginalized social locations. Although marginalized for race and gender, participants in this study are counted among post-secondary graduates; therefore, they are also privileged in that they receive the economic and social benefits that often accompany completion of post-secondary education programs. The examples provided here, of course, represent only a few social locations of many occupied by some Black women without the consideration of other social locations/identities, and only begin to demonstrate the complexity of privilege and oppressions that occur simultaneously and contribute to constructing their social experiences.

The complexity of the power and influence of social locations captured by theories of intersectionality overlaps with perspectives on agency and standpoint that also inform this

research. Collins (2002), for instance, defines "agency" as the individual or collective will to be self-defining and self-determining. Black women's self-definition may be achieved through their abilities to think freely of the influences of images that seek to control how they see themselves and other Black women. Agency functions as a mechanism of resistance that operates in direct opposition of what Collins (2002) labels as controlling images, or negative stereotypical images of Black women. The themes of controlling images often reflect current social climate and cultural values, which generally means some change in themes of negative stereotypes of Black women over time. As an example, while Collins' (2002) identification of controlling images such as Jezebel and mammy are still currently relevant, today, Black women in this study engaged in resistance to different controlling images of Black women such as the "strong Black woman" and those related to glottophobia (linguistic and language bias). From the perspective of Black feminist thought, such images are (or will be) combated successfully when they are replaced with Black women's self-defined standpoints.

Individual and Collective Consciousness

Collins (2002) argues that Black women's standpoints are self-defined perspectives on issues of life and that the goal of Black feminist thought as a critical social theory is the re-articulation of Black women's standpoints. Black women's standpoints, when used as approaches to power, may be dialectical (collective) or subjective (individual). Dialectical approaches use self-defined, group standpoints to collectively resist oppressions resulting from the imposition of controlling images, and subjective approaches to power rely upon individual standpoints that reflect personal histories and experiences. Black feminist thought, as a re-articulation of Black women's standpoints, is concerned with both the dialectical and the subjective approaches to power. Both collective and individual standpoints are necessary for

creating knowledge about Black women that reflects what they think of themselves rather than what those who are not Black women think of them, and both approaches are presented in the findings of this chapter.

Dialectical and subjective approaches to power are connected through their production of two different types of consciousness (Collins, 2000). Dialectical approaches produce group consciousness that represents shared ideas within a community about systems and social structures. While still dynamic, these group consciousnesses are slightly more stable than individual consciousness because they require majority group consensus to shift identified perspectives. To the contrary, individual consciousness is highly dynamic because it is constantly being negotiated with each personal experience and encounter. Although very different, both individual and collective consciousness are crucial to Black feminist thought and the re-articulation of Black women's standpoints and expressions of agency.

Individual and collective consciousness are generally formed from experiences that constitute individual and collective standpoints, and resistance through agency requires a measure of liberated consciousness. The concept of consciousness is useful for this study because it represents the mechanism through which social change occurs (Collins, 2000). Inserting shifts of consciousness into the conversation about educational and life practices favoring social justice can serve as an additional tool to aid those working toward equity and liberation for themselves and others who are similarly oppressed. Individual and collective agency are the materiality of individual and collective consciousness, thus work toward shifts in consciousness is both possible and necessary for change toward equity.

Summary

The assumptions that inform Black feminist theories like Black feminist thought are foundational to this study—and my work more generally—because they do not allow for blanket victimization of Black women. By nature of its basis in theories of intersectionality, Black feminist thought acknowledges that "all individuals and groups possess varying amounts of penalty and privilege in one historically created system" (Collins, 2000, p. 246). This notion is essential to the work done in this chapter because it acknowledges the social oppressions imposed upon Black women without essentializing their experiences or naively assuming that they cannot participate in the marginalization of other individuals or groups.

Finally, Black feminist thought is produced in this study as a challenge to what is often taken-for-granted as critical and resistant literacy practices that promote social justice. In this study, I present Black women's stories as counter-hegemonic narratives in order to demonstrate the possibilities and necessity of research practices equipped to capture the resistant practices of marginalized groups. Although Black feminist thought is a partial perspective on power and domination, it is powerful. It does not seek to be broad in its interpretations of power and resistance; rather, it drills deep into the lives of Black women, holding space for them as they excavate the meanings of their own experiences and examine their potentials for power. In this study, I examine Black women educators' experiences using this conceptual and theoretical framework, which is comprised of aspects of empyreal logics, extraordinary literacies, and critical literacies to identify and analyze participants' literacy practices toward social justice and equity.

Literature Review

Because alternative epistemologies, such as those that are Black feminist, "challenge all certified knowledge and open up the question of whether what has been taken to be true can stand the test of alternative ways of validating truth" (Collins, 2000, p. 271), it is important to critically examine what are currently defined to be critical literacies and if/how extraordinary literacies challenge what counts as truth. In Chapter One, I demonstrated that scholarly work in critical literacy as a field should be more concerned with including epistemologies of Black women. One way that this is possible is to consider literacies that Black women practice in their own lives as resistance to experiences that threaten their physical, spiritual, and mental well-being. Although a relatively new construct, extraordinary literacies has promise in that it offers a complex analysis of power equipped to recognize Black women's intersectional experiences.

Although the definition can be located within a tradition of Black women's engagement with literacies as resistance (Cooper, 1988; Royster, 2000; Stewart, 1987), the construct of extraordinary literacies is relatively new; therefore, little is known about how they connect to critical literacies. While the literacy practices of Black women have been used as mechanisms for survival for many years and are worthy of further scientific exploration in-and-of themselves, a better understanding of the connection between critical and extraordinary literacies is beneficial as it can contribute to our understandings of what can be known when literacies are examined using Black feminist and non-Black feminist approaches. Therefore, this literature review examines how critical and extraordinary literacies have been used in theoretical and empirical research literature to identify literacy practices that support social justice work, and to make claims about the value of intellectual and emotional work.

Critical literacies practices are typically defined from perspectives that focus on the relationship between language and power (through spoken and written texts) and that offer a critique of the sociopolitical climate. They seek to "analyze, critique, and redefine texts…with an explicit aim of the critique and transformation of dominant ideologies, cultures and economies, and political institutions and political systems" (Luke, 2012, p. 5). Critical literacies "embrace a perspective in which language development is seen to include the interaction of experiences, social contexts, language and learning process and power relations" (Aberg & Olin-Scheller, 2018, p. 883; Janks, 2010). Generally, critical literacy theorists argue that texts, having various forms, "both explicitly and implicitly contain messages that promote specific ideologies" (Hall & Piazza, 2008, p. 33). Often taken for granted, these ideologies have the power to form the social world and influence human social interaction. Humans are social actors with the power to interpret (read) the world with an understanding of how language positions individuals and groups, and act in opposition of oppression and in favor of liberation.

The raising of critical consciousness is a precursor to the development of critical literacies, and is most closely related to the emotional justice work of the "interior life" that extraordinary literacies seek to address. Freire (1970) defined critical consciousness as critical reflection, motivation, and action that acknowledge, to varying degrees, the ways that language inscribes social life, often through taken-for-granted ideologies that marginalize individuals and groups. (Minkler & Cox, 1980; Diemer, Rapa, Voight & McWhirter, 2016). Oppressed peoples are critically conscious to the degree that they are able to think dialectically about their society and struggles within it (Diemer, et al., 2016). Thus, one's critical consciousness is directly connected to their potential for action through critical literacy practice, and an intellectual

understanding of systems of oppressions and how they operate through language is crucial to critical literacies tradition.

Although critical consciousness may be viewed as an "internal" prerequisite for critical literacy practice that addresses interior lives, this study addresses "a heavy focus on rationalism [that] is still evident in critical literacy education practices" (Anwaruddin, 2016, p. 381). Anwaruddin (2016) asserts that the critical literacy tradition, in response to the "war, violence, and trauma" of our time, must take an affective turn (Clough, 2007) through education that nurtures the "growth of attitudes and behaviors that deal with feelings, emotions, and in general, students' personal concerns" (Alpren, 1974, p. 46). Thus, affective literacy education opposes the rationalistic framework of traditional critical literacy education which does not address emotions, and "non-rational investments that readers bring with them to texts and tasks" (Janks, 2010, p. 211).

The dangers of a primarily rationalist critical literacies approach that focuses only on the development of the direct actions of critical consciousness is that it is insufficient for advancing intellectual work toward mobilization for social action (Alford & Kettle, 2017). This is partially because repercussions of representations of individuals and groups through texts cannot be fully comprehended through intellectual analyses; rather, such examinations are completed when they include understandings about the emotions that accompany them (Janks, 2010; Mission & Morgan, 2006). The development of critical consciousness is a first step toward resistance; however, subversive actions and attitudes against oppressive social norms and structures must be maintained and actualized through emotions such as anger or hope (Guenther, 2009).

While affective turns in critical literacies studies have added complexity to the approach, most studies focus on teachers' experiences with instructional practices related to students'

engagement with oral and written texts. Few studies focus on the affective potential for reading the world. Aberg and Olin-Scheller (2018) suggest that emotions of both students and teachers must be addressed relative to critical literacy instruction. They studied the impact of emotional power relations on how students practiced critical literacies in their classrooms. They found that critical literacy instruction often addresses emotionally charged issues that may produce emotionally charged discussions and suggest that teachers should find ways to guide students through these discussions without reducing their emotional investment. They offer a model of critical affective literacy (Anwaruddin, 2016), which examines the source and circulation of emotions during critical literacies instruction, as a way for teachers to acknowledge the affective responses of all involved while maintaining a sense of objectivity and neutrality toward the text. Lewis and Tierney (2011) examine the influence of students' emotional responses on critical literacies discussions in racially and ethnically diverse classroom. They found that emotion—when it is not policed—has the potential to uncover ideologies of language oppression that are often taken-for-granted. Similarly, Beck (2005) notes the potential for critical literacy to engage students within correctional facilities on issues of social justice, and teachers' responsibilities to recognize the intellectual, emotional, and moral discussions that may arise during interactive discussions. As critical literacies take an affective turn toward a stance that recognizes the value of emotions and literacy practices in addition to intellect and rationality as it relates to the language of oral and written texts, there is still untapped potential for the possibilities of using emotional, moral and ethical responses to "read" and respond to the world. This study describes the potential for examining more affective literacies, specifically those of Black women, who experience the world from a uniquely intersectional position, giving insight into the potential for complex power examinations within critical literacies.

Methodology

Because this study explores Black women educators' sociopolitical experiences and acts of resistance as expressed through their narratives and literacy practices, a Black Feminist Methodology was appropriate. According to Patterson, Kinloch, Burkhard, Randall, and Howard (2016), Black Feminist Methodology is grounded in qualitative approaches and critical paradigms and "privileges embodied knowledge that emerge through the experiences of black women who name and speak their varied forms of truth" (p. 55). Rather than ascribing to a specific set of methods, Black feminist researchers allow the principles of Black Feminist Epistemology (Collins, 2000) to inform their methodological moves and their commitments to foregrounding black women's experiences and truths (Patterson et al., 2016). Accordingly, this study grounds the research techniques, including modes and method of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, in a Black feminist epistemology.

As described earlier in the dissertation, Black feminist epistemology assumes the presence of oppressive and marginalizing structures as symbols within a social reality, as well as Black women's abilities, as social actors, to interpret their experiences and act upon the world in ways that could transform inequitable symbolic relationships. It values experiential knowledge and poses queries related to Black women's actions and interactions with social systems and structures. Therefore, it is appropriate for this study's aim, which is to understand the commonalities of privileges and oppressions experienced by Black women who are also educators, and how we resist oppressions by using extraordinary and critical literacy to interpret and modify our worlds.

Importantly, a Black feminist epistemological stance also necessitates an emotional and ethical component of knowledge production that is not typical of traditionally positivist and

Eurocentric epistemological approaches (Collins, 2000). As a Black feminist researcher, this emotional and ethical component extends beyond participants to include the researchers' social locations as an important resource in the research (Brown, 2012, p. 20). For this study, I take up this responsibility by grounding my methodological work, in emotional justice work, which is an aspect of extraordinary literacies that positions social issues as the materiality of emotional issues. Thus, any effective social justice work must occur in tandem with emotional justice work (Daniel and Valladare, 2016; Staples, 2017; Wood, Staggenborg, Stalker and Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2017). Because social oppressions impact exterior (physical body) and interior (soul and psyche) lives, people cannot fully address them without, themselves, doing the necessary emotional work. In fact, work to disrupt and dismantle social systems "cannot have the deep roots and far-reaching effects of our wildest dreams unless they are paired with emotional justice work that privileges the complex knowledge, realities, and generated ways of being among terrorized Black women" (Staples, 2017, p. 43). As such, part of my research design, as informed by my theoretical conceptual framework of extraordinary literacies, required that I engage in emotional justice work.

Emotional Justice Work

Emotional justice work is defined in several ways in academic literature related to social justice. For example, it is described as a focus on healing and creativity that may be seen as a shift from direct or immediate action (Wood, Staggenborg, Stalker & Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2017), and "to take seriously the interior life of every person" (Staples, 2017). Although definitions vary slightly in descriptions and the components of emotional justice work, there are consistent views about its necessity as part of effective social justice work. For this project, I used the second definition of emotional justice work, "to take seriously the life of every person," shared by

Jeanine Staples during the 25th Annual Mark Luchinsky Memorial lecture. Staples (2020) proposed that the reason why social justice movements "do not perform well and have the type of impact that they need to have is because we do not have enough adequate, meaningful, emotional justice projects" (para. 10.). Emotional justice projects seek to heal the trauma that comes from social justice harms that result from physical, mental, and psychological traumas of oppression and marginalization. These traumas are located within our interior lives and have been created from experiences of oppression. Such traumas affect our individual levels of empathy and an "empathetic core is necessary for doing social justice work in ways that are not self-serving, shallow, or short-sighted" (Staples, 2020, para. 12). Therefore, each of us involved in this work must do our own work to heal our interior lives.

One method of engagement is through personal liberation projects. Emotional justice work through personal liberation projects is "a singular enterprise to focus consciousness on whatever toxic beliefs we harbor in interior lives that limit capacities to develop the lives that we seek" (Staples, 2020, para. 15). Personal liberation projects "require deep excavations of our own souls that may reveal feelings of abandonment, fear, rejection, or rage" (Staples, 2020, para. 15). They are the things we need to heal and be from as we work toward social justice. "If we do not do our own work to heal our interior lives, particularly those in power to make policies, laws and create curriculum, we are in danger of recreating the systems we seek to change" (Staples, 2020, para. 17).

I engaged in my own emotional justice work and personal liberation project through writing and engaging in activities to support my physical, mental and emotional wellness while doing this work. I began by reading about emotional justice work and watching videos to gain a better understanding of how to design my own personal liberation project. I used writing through

notetaking about the concept of personal liberations projects, and journaling to answer questions such as the following: What is holding me back from creating a deep connection with others? From forming an empathetic core? What is holding me back from my capacity to see and hear deeply from someone else? By answering these questions, I identified two areas—fear and shame—as the focus on my personal liberation project. I continued writing, first with a focus on the sources of fear and shame, beginning with the present and then thinking back to adolescent and childhood for experiences that provided insight into more recent experiences. I also kept a daily journal that I wrote in at night to reflect on the day. After writing with no bounds, I revisited my thoughts to observe evidence of decisions or encounters that I had which were related to fear or shame. My writings included a variety of genres and illustrations which produced paintings, poems, and songs. I did not notice any immediate changes in my day-to-day actions; however, I noticed that I had a greater awareness of how my decision-making and interactions with others were colored by understandings of fear and shame.

As time progressed, I joined a support group to work toward changing one personal habit that I identified as a contributor to my fear and shame. As part of the support group's structure, I began a daily meditation practice and was able to openly share my concerns with others whom had a shared experience. I also continued writing and using my audio recorder to express my thoughts. I found that I was more willing to engage with participants and talk about some of the sources of fear and shame that I was less likely to discuss before doing this work. Through our connections, we found that we shared similarities, and I was more willing to ask participants to elaborate things that were both familiar and unfamiliar to me. Without an established relationship, I may have been less likely to probe during interviews and focus groups when I needed clarity or wanted to learn more about a topic that we discussed. I also found that

participants wanted to know more about me both personally and professionally. For example, one participant asked me about how I came to this work, and if I could describe parts of my life including my childhood. If I had not engaged in emotional justice work while completing this study, I may have been less prepared to share insights about my life and connect with participants through this vulnerability.

Emotional justice work is rewarding yet challenging. Although I knew about emotional justice work during the study design, I did not identify my personal liberation project until I conducted my second interviews with participants. I did not write/journal each day, and sometimes used my audio recorder to talk through my day rather than write. I also found it challenging to remain consistent and to confront some of the issues and experiences that I had identified as holding me back from empathy for myself and others. The healing for me is found in the compassion that I was able to show myself, which I was then able to show toward others. This work was important to share in this paper because it contributed to the level of connection that was established with participants because of our shared willingness for vulnerability.

Emotional justice work was not part of my analysis of data, but its presence is evident in my conceptual framework, through empyreal logics and extraordinary literacies. I was compelled to practice emotional justice work through my personal liberation project because absent of this practice, it is likely that research which seeks to address social justice issues may exacerbate or at least continue the injustices it seeks to combat.

Context of the Study

The Black women participants in this study all lived and worked in a city in the Southeastern United States. They worked in a variety of schools, including charter and traditional, with a range of students from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. While the student and

teacher demographics of each school are important, they extend beyond the scope of this study because participants talked broadly about their literacies practices rather than specifically in relation to their professional experiences.

Methods of Recruitment of Participants

I applied for and received IRB approval during the summer of 2019 and began recruitment during the fall of that same year. I used purposeful sampling to identify teachers who meet criteria for sample selection. Purposeful sampling "requires access to key informants in the field who can help in identifying information-rich cases" (Suri, 2011, p. 3). I used two specific types of purposeful sampling, network sampling and snowball or chain sampling, to recruit participants for this study (Patton, 2002; Woodley & Lockard, 2016). I created a flyer that provided a broad description of the study and indicated that I was specifically seeking Black women educators to participate. I recruited participants via email and in-person. I distributed an email with the flyer (including my contact information) to professors who taught in the Master's degree program at a local Southeastern University. I targeted students in this program for recruitment because of the department's vision for educational equity and social justice, the program's focus on creative and innovative educational methods and pedagogy, and because all students in the program were, in some capacity, current in-service educators. I sent an email to professors who taught courses in these programs requesting that they allow me to speak with their classes about my study and leave flyers and my contact information for recruitment.

Alternatively, I asked them (if I provided them with the recruitment materials) whether they would be willing to distribute it electronically to their class listservs. Potential participants were also asked to refer the study to others who they thought might be qualified/interested.

Network sampling has previously been used in studies with specific goals of privileging voices of Black women and girls and eliciting their perspectives on a number of social issues (Guthrie et al., 2002; Hughes & Heuman, 2006). I also used my social network as a recruitment tool. As a former educator and graduate student, I am still in contact with many in-service and former educators. As I talked with friends and colleagues about my study, they offered to distribute the flyer to their colleagues/friends that they thought may be interested/qualified to participate. I provided these friends/colleagues with the same email attachments (flyer with contact information) that I sent to professors of the Masters program. I only engaged with potential participants after they contacted me and expressed interest in participating in the study. Recruitment efforts yielded 6 initial participants who agreed to join and gave consent for their participation in this study. I conducted initial interviews with all 6 participants; however, 2 decided to discontinue their participation due to issues related to time/scheduling. The data analyzed for this chapter come from the remaining 4 participants.

Ultimately, all participants were educators in traditional public or public charter schools. Two participants were elementary classroom educators, of the other two participants, one was an International Baccalaureate coordinator at an elementary school and the other was a former elementary school teacher who was currently working as a liaison for a local university with a dual enrollment program with high school students. All 4 participants worked with students attending schools within the metropolitan area of the same major city in Southeastern United States during the study. All participants met the following selection criteria:

1. Self-identified as Black/African-American and self-identified as a woman

2. Worked as a full-time educator who engages in literacy education (either solely or in conjunction with other subjects) within the metropolitan area of a certain city in the Southeastern United States

3. Had access to a personal smart device with the ability to download Voice Recorder, a free application

Research Design

As described above, the broad principles that guide this research are derived from Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 2000). Broadly, these principles require a general concern for the emancipation of socially oppressed groups and individuals, a desire for social equity, recognition of social locations as intersectional, and an interest in Black women's needs and concerns. I also approach this work from a perspective that recognizes experiences of social locations as multiple, intersecting, and simultaneously privileged and oppressed. Dynamics of power in relation to these social locations are conceptualized as part of a matrix that includes broad, structural systems as well as interpersonal interactions. Additionally, regarding power, I base this study on theoretical assumptions of intersectionality which suggest that hegemonic domains of power materialize as ideologies that allow for unquestioned adherence and participation in actions and interactions that reflect dominant/master narratives (Collins, 2000). With these principles and assumptions in mind, I turn to narrative inquiry to inform my methods for understanding and honoring participants' experiences as Black women and educators within the United States.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is the study of narratives or stories, and a qualitative research design that uses stories to describe human behaviors (Delgado, 1989; Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative

methodologies hold assumptions that humans are narrators, "embodied social and moral agents who are experts on their own lives," whose stories stem from the events of their experiences (Pitre, Kushner, Raine & Hegadoren, 2013, p. 124). According to Chase (2018), personal narratives of experience are "distinct forms of communication: meaning making through the shaping of experience; a way of understanding one's own or others' actions" in ways that are connected to the past, present, and/or future (p. 549). Narrators' stories represent their personal experiences within historical and social contexts, and are "authentic representations of narrators' beliefs, thoughts, emotions, intentions, choices, and actions within a particular storytelling context" and become the subject of narrative inquiries (Pitre et al., 2013, p. 124). In this study, I aim to prioritize participants' voices during participant-researcher encounters, which I describe in data collection methods, because participants, particularly educational practitioners, have "long been silenced in the research relationship" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4).

Stories are significant to this study for two primary reasons. First, stories serve as sites of self-identification. Participants produced counter-images of themselves and claimed their identities through storytelling (Specter-Morsel, 2011). Second, stories can "promote empathy across different social locations" (Chase, 2005, p. 668) by forcing us to address social norms that often go unquestioned. This type of instigation is useful because it calls into question what are valued as literacy practices and the types of representations that are afforded Black women's extraordinary and critical literacy practices in professional literature. While stories are performed, where narrators often present their preferred selves (Langellier, 2001), this does not mean that they are inauthentic. Rather, I recognize that participants' stories are situated in and accomplished through social interactions.

Feminist Narrative Inquiry

My research design is also more specifically informed by feminist approaches to narrative inquiry, which enable a focus on participants' experiences as women in society, based on assumptions that social and political structures have produced marginalized gendered and racialized experiences. A feminist approach is important to this inquiry for several reasons. First, it requires a reexamination of traditional Western methodologies which make it difficult to view the unique ways that women participate in and experience social life, especially Black women who contend with gendered, racialized, and other types of marginalization due to their social locations (Harding, 1987). Further, troubling issues that are of concern to Black women such as controlling images, self-definition, and sexual politics of Black womanhood (Collins, 2000) raise questions that differ greatly from those that concern White men (Harding, 1987). Second, a feminist methodological design also influences my data collection methods and elicitation of participants' personal narratives as valid knowledge sources. Finally, an epistemological approach that is inherently feminist supports my acknowledgement of Black women educator participants as authors of their own experiences, that the legitimacy of their knowledge must be tested within their own communities for validity, rather than against an outside source, and that both their subjective and collective truths can be known (Harding, 1987). A combined concern for issues that are of concern to Black women, recognition of the role of social structures and systemic inequities that marginalize and privilege them based on their social locations, and a belief that they can produce and possess knowledge from and through their experiences served as evidence of the critical feminist approach of this inquiry.

Stemming from assumptions of Black feminist theories which undergird this study, Black women's standpoints are uniquely different because of our social locations (Collins, 2000).

Stories about Black women educators' personal experiences and literacy engagement are unique because of the insights they provide from Black women's standpoints/perspectives. Therefore, I create a space for stories that offer contrasting perspectives about social experiences and literacy engagement from those that have been provided from participants who do not identify as Black women. My aim is to position Black women educators as narrators by producing personal narratives about encounters of privilege and marginalization in society, Black feminist thought offers complex conceptions of power and identity/social locations, as well as explicit definitions of privilege and oppression that are appropriate for this study. Collins (2000), for example, defines oppressions, in part, as "Black women's vulnerability to assaults in the work-place, on the street, at home, and in media" (p. 26) and privilege as "invisible, unearned advantages that mirror the affordances of White male privilege (ex; economic, political, legal, etc.) and become part of one's identity" (p. 22). These definitions of "privilege" and "oppression" are useful for identifying and bounding the focus on my inquiry.

One reason I engage in this type of narrative work is to provide a listening ear and an honored space for Black women to share their stories. Patterson et al. (2016), building on Janette Taylor's (1998) work, refer to this sort of methodological practice as witnessing, or "affirming [participants] input by acknowledging their voices and maintaining spaces where multiple truths could coexist," which can afford opportunities for "self-definition and self-valuation" (p. 67). Also, one of my aspirations for this research is that it will place in the forefront Black women's stories of resistance and triumph while supporting the case for our inclusion in more research that values our contributions to our society.

t/Terror Narratives. As I describe in more detail in the analysis section, I focus my narrative inquiry on what Jeanine Staples (2017) refers to as t/Terror narratives, which exist within the

larger narratives that participants shared throughout the course of this study. According to Staples (2017) t/Terror narratives are "verbal accounts of encounters with micro-aggressive, macro-aggressive, and systematically aggressive violence that are often elusive, fleeting, and taken-for-granted as normal or inevitable" (p. 34). t/Terrors, for instance, can be instances of fear impacting individuals both locally (t) and nationally/internationally (T). They result from the influence of dominant powers in a society run by supremacist patriarchal ideologies, determining the social structures of a society and having deleterious effects on the lives of individuals and marginalized groups (Staples, 2010). Terrors can be macro-aggressive and harm aspects of the soma (exterior/physical) and material worlds such as the racially motivated murders of Tatiana Jefferson and George Floyd or they may be micro-aggressive and experienced in the psyche (interior/mental) and spiritual worlds; for example, when the President of the United States called Haiti and other African nations 'shithole countries', and suggested that the United States should prefer Norwegian immigrants over those from Africa and Haiti (Kendi, 2019). Micro-aggressive social (t)errors are commonly linked to "figurative deaths" of the soul, which harm one's spiritual and emotional state (Staples, 2017).

Those who experience social terrors often respond in ways that seek to preserve their interior and exterior lives. Subversive actions against t/Terrors may include communal practices such as protests and artistic expression, as well as private ones such as meditation and prayer. When subversion is rooted in guiding (often spiritual) principles, we see expressions of extraordinary literacies which are often used to respond to t/terror. This study is an exploration of extraordinary literacies which are often produced in response to t/Terror; therefore, I first examine t /Terror narratives.

Data Collection

During data collection I gathered personal narratives from participants about their experiences as Black women in society generally and as literacy educators more specifically. I elicited participants' stories about their experiences, as Black women who experience social realities that both privilege and marginalize their identities. I recognize participants as social actors, and seek to understand how their interpretations of their experiences, and the ways that their actions opposed or complied with social rules and symbols within their environments.

Data collection took three main forms. Individual interviews with participants, audio reflections created by participants on their own time, and group interviews, which Dunmeyer (2020) refers to as sista circles. From these data sources, I produced artifacts such as audio transcripts and a researcher's notebook. I used transcripts, field notes, audio recordings, and my researcher notebook for the analysis of data. In the following sections, I provide additional details about data collection methods.

Interview Cycles (First, Second and Third)

Semi-structured interviews are appropriate for this study because I was interested in collecting participants' narratives about being Black women and their engagement with extraordinary and critical literacy practices. I used interviews to elicit their stories about marginalization, privilege, and resistance and tailored the interview process to each individual participant by asking interview questions in a non-sequential and non-uniform way. This is typical practice of Black Feminist Methodologies where the researcher is actively engaged in conversing with participants and contributing to the knowledge production (Patterson et al, 2016). Also, a semi-structured interview format gave me the autonomy to use a script with open-ended questions and also follow participants' leads during discussions (Pugh-Lilly et al., 2001). Open-ended and broad questions encouraged participants to elaborate on their perspectives in a

form unique to their specific experiences. Examples of questions from interview protocols are: How would you describe yourself?, What parts of your identity(ies) do you feel are most salient?, and What does it mean to you to be a Black woman?

I conducted a total of three interviews with each participant. The first interview served as an opportunity to get acquainted with participants and to explain more about the context of the study. The second interview focused mostly on participants' experiences of empowerment and disempowerment and their practices of resistance, and I used the final interview for member checking and to clarify details about any previously discussed ideas. During interviews I engaged in self-disclosure (Few, et al., 2003) which required my willingness to share my personal experiences as related to topics that arose in interviews and was supported by my emotional justice work. Therefore, each interview was similar to a conversation rather than a question and answer session focused solely on recording participants' responses. I participated in the interviews sometimes by affirming, encouraging, or agreeing with participants' narrations.
I conducted interviews in "safe spaces," which Collins (2000) suggests should be defined by the participants as places that they feel comfortable openly discussing sensitive topics such as their experiences of disempowerment and vulnerability. I suggested private spaces, such as meeting rooms in public libraries that could be reserved by individuals for up to 2 hours. I also offered to travel to participants' homes, schools or other locations that would be comfortable and convenient. After several issues with scheduling, I also offered a virtual option to all participants, after which all subsequent interviews took place via Zoom, an online meeting platform.

Audio Journals

Audio journals serve as a tool that reflects participants' personal experiences in real time. I provided participants with general topics of interest for audio journals by asking them to share

details that related to their social experiences. For example, I asked that they include encounters such as times that they felt particularly privileged or marginalized because of their social locations/identities. I also asked participants to describe their intake of current events (newspaper, television outlets, social media, etc.), how they view representations of Black women on these outlets, and how it made them feel. I provided additional direction for audio journals through sentence stems such as "Today was particularly challenging because…", "I felt really empowered when…", "I see myself show up in my experiences when…", and "I stood up for myself by…". However, I clarified that the prompts were only examples of what could be shared rather than directives for their audio recordings.

Each participant downloaded a voice recording application (Voice Recorder) on their mobile device and used it to record, upload and send their audio journals. I provided a detailed explanation for participants of how to complete audio-recorded reflections immediately following the first group meeting. I did not request a specific number or schedule of audio recordings; participants sent in audio journals at their discretion.

Sista Circles

Data collected from discussions in group settings provided a space for participants and I to collectively consider issues of privilege and oppression. Black feminist thought recognizes Black women's collective standpoints and regards the power of our collective resistance. While it was important to gather information about participants' individual experiences and standpoints; the work of Black feminist thought is in representation of a collection of multiple standpoints. Individual and collective consciousness are generally formed from experiences that constitute individual and collective standpoints, and resistance through agency requires a measure of liberated consciousness. They are also the materiality of individual and collective

consciousness, thus work toward shifts in consciousness is both possible and necessary for change toward equity. Therefore, both collective and individual standpoints are necessary for creating knowledge about Black women that reflects what we think of ourselves rather than what those who are not Black women think of us. Interviews and group discussions called sista circles allowed me to glean understandings of participants' dialectical and subjective standpoints.

I originally designed these group interviews to function as sister circles, which are "support groups that build upon existing friendships, fictive kin networks, and the sense of community found among Black women" (Neil-Barnett et al., 2011, p. 266). Sister circles are a historical tradition that date back over 100 years and were used as safe spaces for Black women to share their thoughts and have community with one another. Sister circles are also spaces where Black women nurture, support and encourage each other (Boyd, 1993). Sister circles have been taken-up by Black women for many different purposes such as groups of women within the same organization (e.g., sororities and social clubs), connected by similar concerns (e.g., health and wellness and social issues), and young women coming of age (e.g., Jack and Jill) (Winkle-Wagner, 2008). Overall, sister circles exist for Black women as a space for us to discuss and address the things that concern us.

I encountered a methodological dilemma regarding my use of the term "sister circle" rather than "sista circle." From my own experiences as a Black woman, I know that Black people often use colloquialisms such as brotha' and sista', especially when relating to someone with whom they are in a fictive kinship relationship. This was confirmed by Johnson (2015) and Haddix's (2012) definitions of sista' as a term of connectivity, especially on issues of race, class, and gender, that is used among Black women. I planned the focus groups using the term sister circles because although the term did not reflect my own experiences, it is acknowledged in the

research literature, as being grounded in Black women's historical traditions. Because this term is already used in research literature as a form of group discussion among participants with shared experiences, I decided to use it although it did not reflect my personal experiences.

However, during our group discussion, one of the participants, Assata, expressed her similar concern:

> So, I almost want to say sista' instead of sister because that invokes something else cause they're [Black] women who I'm connected with who all I have to do is give a glance and they know how I'm feeling, how to address it, what they need to do or not do. You know.

As I thought more about Assata's comment and my own struggles with the methodological design of sister/sista circles, I decided to revisit Dunmeyer's (2019) sista circles which are similar in form and function to sister circles, but use "decolonizing" efforts such as the rejection of the term "sister" and embracing of sista as a meaningful political act in the research space (p. 49). Dunmeyer (2019) defined sista circles as "a method that centers the experiences of Black women specifically, acknowledging that all women within the circle are cis-gendered, of African descent, and either identify as Black and or African American…who come together to discuss their racialized and gendered experiences openly" (p. 50). Dunmeyer (2019) distinguishes sista circles from sister circles because sista circles denote shared social locations of members that are determined at birth such as race and gender. She suggested that these social locations are inherited at birth, and should be recognized for how deeply racialized and gendered indoctrination is entrenched in our societies, and has historically and currently impacts Black women's experiences.

The cis-gendered qualification for Black women's participation in sista circles was troubling for me as it related to this study because of the problems of exclusion that it presents for transgender women and how this definition may have excluded participants from engaging in the group discussions. However, because all participants already identified as cis-gender Black women, I decided it would not present problems of exclusion and would be appropriate for this study. Assata's observations quoted previously are also important to note because they represent the value that is added to the quality of a study when participants' voices are valued not only as informants, but as co-investigators. Her challenge pushed me to reconsider the methodological design of sister circles to a model that participants felt was more reflective of their experiences. I appreciate their candor and willingness to advocate for themselves and their perspectives.

These collaborative discussions also supported participants' abilities to identify the ways that their individual standpoints shared thematic consistency. I conducted group discussions after the second round of individual interviews. Group discussions were also conducted in a safe space (Collins, 2000). I asked participants where they felt comfortable meeting and we co-negotiated a decision to meet in a space that was familiar and conveniently located to all.

Sista circles are distinguishable from focus groups because I did not use predetermined protocols and I also engaged in the discussion alongside participants. To prompt conversation, I provided lists of words and phrases related to the research questions; for example, "power," "marginalization," and "literacy" which served as conversation starters. Participants selected a word or phrase and began a discussion with the group. Conversations did not have to reflect a word or term that I provided, and anyone at the table could change the topic at will.

The seating arrangement during the group discussions reflected our co-negotiated space. We sat at a rectangular table, across from, and next to one another. There was no one at either end/head

of the table. I placed two recorders in the center of the table on either side and participated in the conversation alongside participants. Sista circles are connected to focus groups but they are not the same. Sista circles offer a unique alignment with black feminist epistemologies that acknowledge the value of emotion and moral and ethical commitments for knowledge production and possession.

During sista circles, participants in this study responded to questions and prompts such as the following:

- What does it mean to you to be a sister/a?
- What comes to mind when you see/hear the words oppression, freedom, liberation, literacy, (etc.)?
- Describe a time when you felt empowered/disempowered.

I asked participants to share their definitions of sister/a to elicit conversations about collective knowledge production and the characterization of our group discussion. I introduced words such as oppression, freedom, liberation, empowerment, and literacy which are directly related to the topic and theories in which this study is grounded. While related to social justice as a literacy practice, participants did not answer specific questions about these topics; rather, sista circles were presented as opportunities for open discussion with the optional use of prompts through words and phrases that might evoke their sharing.

Preparing the Data

I uploaded audio files from my recording device to a transcription service called Temi.com. The service notified me within 24 hours via email when records were transcribed. I logged in to view transcriptions and compared them to the audio recordings for accuracy. I

listened to each recording and followed along with the transcripts to correct errors. On the Temi website, I paused the recordings and made corrections as I listened to and reviewed the data.

I focused on accuracy of language and dialect. For example, some words were completely incorrect such as “world” instead of “whirl;” however, other words were changed by the software to standard English such as gon’ which was changed to “going to.” When this was the case, I altered the transcription to more accurately reflect what the participant actually stated. This was important to me because the variations in language that we, as Black women, use can be used to convey emotion, and emotive expressions are part of Black women’s ways of knowing when considered from a Black feminist epistemological perspective (Collins, 2000). Furthermore, as Venus Evans-Winters (2019) states, “acknowledging Black women’s ways of knowing, cultural expressions, Black vernacular, and cultural speak” affirms “[Black] women’s humanity,” which is necessary part of inquiry that aims to “identify, name, and creatively confront racial and gender injustice” (p. 70).

I noticed that I had to make more changes for one participant who stated in her interviews that she was concerned about how she was perceived by her coworkers because she chose to use African American vernacular English. This confirmed my concerns about the capabilities of the transcription software to account for the nuances of our conversations. Therefore, after comparing transcripts to audio recordings for obvious errors, I completed a third comparison specifically attending to culturally specific language variance.

Data Analysis

Data analysis informed by Black Feminism and produced by Black women leverages the social position of the researcher as a resource for inquiry and interpretation (Brown, 2012; Patterson et al, 2016; Evans-Winters, 2019; Dillard, 2018). Evans-Winters (2019) describes, for

instance, how "[o]ur very existence becomes our sites of observation and analysis" as we "play in between the lines of the experiential and theorized" (p. 26). This process of Black Feminist theorizing or "playing with data" as Evans-Winters (2019) refers to it, is creative work that involves a "conscience engagement in the interpretation of data [during which] we draw upon formal academic training in research methods, but also consciously and subconsciously rely on cultural intuition and prior childhood and adult socialization without our primary culture(s)" (pp. 4-5). Analysis, in this sense, involves a piecing together of methods and practices that feel authentic to the inquiry and that help to center issues of concern to the researcher and researched. As Cynthia Dillard (2018) describes, the researcher is engaged in "showing up, living life, and being in the world as inseparable from the labor of our research" (p. 622). It is important to note that by including critical literacies as part of my research questions I did not seek to determine how participants were taking up traditional critical literacy practices as they are explained in Chapter One. However, I engage with the idea of critical literacy throughout the analysis process, thinking it alongside empyreal logics and the ways in which extraordinary literacies deepen or expand ideas about what is thought of as critical literacies.

In addition to the Emotional Justice work I describe earlier in this chapter, the analysis in this study involved a number of practices that were ongoing throughout data collection as well as after data collection were completed. These analytic techniques included the ongoing reading of theoretical and methodological texts (Collins, 2000; Dunmeyer, 2019; Evans-Winters, 2019), multiple repeated listening to recordings from interviews, sista circles, and participants' audio reflections, writing-to-think (Hughes & Bridges-Rhoads, 2013), conversations with friends, participants, and mentors, coding practices (Saldana, 2016), writing about my own experiences that examined my own resilience and agency (Evans-Winters, 2019) and ongoing attention to the

texts and events happening in the world at the time of the dissertation. Throughout this work, I followed Evans-Winter's (2019) guidance to pay attention to what felt inauthentic or foreign and to make methodological moves toward practices that allowed me to stay attuned to the unique ways of knowing of Black women. For example, although I transcribed audio recordings, I rarely worked with the transcriptions, preferring instead to listen to audio recording. I listened while sitting at my computer and also while doing other things like laundry or going for walks. This process allowed me to hear inflections and laughter and helped me to remember how being in the space with the women during our conversations mattered. This practice also centered the humanity of the women and reminded me that these stories were produced and are being interpreted in specific contexts. Below, I discuss in more detail how these various analytical decisions produced findings by allowing me to bound and focus my inquiry and simultaneously complicate it through ongoing reading and being in the world.

Coding

Early in my analysis of data, I engaged in coding of data to understand the commonalities of privileges and oppressions experienced by Black women who are also educators, and also how they resist oppressions by using extraordinary and critical literacy to interpret and modify their worlds. Rather than use these codes to directly inform themes for findings, I used the process of coding as a tool to understand commonalities among the participants, which further deepened my theoretical understanding of Black Feminist Epistemology and the specific standpoints of Black women. I referred often to the theoretical literature, for instance, during all coding cycles. Specifically, the coding helped draw my attention to theoretical concepts of oppression and privilege from Black feminist thought and actions related to promoting social justice and addressing interior lives from critical and extraordinary literacies.

My coding practices took place in cycles. I completed the first cycle of coding using In Vivo coding methods, which place emphasis on participants' spoken words (Manning, 2017) and are appropriate for "studies that prioritize and honor participants' voice" (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 1994, p. 74). I created a word processing document with interview transcripts in the first column, and two additional columns for recording In Vivo codes related to Black feminist thought, critical, and extraordinary literacies. I identified initial codes based on elements of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks such as instances of privilege, oppression, marginalization and literacy practices. In the second column of the word processing document, I used words and phrases from participants' language as examples relating the theories and concepts, and in the last column I made notes about my observations. Although I kept the theoretical constructs in mind, I was not very selective with identifying codes because the process of second cycle and selective coding allowed me to narrow my focus.

Axial Coding. I completed axial coding by identifying repetitious and similar language and ideas among the in vivo codes (Saldana, 2016). During this portion of analysis, I collapsed In Vivo codes that used redundant language/ideas to streamline the ideas stemming from the coding process. I also identified what the individual codes had in common. Thus, even if they did not use similar language, if the ideas were similar axial coding allowed me to streamline the codes.

Selective Coding. After generating and collapsing individual codes where possible, I used my interpretation of collective codes, through axial coding, to identify themes and theoretical constructs that were present in the data through pattern coding (Miles, et al., 1994) For example, I combined codes "I talked to a lot of people about it…until it no longer affected me in the same way" and "I dance—I know I need to move my body to get myself out of this

place…I also might go to church" as examples of resisting the oppressions of their terror narratives. After joining these phrases with similar ones from other participants, I began to identify commonalities, such as, for example, in participants' descriptions of self-help as resistance.

Analytic Questions. Throughout the research and throughout the coding cycles, I crafted and refined analytic questions to guide my theorizing and engagements with data and also to complicate and deepen the coding. These questions were refined throughout the analysis as I continued to read theoretical work, listen to audio recordings, and live my daily life. Because my broader research questions are focused on examining participants' narratives from the perspectives of both extraordinary and critical literacies practices, I used analytic questions representing each theory for this inquiry. It is important to note that I used Lewison, et al.'s (2002) definition of critical literacies which defines critical literacy practice, in part, as action promoting social justice. This dimension of critical literacy includes supporting students (and others) as they engage in relevant social action (Coffey, 2008; Young, 2009; Norris, Lucas and Prudhoe, 2012). The analytic questions used for this analysis were:

1. What sources have produced experiences of oppression/marginalization? What are participants resisting?
2. In what ways do they interrogate whose interested are served, who is marginalized, and who is privileged? Advocate for promoting change?
3. How do they address their interior lives? What practices are personal, less direct, yet still contribute to their resistance of oppressions?
4. How are participants navigating oppressions and privileges?

I also asked questions about the theories I was using to guide my inquiry. I sought to understand the impact of epistemological and theoretical approaches on social justice-oriented literacy research—specifically, what can be known about literacy practices as resistance when they are examined from perspectives that hold specific assumptions about knowledge production, knowledge possession, and the nature of oppressions.

Analysis of Narratives

To further focus my analysis, I draw upon Bruner's (1985) ideas about narratives. Bruner (1985) distinguishes between two types of analyses related to narrative inquiries; narrative analysis and analysis of narratives. Analysis of narratives seeks to identify common themes or concepts within storied narratives or data (Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative analyses examine relationships among elements of narrative data, specifically troubling how they might be different, to form new stories or narratives. Narrative analyses entail searches for what is common among elements of a story to create new stories that represent multiple narratives within one. By contrast, paradigmatic analyses, also called analysis of narratives utilizes stories as data then makes a paradigmatic shift into identifying commonalities among elements in the stories through categorization.

An analysis of narratives identifies distinguishing elements among narratives to understand what is common among stories. Paradigmatic procedures are useful for developing general understandings about a group of narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Because I identify collective standpoints among their expressions of extraordinary literacy and critical literacy practices, I focus on an analysis of narratives and on Black women educators' stories about their experiences as social beings and as literacy educators. I also attend to the social, historical, and autobiographical contexts of participants' stories because it is their actions

and interactions within a social space that either recreated or reimagined symbolic relationships and meanings.

More specifically, my analysis of narratives focuses on Black women educators' t/Terror narratives and examines their responses using aspects of extraordinary literacies for theoretical analysis. To do so, I compiled participants' narrative descriptions of their experiences/encounters of empowerment and disempowerment within schools (disciplinary level), their daily lives, and also their general encounters with privileges and oppressions and the effects of disempowerment on multiple aspects of their lives. This allowed me to focus on the impact of the experiences in their t/Terror narratives on other aspects of their lives. I talked with participants about these narratives and my ongoing interpretations of them in a member checking interview and other informal conversations.

Overall, my analysis process kept me focused on acknowledging that power is both interconnected and multi-faceted. I also explore how experiences of t/Terror narratives, for example, led to practices of agency such as self-definition. Guided by assumptions of Black feminist thought, I focus on participants' expressions of agency and self-definition in response to negative stereotypical images about Black women. Black women's expressions of agency and self-definition also guided me during analysis when identifying practices of critical and extraordinary literacies because they served as signifiers for participants' resistance of oppressions and efforts towards social justice. Perhaps more importantly, this analysis allows me to identify sources and resources that supported participants' agency, experiences of privilege, and to provide insight into these Black women's standpoints of asserting agency through their uses of extraordinary and critical literacies. Because the purpose of the collected knowledge is to empower Black women for change and self-definition, this focus on methods of

resistance is important. By sharing their experiences, participants contribute to broader understandings about how power and resistance operate, as well as how to engage in resistance of oppression.

Member Checking

I used the final interview as an opportunity to present participants with my interpretation of their terror narratives and responses through literacy practices. I requested feedback from participants on my interpretations of their stories and the ways that they engaged in resistance. Similar to other interviews, I audio recorded the member checks and used them to complete revisions of my analysis.

Findings

Organized by individual narratives of agency, privilege, and oppression, this section presents participants' t/Terror narratives in the context of their backgrounds and teaching experience. I found that terror narratives are sites for the proliferation of extraordinary literacies. Therefore, I explored participants' use of extraordinary literacies as responses to t/Terror narratives that they described when asked to describe a time that they felt marginalized or oppressed. Although the t/Terror narratives in the following section are personal accounts, they represent broader narratives of t/Terror that can be conceptualized as shared among Black women. The findings from sista circles follow the stories of each individual participant and demonstrate the ways that participants conceptualized collective t/Terror and their extraordinary literate responses.

Assata

Background

Assata is from Cape Verde islands in West Africa. When she was a child she moved to New England and spent much of her childhood in Boston/Cambridge, Massachusetts. As a child and young adult, she was able to maintain much of her language and culture because of the large population of people from Cape Verde living near her in the United States. Assata recalled that her interest in equity and education began in high school during her work with an organization that sought to enhance public school education experiences for children all across the United States of America. Upon graduation she attended a historically Black college and majored in education, and subsequently earned her Masters degree in the same field. Assata has 3 children and identifies as an immigrant of color and a Black woman.

Teaching Experience

Assata is currently an International Baccalaureate coordinator at an elementary school with approximately 20 years of experience in education. She described her current role as a liaison between the International Baccalaureate's national and international organization (IBO) and her local school. She supports teachers with curriculum design and instruction for all subjects including literacy, and across grades PreK-5.

Terror Narrative

Assata's (T)error narrative is related to her social locations of gender and race, as well as her role as a mother. The interaction that she described during her interviews and the group discussions is centered on an incident that occurred during her son's sports practice between herself, her daughter, and a White man. Assata's account is described as a (T)error narrative because the terror that she experienced was a physical macroaggression. Although this incident

began with a violation of her daughter's body, Assata was impacted in several ways, including as a mother, a Black person, and a woman. Assata recounted the following events:

> And we were on the stairs 'cause we were gonna' continue walking. So, there were a lot of parents there. So, we were on the stairs and my daughter was standing close to me, but this like really burly dad came down the stairs. My daughter couldn't see him because neither could I. Our back was to him and so he thought it was appropriate to use his body to knock her out of the way so he can come through. And she turned around and she just said excuse you. And his response was, well, don't stand in the way. And so, but it didn't stop there because on his way back he did it again, bumped her with his stomach. And she fell back on the stairs like...And I felt so helpless.

The historical record of disregard of Black women's bodies by White men is evidenced by their proliferation of sexual violence such as rape dating back to times of slavery in the United States (Collins, 2000). Although the nature of this historical abuse is sexual, the White man in Assata's Terror narrative exhibited a disregard for her daughter's personal space and the rights of her body that are reminiscent of a tradition of White male privilege that allowed unchallenged access to women's bodies (Collins, 2000). This analysis of Assata's experience is based on her social locations as a Black woman which also intersect with her role as a mother, and add complexity to her perception of the experience and her responses. In both individual interviews and in the sista circle she shared:

> That whole situation was not okay, and I find myself in those things kind of like frequently and then questioning whether or not am I overreacting or is it maybe I'm too sensitive like those micro-aggressions that are...Who the hell walks behind

> a... My daughter was like five-two and a half and weighs about 115 pounds and your big self thought it was okay to push her down? My daughter at this point, she's 20, she was really upset and she, in her frustration, she was cursing at the guy, and what the [other] parents [at the soccer practice], what they did respond to was her cursing and that...didn't feel good.

As I noted in Chapter one, some Black women's journeys as mothers begin as evidential sites of inequities even before their children are born, especially as it relates to prenatal healthcare. Concern for Black mothers and their children is maintained throughout the birthing process and postnatal care because of alarmingly high rates of maternal morbidity of Black women and infant mortality rates of Black children (Calhoub & Rimar, 2018). These statistics are only a few examples of evidence that highlight the trauma and terrors (Staples, 2012) that may be associated with Black motherhood. While healthcare disparities reflect bias of social structures and systemic oppressions, there also exists controlling images (Collins, 2000) that are reflected in Black mothers' interpersonal engagements. One example of a controlling image of Black motherhood is the "superstrong Black mother" which portrays Black women as being "endowed with devotion, self-sacrifice and unconditional love" usually at the expense of their own physical, mental and emotional well-being (Collins, 2000, p. 174). Black mothers' engagement with the "superstrong Black mother" trope may result in trauma and the production of terror narratives which bring about opportunities for making visible the practices of extraordinary literacies.

In this narrative, Assata shared her individual experience as a Black woman and mother that is unique in many ways; yet, also demonstrative of a collective experience of Black

womanhood incited by a harmful narrative of Black women that has rarely been challenged by White feminists, and White and Black male scholars (Collins, 2000).

Assata's observation that the other parents present were more concerned with her daughter's response to the confrontation than the assault itself is aligned with Collins (2000) observations about the ways that controlling images are used to legitimate violence against Black women; therefore, condoning acts that would be unacceptable if committed against other groups. During a sista circle, Assata elaborated by giving her response to a parent who interjected by asking her daughter to stop cursing:

> I said, ma'am, thank you for your involvement and your concern, but this has nothing to do with you. Do you know what he did that led to this? And I gave her the sit down. I said thank you. Sit down.

Assata's response may be attributed to the fact that onlooker's interest in the situation was peaked only when they witnessed her daughter's response, rather than the physical violation itself. Although Assata herself was concerned with addressing the situation in a manner that would not perpetuate a controlling image of "angry Black women". She was much more liberal with allowing her daughter to respond in a way that was authentic to her feelings about the situation, regardless of the opinions of others. This type of mothering as "teaching skills of independence and self-reliance" is one way that Black mothers protect their daughters and teach them to protect themselves (Collins, 2000, p. 186). Further, Assata's respect for her daughter's autonomy to respond in the ways she felt most appropriate, and her willingness to defend her daughter against the unsolicited critique of others, is similar to the ways that "slave mothers taught children to trust their own self-definitions and value themselves", essentially standing up for themselves, "as a powerful tool for resisting oppression (Collins, 2000, p. 51).

Assata's feelings of disempowerment were evident in her description of the incident. However, Assata (and her daughter) also expressed agency during this encounter. She responded to the "really burly dad" in the following ways:

> And he came back later, like after I went in at him, I was like, you would have never done this if this was a White woman or if it was your daughter. And he was like, Oh don't play that. I was like, and I kept going at it with him about that and I kept my cool, I just kept going at him like, you asserted yourself, you initiated this, you instigated it.

This instance, particularly Assata's response was revisited several times during data collection by either me or Assata. During the sista circles, Assata elaborated on her simultaneous expressions of marginalization and privilege:

> I felt both [marginalized and privileged] at the same time. I felt helpless, but privilege allowed me to address him in a way that he understood. I was not yelling or raising my voice. I was able to communicate without being the angry Black woman. I said you are asserting your White male privilege.

At another point during the sista circles, as participants discussed how they navigated marginalization and oppression, Assata described how she has used formal education, specifically degree seeking opportunities, to navigate marginalization. She shared:

> I've always felt like I wanted to be heard, but that it is not enough for me to know something...for me to speak upon what I know through my experiences, I feel that I need degrees. Even though it [attending school] is something that I want to do, it is also a way to navigate it [oppression].

Assata's class privilege which is expressed as educational opportunity adds to her social locations and complicates her experience of marginalization by adding to it an element of privilege. She leveraged her privilege; thus, part of her terror narrative includes an empowered response that includes self-valuation (Collins, 1989), a definition of self that includes a personal standard of respect and the right to respond in this situation in the way that she sees fit. Although the man who pushed her daughter wanted to apologize, she decided not to entertain his attempts to verbalize an apology because she felt it was disingenuous. Assata continued explaining her response to the encounter:

> You're not even, you know, taking ownership over it. But then eventually I walked away and he came, he tried to come over to apologize. I told him no. I was like, I don't, I can't talk to you right now. Don't want to talk to you. And he was, like, he, he wanted to make me listen to him and I put my hand up. I was like, no. He was like, well, let me apologize, let me take ownership. I said, no. I said, you do that on your own. I said, I don't have to listen to you. I don't have to forgive you. I was like, just not now. No, I have a right to like, I had to literally say, no, and do like this [put her hand up with fingers spread and palms facing out] to keep him away. So, but even with that, like that, that was like after the fact that you denied everything and your wife might have called you out on your behavior and then now you're appeasing her. It's not because you really self-reflected and was like, Oh, I'm, I shouldn't have done that. I was like, I don't want to listen to it. I don't have to listen to you and he kept going. And I was like, I told you no. And then he finally walked away.

In this terror narrative, Assata revealed her simultaneous experiences of privilege and oppression caused by intersections of race, gender, and class. Similarly, terror narratives are simultaneously sites of terror and expressions of extraordinary literacies because extraordinary literacies are responses to terrors that Black women face (Staple, 2020). Because they are focused on the repair of interior lives, extraordinary literacies are not directly subversive of oppression and marginalization; however, they equally as impactful. For example, Assata engaged with religious texts in ways that helped her construct meaning about raced and gendered experiences:

> I do a lot of readings about just like I'm, I'm Baha'i so there are a lot of readings and writings…So there are tenements like equality of men and women. So, these are things that were being preached over a hundred years ago. And there's writings about it like humanity can't reach its full potential until men and women are treated equally. Also, uh, about, um, inequality of the races and the whole idea is that we're one human race and that's it. Everything else was man made. And so, there're very specific writings that, um, that refer to black people and people of color as the pupil of the eye. And so, like the function of the pupil is to – it's what helps you see, cause without your pupil absorbing the light, you won't see. So, it really elevates the status of people of color as necessary. I think it purposefully addresses issues of inequality and race...Depending on what has me drained or holding me back -I'll search for readings on that.

Assata expressed during one of our individual interviews, that she felt helpless and angry about the devaluing of herself and her daughter when her daughter was pushed aside by the

White man in her terror narrative. She processed her emotions by engaging in another practice of extraordinary literacy - telling her story to anyone who would listen.

> Well, I kept telling people what happened. Maybe that might've been what I used to release it because I, I don't think I was ready to release it yet. And so, I just kind of started telling the story to anybody who would listen. So that's what I did. I don't know if that's, maybe it was, it was subconscious self-care, but I kept telling it over and over until it, it wasn't as, um, it didn't affect me as much.

Assata engaged in practices of extraordinary literacies as guided by her "subconscious", through sharing her story until she felt less affected by the events, and her spiritual/religious principles. Her use of Baha'i readings is an example of the connectedness between empyreal logics and extraordinary literacies. Baha'i teachings provided Assata with the tools she needed to process and make meaning of her experiences of oppression.

Ella

Background

Ella is from the Washington metropolitan area, D.C. by way of Ghana. She is a first generation American. Her father is from Baltimore and paternal grandfather is from Cuba. She describes herself as having a rich heritage that is Hispanic and from South Carolina. She decided to enter the field of education because her family viewed education as a tool for social mobility. She considers herself a spiritual person, a healer, and uses African cosmology as a driving force for how she decides to use her influence as a teaching artist. She's currently earning her Masters degree in education. She was raised in a Caribbean household and also identifies as Black American and recalls feelings of "not being Caribbean enough" to fit in with other Caribbean people, and also not "Black" enough to fit in with her Black American friends. Ella earned her

undergraduate degree in sociology, and views both her formal experiences in classrooms and her interactions in society as educative ones. She characterizes herself as an educator and a lifelong learner. She says that learning makes her feel seen and heard. Of a family of four siblings—she is the third child and first girl.

Teaching Experience

Ella identifies herself as a teaching artist that uses African cosmology to guide her pedagogy and practice. She is concerned with creating culturally and socially comfortable spaces that are supported by academic research for people, including young children, to express themselves. She is a former elementary school teacher who currently supports high school students who are dually enrolled in college programs as a liaison between the high school and college/university. She also previously taught all subjects at a local elementary school.

Terror Narrative

In all other accounts, I have focused on terror narratives that deal with verbal and physical occurrences of micro- and macro- aggressive behaviors from outside sources. Ella's narrative is unique because she shared a continuous broad scale terror of self-definition across multiple interview audio transcripts that described internalized feelings of not-enoughness. Feelings of inferiority may be described as oppressions impacting Black women because at the heart of both racism and sexism are "notions of biological determinism claiming that people of African descent and women possess immutable biological characteristics" that devalue their humanity as less than elite White men (Collins, 2000, p. 138). Examples of Ella's terrors of self-definition are the tensions she felt from being raised in a Caribbean household and also identifying as a Black American. She struggled when friends criticized her for not being "Black enough" and also not "Caribbean enough". Ella, who identifies herself as an academic and an

artist, also expressed struggles with feeling "up to par creatively and intellectually" when interacting with others in academic and social environments. Ella's terrors of self-definition combined to form a general desire to be cared for and appreciated, and to be in relationship with others in ways that are reciprocal, not quid pro quo or contingent. Her awareness is an example of her ability to self-define. In an audio recording she shared a vulnerable moment of self-talk:

> Oh, this is because you never consciously admitted to yourself that you want to be cared for. You want someone to care for you and you want someone to feed this desire that you have to be adored and desired and to reflect your desire to feel worthy and to be unconditionally loved by – just anyone…I refuse to look at myself and say that you are so worthy and deserving of the things in life that bring joy. Even if you make mistakes you are worthy of redemption. You are worthy of unconditional love. Whether you are in performance or not, you are worthy to be accepted just as you are.

Ella's terror narrative is also unique because it is colored by her expressions of agency and resistance so that she is constantly talking back to feelings of inferiority through self-definition, and more specifically shifts in self-valuation. Ella's ability to self-define is present even as she struggles to combat feelings of inferiority. Her self-valuations produce shifts in how she chooses to self-define and are shaped by her practices of extraordinary literacies.

Ella's extraordinary literacies stem from an empyreal logic relative to African cosmology. She explains how African cosmology fuels her being in the following ways:

> I would say African cosmology allows there to be gas in our tank to keep on pushing myself to a place of advocacy or healing or care so to speak. But I will say it is taxing, very taxing and something I have to recognize in myself a lot of

> the time to be aware of. I don't know if it's the Capricorn in my chart but I will work myself to a place where I don't really consider when something is either physically taxing or emotionally and mentally exhausting. I'll do this thing where I won't stop and take a reflection and honor myself as being a conduit for creating space for these things.

In the previous excerpt, Ella uses characteristics of African cosmology to connect the Capricorn in her chart to a self-awareness of the need to reflect on the ways that she shows up for others, and to establish boundaries and reflect on how to make space for self-care. These self-care actions are her practices of extraordinary literacies. They included laughter, dance and physical movement, specifically pole dancing, which served as sources of joy and responses to the terrors of inferiority. She continued in an interview:

> So, I find that in a professional space that it is important for me to speak up for myself, just as much as I would be for anybody else. With my kids I am always telling them don't worry, you're safe because I ride for mine, but sometimes it's about taking that lens for yourself and saying would you ride for you though? Would you be able to put up these parameters? Care for self is something that I need to advocate a lot more for. [For example], I have a personal commitment to joy. I have a calendar and I have to have one deep belly laugh per day.

Ella continued with self-talk in another personal audio recording, determining that she needed to engage in extraordinary literacies at that moment to reposition herself and shift her mentality and self-valuation:

> Then I realized we were not having fun. There was no glee. So, I laughed, gathered all my "hees" and my "has", and after I laughed the world was in

> technicolor. Then I realized I haven't been physical…I haven't gone on my pole in 5 days, and I haven't been to the gym. That's what today's (mental/emotional state and feelings of inferiority) about. This is evidence that you have to laugh every day because if you don't you start taking yourself too seriously and if you start taking yourself too seriously then you're a sad girl because guess what you still have depression and you still have anxiety but it's so much funnier when you laugh about it, and then you find new creative approaches.

Maria

Background

Maria is from Savannah, Georgia and has been in the location of the study for approximately six years. She earned her undergraduate degree in early childhood education with a dual certification in special education, and she is currently studying for her Master's at the same university. Maria was inspired through people and life events to become a teacher. She admired her mother's example as an educator and sought to remedy some of the social issues that she witnessed, such as child abandonment and violence, through her services as an educator. Maria identified as a Black woman.

Teaching Experience

Maria has taught third and fourth grades. At the time of the study she was in her third year of teaching at an elementary school.

Terror Narrative

Maria's narrative forms at a site of race, gender and the possibility of economic opportunity. The oppressions that Maria identified in her workplace are characteristic of the vulnerabilities that Black women regularly experience (Collins, 2000). Black women have

experienced discrimination in the field of education since the 1900's; for example, policies and hiring practices of the American Missionary Association served to strategically limit the number of Black women that might qualify for positions (Perkins, 1993). More recently, D'Amico et al. (2017) found that when other factors remain constant, Black applicants were less likely to be hired than were White applicants and when Black applicants were offered positions they were placed mostly at schools with children of color and in high poverty settings. Maria's narrative represents her individual experience of what she identified as discriminatory hiring practices, which is also aligned with a broader concept of the value of Black women's work and examined as a part of Black feminist thought.

Maria's (t)error narrative can be identified as the result of (t)errors or micro-aggressions. She described her experience as a candidate in a local school system-university partnership program where she felt that she was not offered a job because of her race.

> I was in [name of graduate program] my last year of college and of course they kind of supposed to guarantee you a job position, and I was like die hard for [name of graduate program]...Like one- the school that I was student teaching at, I wanted to interview there and I was trying to figure out why I wasn't getting an interview there but they had job openings...I just found it so crazy that she hired the Asian girl that was student teaching there with me, who would come to me and crying on my shoulder like, What do I do? They're [K-5 students] not respecting me. And I would give her advice and cheer her up and just give her positive affirmations. Of course, I was happy that she got a job, but I'm just like, but little do y'all know behind closed doors that, you know, it was times when she wasn't able to handle this and I was going out of my way to go to those kids'

> basketball games and all that and I'm not even a paid teacher here...those things got looked over and so I got rejected from them…

Maria's account resembles patterns of the treatment of Black women's work and labor from Black feminist thought, that identify the exploitation and lack of acknowledgment of Black women's contributions in employment settings (Collins, 2000). Specifically, Maria expressed frustration with her cooperating teacher and the principal of the school where she completed her student teaching. Maria felt that she had fulfilled her obligations to the university program and gone above the call of her duties as a student teacher yet still was not offered a contract for employment which she expected per the terms of the program. After engaging in a meeting with the university representatives and the school's principal, Maria felt that she was not hired because of her race.

> She [the principal] was white. Yeah, she was white…And they really even couldn't explain - But I know, I know for sure it had to be because I feel like because of my race.

Maria's experience resembles the issues that served as Crenshaw's (1990) impetus for developing intersectionality theory. Definitions of sex and race discrimination have been predicated on narrow representations such as White women and African American men which obscure discriminatory hiring practices impacting Black women. Because women constitute the approximately seventy-six percent of those employed in the teaching force (CITE), Maria's experience of discrimination is not visible as one that is gender-based. Also, the employment of Black men would negate any argument of discrimination based on her race without accounting for the unique way that Maria's social locations positioned her in the margins of both spaces. Her terror narrative is an example of how the entanglement of multiply marginalized social locations

can work to oppress individuals. Maria describes what she identified as racial discrimination in the workplace. The material consequences of her experiences are that she was unemployed and unable to finish the program because she was not hired; although, she later found employment with a local school system. Maria describes how the incident impacted her interior life as she described feelings of rejection, a loss of confidence, and a devaluing of her work and contributions to the school.

Extraordinary literacies may be employed to address harms of the interior life, the figurative deaths that Staples (2017) refers to as common and everyday oppressive experiences. Maria's self-valuation was challenged by the rejection that she faced from her potential employer and she suffered damage to her self-confidence and self-esteem, especially because her contributions to the students in her student-teaching classroom which she described as "over and beyond" what was required were overlooked. Maria's extraordinary literacies were in response to these damages or figurative deaths and clearly informed by empyreal logics. Maria attends a Christian church and believes that she and others have a divine purpose connected to God's plan. She shared:

> So, it's like God's plan, but you know I got three rejections and no's. Three rejections. They hurt so bad and it was because I love that program. I want to be in [the graduate program]. So that one teacher and the one principal I do believe didn't want to hire me.

She repeated similar phrases related to a divine order throughout our interviews and during the sista circle until it became clear that she used the practice as a method to self-soothe. She did not dismiss the discrimination that she feels she experienced; however, she was guided by her spiritual principles toward actions such as attending church and continuing to look for

employment opportunities with the belief that she would eventually be employed at the job meant for her. Her extraordinary literacies of church attendance and regular engagement with her spiritual family allowed her to redirect feelings of not-enough toward finding the place of employment she felt was right for her, and more importantly - was in God's plan.

Anna

Background

Anna is from the Southeastern United States in the same metropolitan area of her childhood home. Anna expressed a deep commitment to caring for those who cannot protect themselves, particularly children. Her work as an educator began with her children and she used lessons and inspiration from her experiences with them to inform and fuel her teaching of students in her public-school classroom. She considers herself to be a child advocate and believes that children's gifts and talents should be nurtured, and that entrepreneurship is a fundamental life skill. Anna is an entrepreneur herself, owning her own educational consulting business, tutoring company, and running a non-profit. She also supports her children's individual entrepreneurial endeavors. She earned her doctoral degree in curriculum and instruction in 2015. Anna identifies as a Black woman from the South.

Teaching Experience

After a 6-year break from public school teaching, she returned to teach her local public school district. Anna is a 15-year veteran educator who currently teaches 5th grade social studies and science at an elementary school. Although she does not teach reading or English language arts, she recognizes the significance of literacy skills for her students.

Terror Narrative

Anna's (t)error narrative is presented in multiple parts of her interviews but is centered on feeling pressured to conform to language expectations in her workplace. Black women's speech practices are grounded in their experiences and colored by the rich historical and cultural wealth of our communities; therefore, they may not adhere to traditional rules of normative language practices. For this reason, Black women's speech practices have long been a site of interest for those seeking to understand the function of language as a challenge to power structures, and Anna's experiences reflect how disciplinary domains of power may maintain rules around language that marginalize individuals and groups. Anna's story provides some insight into how language expectations can function as sites of oppression. In an interview, she shared the following:

> It started off with me feeling like I had to prove myself in the workplace…I'm from the South and I was raised with a certain dialect and understanding of literacy that those that were in mainstreamed culture may have had more privilege to understand how to operate in that type of world…but I speak a little more country and use African American Vernacular. In certain situations, whether it was workplace or anything where I had to show up for other people – I would tend to just adapt to what they needed me to be and try to transform so that they could be happy or they could get what they needed out of me instead of me saying I am enough. And I'm literally tired of fighting it, so I'm starting to just perform it to just get through the year. And so, it does bother my psyche.

Anna identified tensions in her workplace between who she is and how she speaks with the rules of a "mainstream culture" that she feels that others have had more privilege in learning how to navigate. An intersection of geographical location and race is made visible as a site of

oppression when Anna refers to the challenges that she has experienced because of both her southern dialect and cultural grounding in colloquialisms that she identifies as African American Vernacular. Anna describes her decision to conform to the linguistic expectations of her workplace environment as a result of fatigue, a "performance just to get through the year", and this is not uncommon of women who are bombarded with pressures to adapt to their surroundings, especially in situations related to their employment. In fact, Collins (2002) suggests that Black women may conceal their self-defined standpoints in favor of becoming "familiar with the language and manners of the oppressor; even some-time adopting them for some illusion of protection" (p. 34). However, although we may appear to conform to certain behavioral expectations, we are always negotiating and reconciling our own definitions of self with the ways that we are positioned by our social locations in society (Mogadime, 2005). Anna had recently resumed employment in the public school system as a classroom teacher after a six-year gap for entrepreneurial pursuits. She described how she felt about the return:

> I didn't want to go back [to working in public school systems] because I felt I could not be myself. I felt like someone was trying to take the gifts that God gave to me and strip me of them and make me a scripted version of whatever this teacher was that they wanted all teachers to mimic. I knew from teaching in the hood…those kids was just like me. And so, as I was fighting to be multifaceted and creative what I thought that we needed growing up as kids – because I saw myself in these kids. They [administrators] were fighting against me and the kids, so it was like I was fighting for myself and I was fighting for the kids.

Anna shared her struggles with self-confidence and identity, as she sought to harness her experiences, background, and culture as strengths, even as they were being used to marginalize

her within the school environment. Although she gave an appearance of conforming, Anna's strong beliefs about using her personal experiences to connect with her students was expressed through her instruction such as using music and lighting to create a calm and tranquil atmosphere. Collins (2002) suggests that Black women do this, strip off the illusions of language and manners of the oppressor, in safe spaces. Anna locked her door at some points during the school year to protect the meditative space that she curated for herself and her students, and used "the gifts that God gave her" to provide what she felt her students needed.

Anna's empyreal logic is demonstrated by multiple practices including her religious affiliation and church attendance, and her visitation with spiritual guides or seers that she consults for insight about how to navigate life decisions. Additionally, Anna attended cognitive behavioral therapy sessions, a practice she identified as specifically useful for learning how to preserve her self-definition within an oppressive space, but discontinued her attendance due to financial constraints. Of therapy, she said:

> I had somebody on my side to help me figure out how to get adjusted to this environment and also how to remain as my own individual person. I would say stick to your therapy regimen if that's what you do. I think for me what I miss most is that I am not able to talk out my frustrations and devise a plan with someone that I was able to do. I've been very frustrated at this job and I have not been able to express my concerns and get encouragement in my way…I feel like I'm being forced to conform. It does bother my psyche, but with therapy I would at least have somebody to talk it out with and someone on my side telling me I don't have to conform.

Anna's participation in therapy was a practice of extraordinary literacy stemming from an empyreal logic that valued her God given talents and passions. Because she ascribed to the spiritual principle that she was created with unique talents and abilities, she sought opportunities to engage in practices that would support her preservation of self. Thus, extraordinary literacies served to strengthen Anna's abilities to participate in self-definition and self-valuation, core themes in Black feminist thought.

Sista circles developed as discussions that revealed a collective terror narrative of how navigating marginalization and oppression has materialized in some ways as internalized oppression. As participants we discussed how internalized oppressions are the terrors impacting not only our personal experiences and actions, but also our teaching. Participants collaborated to explore the extent of internalized oppression and the degree to which it carried over into their instructions and interactions with students. During our discussions, participants questioned ourselves and our practices in ways that challenged the "tough love" approach toward students of color and wondered if instructional and pedagogical practices, based on our own experiences, actually operated as oppressions for the students in our classrooms. As is characteristic of Black feminist thought, participants used language such as "we" and "our" to indicate an assumption of community, collective work, and responsibility for the development of a self-defined standpoint on effective guidance for the children that they teach.

Collins (2002) warned that the danger of controlling images, particularly when they conflict with dominant standards of beauty, womanhood, and human value, is internalized oppression. For example, when dominant narratives of women as fragile prevail, yet Black women are treated as "mules" in domestic work and harmed by police when unarmed, there is a tension between what is and what "should be" that may result in Black women turning inward to

justify the discrepancy. It is difficult for Black women to reconcile the negative images they observe as archetypes of themselves with their own self-defined standpoints. Further, the pain and violence that Black women experience as a result of traumas that are evidenced by these participants' terror narratives, is dangerous not only in the moment of occurrence but also as a potential site for internal oppression. In fact, because of the history of racialized and gendered inequities in United States' past and present, access to a Black feminist woman's standpoint may be the only buffer between the influence of controlling images and the development of internalized oppressions. Participants' work in sista circles represents this collective work in action. The following exchange occurred between Assata and Maria.

> Maria: I'm always telling my students - being black, because all my students are black - we have real life conversations, and I'm always telling them - because they're oppressed just like I'm oppressed, I always tell them how important it is to have an education in this society that keeps trying to set us up to not be able to succeed. I always tell them, this world - this world is difficult, I sometimes tell them this world doesn't love you.

Assata: [Interjects] You have to say that to little kids. Isn't that disheartening?

> Maria: Yea, exactly but it comes from just knowing and experiencing that this world does not love you and you have to go above and beyond to get a degree, and um all the conversations around career day when I ask what they want to be are um - NFL, NBA, I want to be a rapper - and I'm just like ok so now we're going to have a real conversation. You're in the NFL and your leg breaks, so what now?

These conversational turns represent Maria's initial views on teaching her students how to navigate the world as a Black person—but specifically an oppressed person. She qualifies her strategies with her own experiences, which have taught her that the world is difficult for Black people and that students should be prepared to "go above and beyond" and to "get degrees" and an education so that they can exist in a world which was not designed for their success. Assata's interjection, began with a wondering as she pondered the impact of the reality that Maria described in relation to the innocence and youth of a child. Their conversation continued:

> Maria: So, let's ponder that...how many of you and your friends have that dream? Do you think that all of you all will make it? And I told them, I know what you all see on T.V. and I feel like society tells them unless you are dribbling a ball, throwing a ball, doing something with a ball or rapping that it is that is the only way that you can be successful and everybody can't do it. I want them to not live in an oppressed mindset. We might live as an oppressed people but you know getting out of the mindset of being oppressed and trying to overcome that.
>
> Assata: You know you said something that resonated with me about how your kids want to be rappers and basketball players and things like that, and it's funny because we want to prepare them for reality and in that same time we take away that childhood because we're telling them in fifth grade you got to know what you want to be right now and...you know what I mean? Like I know we have to prepare them because it's harsh out here but in our preparing them we take away that childhoodness -that idea that it's okay to be a child and dream away from them. It's so unfair, but at the same time it's the reality that we live in. Why can't you dream and be a football player?

As Maria described her conversations with her students, she identified controlling images of "successful" Black people as only sportspersons and entertainers. Her attempts to ground students' dreams of professionally participating in sports and entertainment by suggesting careers in law and medicine stems from a desire to escape controlling images and to conform to dominant narratives (Collins, 2000). In the next conversational turn, Assata moved from wondering about the impact of oppressions on children to challenging Maria's strategy. As Assata talked, Maria indicated her agreement by nodding and saying "yea" and "mm-hmm".

> Maria: I think the difference is when you go to the students in [the Northern part of the district] I wonder if they're going to have the same responses, and it's because of what they're exposed to. I have worked with those students so I know the responses are different because my students now are just exposed to successful Black people being rappers and athletes. I think there are just so many different options that I want them to be exposed to.
>
> Assata: Ok, so is there a way that we can do it without taking that away. [For example] Oh, you want to do that? Interesting, here's what else is out there - without saying - without like...I'll just use your example, but I'm not downing you or anything, please don't take it like that.
>
> Maria: No, no, I understand.
>
> Assata: So, having the conversation like, oh you want to be an NBA player? Well what if you break your leg? Instead we could say - Well what about when you finish playing in the NBA? You know most players finish playing professional around age 30. What else would you want to do when you finish? And this is not

because I've done it. It's because I've done what you've said too because that's not our reality. Does that make sense?

Maria: Yes, absolutely.

Assata: So, it's us learning to navigate it [oppression and marginalization] and teaching them [students] how to navigate it, because someone has to teach them how to navigate it. I feel like we take away from their innocence and their time to just be children, and so that's what I think is unfair...Why do we even have to teach 10-year-olds how to navigate that?

This exchange represents a sharing of individual experiences and a dialogue toward constructing knowledge about new ways to respond to their internalized oppressions.

Maria: I agree with you though, and thank you for giving that mindset of thinking that way. It's just life is so unfair and you want them to be prepared and to understand how to navigate that.

Assata: Yea, I know. You want them [children] to be okay.

Maria: Yea, and it's like why do Black people always have to go through tough love.

Assata: Right, and sometimes it's more tough than love, right?

Maria: I guess, how can we change that and still be effective?

Assata: Right, and also how can we honor them too without spirit murdering as...what's her name? Dr. Love call it.

Maria: Right

Participants' understandings of internalized oppressions developed throughout their understanding as they identified the concept of "tough love" and "spirit murdering" as possible

effects of internalized oppressions. Also, the turns in conversation occurred more frequently as Maria and Assata began to feed off of one another to begin theorizing their experiences. In Assata's last statement, we see a move toward what Evans-Winters (2017) calls collective theorizing through everyday experiences, which are part of participants' extraordinary literacies. In response to individual t/Terror narratives, participants drew upon various empyreal logics to inform their practices of extraordinary literacies. In this case, the women collectively drew upon the wisdom of other Black women scholars as the principles for their work toward liberation. Specifically, they unpack the concept of "spirit-murder" which Love (2017) defined as an intangible death of the spirit that "denies the inclusion, protection, safety, and nurturance" of Black children (p. 24), and intentionally use theory as a "North star" (Love, 2019, p. 68) and a mechanism for healing (hooks, 2004). Finally, their grammar usage of the collective "we" and "our" serve as an indicator of their mutually agreed upon collaborative efforts towards self-defining their engagement with their students. In this conversation, Maria and Assata used extraordinary literacies to respond to an awareness of internalized oppression, and to collectively self-define future actions on their journey toward "free minds" (Collins, 2000, p. 112).

Summary

Participants' personal t/Terror narratives demonstrate how Black women experience oppression and marginalization through encounters with macro- and micro-aggressive behaviors. Sources of oppression included interpersonal interactions such as Assata's narrative, discriminatory hiring practices as described by Maria, and the marginalizing of linguistic and language practices as described by Anna. Their narratives also demonstrated the depth of impact of t/Terrors as effecting both their exterior (physical) and interior (mental and spiritual) lives. For example, Assata dealt with both the physical violation done to her daughter's body, as well as the

emotional distress of the helplessness that she felt. However, t/Terror narratives are not only about oppression. They are sites for the proliferation of extraordinary literacies; therefore, participants also demonstrated simultaneous privilege and agency through extraordinary literacies as responses to the t/Terrors that they faced. As an example, Anna drew upon her beliefs of individual and divine gifts and talents to guide her towards the decision to attend therapy.t She used support for maintaining a God-given identity that she felt was valuable and unique to her role as a teacher. The section on personal narratives provides evidence of the unique experiences of oppression and privilege that Black women encounter and the ways that they resist by drawing empyreal logics to guide their practices of extraordinary literacies toward a more authentic "self".

Collins (2002) explained that "self" is not defined as the increased autonomy gained by separation from others. Instead, the connectedness among individuals results in deeper, more meaningful forms of self-definition, empowerment, and solidarity. By establishing group solidarity, collective resistance against oppressive forces can be bolstered. The section on sista circles takes up the construct of t/Terror narratives slightly differently by describing one t/Terror that two participants shared in common and demonstrating the ways that they worked together to draw upon collective empyreal logics of Black women's theory to re-define their engagement with their students. For example, both Assata and Maria had an idea of what it meant to be a Black teacher that was challenged in several ways and complexified by their conversations. The transcripts show multiple truths that deepen their understandings about what it means to prepare students of color for success in a world where they will experience oppressive conditions. Participants' t/Terror narratives differed in several ways, including how they identified sources of oppression and their methods of resistance. However, one of the goals of Black feminist

thought, the theory upon which this study is grounded, is to present a shared or collective standpoint of Black women; therefore, I have identified two dominant themes to capture the shared ways that Black women literacy educators employed extraordinary and critical literacies to address oppression and marginalization.

Participants employed both critical literacies and extraordinary literacies such as dance, spiritual/religious texts, church attendance, and cognitive behavioral therapy in response to their experiences of oppression and marginalization. They used critical literacy as direct action against people, situations, and systems they identified as contributors to the t/Terrors they faced. However, what is not captured by critical literacies theory are the extension of the material effects of oppression into interior lives, such as Maria's feelings of rejection and Ella's struggles with feeling not-enough and the ways that Black women educators resisted. In the following section, I provide examples of the ways that participants drew upon their empyreal logics to inform practices of extraordinary literacies for the healing of their internal lives that also, in some cases, manifested in the material and had a positive effect on participants' exterior lives as well.

Critical Literacies as Direct Action

Participants in this study demonstrated critical literacies as promoting action towards social justice by mining religious and theoretical texts for information to navigate their experiences, support their resistance to oppression, and by reading their experiences with dominant controlling images through a lens that questions whose interests are served, and who is marginalized. Assata mined her Baha'i text, to seek a non-dominant perspective on race and gender inequality. She consistently used it to contrast dominant narratives about the positioning of people of color in society. Her excerpts provide evidence of how she used the text to

reposition people of color from the margin to the center, or “the pupil of the eye” as she stated. Assata also discussed how her educational privilege provided her with language/vocabulary to respond to the aggressor, a White man, “in a way that he could understand” – alluding to the sophistication of her communicative practices and a prevailing assumption that connected educational privilege to White male privilege. Participants also used critical literacies in the sista circles when they drew upon Black feminist theories to examine their own teaching practices.

Discussions in the sista circles developed into an interrogation of the ideologies and agendas that were perpetuated by participants’ expectations of their Black and Brown students. For example, Anna stated “we’ve been trained well to sustain a system that oppresses us every day, and we think because now that I am a teacher, I have my degree or I have this kind of house, or I’m living in a different neighborhood and I don't live in *this* kind of neighborhood that now I can look down [on students].” Assata agreed and went further to call out the power of language – “And I agree, I’ve heard it my whole career, and this is the kind of *language* that dominates among some teachers”. These examples are few of many where participants clearly identify relationships between language, power, and the influence of systemic inequality on their personal experiences and teaching.

Extraordinary Literacies as Responses to Controlling Images

Participants used extraordinary literacies to address harms of their interior and exterior lives which mainly resulted from the imposition of controlling images on their self-perceptions (Ella and Maria) and from the perceptions of others (Anna and Assata). Their extraordinary literacies could be traced back to empyreal logics that guided their decisions and actions, and they used them not only in support of their own liberation from oppressive controlling images, but also to inform their interactions with their students.

Controlling images are one of the core themes of Black feminist thought and may be described as negative stereotypes or assumptions of Black women that have been created within a White supremacist patriarchy and seek to define Black women (Collins, 2000). By contrast, Black women develop a self-defined standpoint, often derived from their own experiences, which they use to contradict the validity of controlling images. Participants provided evidence of resisting controlling images of the "strong Black woman" through their use of extraordinary literacies.

The "strong Black woman" is a controlling image that may appear on the surface to praise the abilities of Black women to survive and thrive in less than favorable circumstances; however, as Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) identifies, "Its real function is to defend and maintain a stratified social order by obscuring Black women's experiences of suffering, acts of desperation, and anger" (p. 2). Ella's feelings of inadequacy conflicted with the controlling image of the "strong black woman", and parts of her terror narrative demonstrate the impact of this controlling image on her psyche. Although she finds ways, through her extraordinary literacies, to self-define as enough when society tells her she is not, she refuses to continue to be the "mule" of the world and shoulder the burdens of work, sadness, and stress. She identified that experience as "draining to her spirit, exhausting, and irritating." Instead, Ella found (and is finding) her way to self-healing through a process of vulnerability which includes acknowledging and expressing her needs and wants, emoting, and making space for herself to be strong, weak and everything in between.

Assata interrogated the reactions of standers-by as she engaged in conflict with the aggressor as she also rejected the narrative of the "strong Black woman". In her t/Terror narrative, she recounted how she felt when people standing near her seemed more concerned

with her daughter's reaction to being pushed than the actions that were initiated against her. Although Assata described that she felt empowered to use agency to respond, she still questioned why standers-by (except one) responded with criticism towards her daughter's reaction to being pushed rather than attempting to defend her daughter, a minor, from being pushed by an adult.

> And then I was angry because there were all these people around and nobody stepped in. Well one guy did. Um, like literally put his body between that guy and my daughter and um, basically told the guy to be a gentleman in so many words, but other people- my daughter at this point, she's 20, she was really upset and she in her in her frustration, she was cursing at the guy and what the parents, what they did respond to was her cursing… that didn't feel good.

Finally, Maria expressed her vulnerability and loss of self-confidence when she experienced what she identified as discriminatory hiring practices. She rejected the idea that she would be unaffected and described the amount of time and effort that she invested into the students, and how it made her feel when her efforts went unnoticed by the administration.

> So, it's like God's plan, but you know I got three rejections and no's. Three rejections. They hurt so bad and it was because I love that school. I wanted to be in [name of the school]…It was hurting me so bad that they did not want to hire me.

All participants also engaged in healing work that extended beyond the opposition of controlling images. They employed their literacies practices as responses to the impact of experiences from their t/Terror narratives, and as ways of doing emotional justice work. Assata described how her use of three specific practices – breathing, spirituality/religion, and dialogue

with others – helped her to work through her feelings of helplessness that resulted from her encounter with the man who pushed her daughter.

> I kept telling people what happened. Maybe that might've been what I use to release it because I, I don't think I was ready to release it yet. And so, I just kind of started telling the story to anybody who would listen…I kept telling it over and over until it, it wasn't as, um, it didn't affect me as much.

Ella described the value of laughter, physical activity, writing, meditation, and church in her practices of extraordinary literacies to self-heal.

> I basically set myself up for failure because my gut didn't tell my spirit what to do, which is enjoy myself…you know what I did today – I laughed. I mean a gut twisting good laugh. I needed to replenish my cackles, my "hees" and my ha's….My life, it lightened up…I realized I was just being a sad girl. I mean it was honest...but it was corny to be so sad. So, I just laughed, and I felt inspired again…and so I felt like maybe there are good things in the world. So, I'm also thinking about going to church, but not until I do one dance on the pole first.

Anna's work with her therapist supported her resistance of conformity, and also her navigation of her work life. She described the value of therapy for helping her to recognize her personal worth and the value that she adds to a space by simply being herself. Anna suggested that work with her therapist helped her to heal feelings of inferiority and insufficiency that she had encountered in life in general, and specifically in her workplace.

Maria relied on her spiritual and religious understandings to process why she had not been selected to fill the open position at the school where she was an intern. She expressed

several times that “God had a plan” and that she attended church to renew her strength to continue looking for employment and teaching.

> It was...God's plan was not for me to obviously continue within that program…So it's like God's plan, but you know I got three rejections and no's… But it wasn't meant for me to be there and that's why I feel like, you know, God aligned me and put me.

Discussion and Implications

This study employs a Black feminist theoretical framework, using Black feminist thought as a foundation, which suggests that Black women have unique and intersectional experiences that simultaneously reflect privilege and oppression due to their social locations, engage in practices of self-definition and expressions of agency in response to negative stereotypical tropes, and share a collective standpoint that can be helpful for identifying methods of resistance in the fight for liberation and equity (Collins, 2000). Assumptions of Black feminist thought are visible throughout this study as a theoretical design (e.g., participant selection, units of analysis) and methodological analyses (e.g., modes of analysis, methods of interpretation). Participants are self-identified Black women who also worked as educators. Coding methods include multiple readings of the data, coding for generation of themes, and consulting with participants as co-researchers for the interpretation of meanings.

Units of analysis are participants’ personal experiences of privilege and oppression, described as t/Terror narratives (Staples, 2017), as well the ways that they find and express agency and autonomy through their resistance to oppressive structures. The participants in this study shared their stories of and responses to moments of “figurative death,” and I examined their stories through lenses of critical and extraordinary literacies to illustrate the affordances and

constraints of the theories. Participants' stories of "figurative death" are considered t/Terror narratives, which are respectively micro-aggressive and macro-aggressive encounters (Staples, 2017). t/Terrors can be either relational stemming from interactions in personal relationships (e.g., romantic, kinship, friendship), or social which often occur in broader society (e.g., workplace and schools). Micro-aggressive (t)errors are social terrors that include mental and emotional assaults on individuals, while macro-aggressive (T)errors involve physical assaults to the body. Most often, participants in this study reported social terrors which bears witness to the significance of using the t/Terror narrative framework to present their stories, because social terrors are "minute, fleeting, called debatable, and often normalized" (Staple, 2017, p. 34).

I used a theoretical mode of analysis based on tenets of critical and extraordinary literacies and discussed the provisions and constraints of each theory as an analytical framework, as well as unique affordances of theories grounded in Black feminist thought for producing knowledge about how to resist oppressions and marginalization. I assert that analyses of participants' t/Terror narratives from two different perspectives provided evidence that theories which view power structures as intersectional, and are grounded in Black feminist epistemologies are well equipped to encompass and illuminate Black women's experiences of privilege and marginalization as well as their literacy-related methods of resistance that might otherwise be overlooked.

This paper demonstrates the effectiveness of examining literacy practices using more inclusive methodologies, and the promise that it holds for revealing more expansive iterations of social justice work, which is necessary to truly work towards equity and liberation. In this chapter, I use critical and extraordinary literacies as analytical guides to identify Black women teachers' literacy-related methods of resisting oppression and effective constructs/theories that

are capable of illuminating how Black women employed their own literacies as resistance to social t/Terrors and other forms of oppression. Specifically, although critical literacies theory shares a common goal with critical literacies of social justice, this study raises questions about whether or not it can be used as effectively as extraordinary literacies to capture features unique to marginalized groups such as an intersectional nature of oppressions and "non-traditional" literacy-related resistance practices.

Literacy as Resistance

The participants in this study used various practices to respond to the oppression and marginalization that they experienced. They engaged in resistance of offenses impacting the soma, as well as their mental and emotional states. Their responses included both direct opposing actions such as verbal confrontation, as well as more discreet and personal practices such as attending therapy, engaging in spiritual and religious practice, and meditation. Participants most often described their experiences of oppression and resistance as impacting their mental and spiritual wellness. For example, Maria reported that feelings of rejection impacted her self-confidence and Anna discussed the toll that pressure to conform took on her self-identity. These examples support Staples' (2017) assertion that it is necessary to examine the interior lives of individuals, particularly those who are often marginalized, because if we do not, we cannot understand the full scope of the impact of oppressions. Thus, our work toward social justice and equity will be incomplete. Because participants reported the significance of impact on their interior lives, their responses were mostly directed towards addressing these harms by resisting controlling images and engaging in practices to promote self-healing.

Analyses of Power

As evidenced by the writing in Chapter One, critical literacies are designed from a critical perspective that acknowledges inequities in society, but not from an intersectional perspective. Extraordinary literacies respond to a U.S. society as a White supremacist patriarchy (Collins, 2000), and conceptualize power through an intersectional lens, recognizing the unique impact oppressions such as racism and sexism, as well as simultaneously occurring privilege and oppressions. Participants' privileges often led to agency, for example, Assata suggested that her educational privilege supported her agency in speaking up for herself and her daughter. The extraordinary literacies framework is useful for understanding the dynamic ways that individuals can engage in society and work toward justice for themselves and others.

Black feminist theories, such as Black feminist thought, provide intersectional analyses of power and are grounded in Black feminist epistemologies that acknowledge Black women's experiences as knowledge producing. Because knowledge production and possession are assessed by standards that differ from traditional western, and positivist standards, Black women's dialogue with one another, moral and ethical connections to knowledge claims, and experiences are considered valuable, research that uses Black feminist theories has the flexibility to acknowledge the intellectual contributions of Black women.

Implications for this research suggest that using critical literacy as a conceptual model for research design, and an analytical framework is useful for identifying experiences of marginalization and certain responses toward promoting social justice. Currently, the focus of critical literacies research in education focuses on direct harms and direct action toward social justice. However, as is indicated by the call for an affective turn in critical literacy studies, researchers may be missing important consequences and responses to oppressions when they do

not consider the impact of oppressions and marginalization on interior lives of marginalized individuals. Employing a lens of extraordinary literacies is useful in this way for several reasons. As a conceptual model, extraordinary literacies require attention to the effects of oppression on both interior and exterior lives, and as an analytic frame, it operates from an intersectional perspective which identifies power as multi-axial and multi-dimensional. Further, extraordinary literacies expand the concept of literacy practices, because it includes literacy practices that respond to harms of the interior life. Literacy practices, such as therapy and meditation are not identified as methods of resistance in critical literacies research.

As evidenced by the findings of this study, Black women report and respond to harms of the interior life, such as decreases in self-confidence, feelings of rejection, and limited opportunities for employment as educators. As such, their responses often mirror what are considered to be extraordinary literacies, rather than actions that promote social justice from a critical literacies perspective. Thus, if we do not expand the ways that we view power and individuals' responses to oppression, critical literacies research will be incapable of reflecting the experiences of those who practices resistance in the margins. Therefore, it is vital to consider what may be missing from research on critical literacies practices. I propose that critical literacies research make room for not only an affective approach, but an effective approach to literacy as resistance that is expansive enough to account for both the impact of injustice on interior lives and the methods that Black women specifically choose to heal ourselves.

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