

ABSTRACT

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FEMINIST THOUGHT, PERFORMANCE, AND
PEDAGOGY

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This dissertation, "Body of Knowledge: Black Queer Feminist Thought, Performance, and Pedagogy," considers the ways in which the body, identity, and performance function as "equipment" for teaching and learning in the college classroom and beyond. The project identifies, names, and examines the ways in which the body functions as a text for some instructors who self-identify as Black queer feminist women, as they draw attention to or deflect attention from their own corporeal presence as racialized, gendered, and sexualized subjects in the feminist classroom and in the broader campus community. For pedagogues whose "embodied text" highlights the nexus of race, gender, and sexuality, identity informs and constructs the classroom. These intersections can disrupt the classroom, and shape the pedagogical project. This dissertation explores the ways in which such pedagogues work to harness their "otherness," or differences from expected teaching identity, and to engage their creative pedagogical power through embodiment and performance.

Using two feminist case studies and a self -study, I employ an intersectional feminist approach that envisages the body as a text for teaching about race, gender, and sexuality in higher education. This project theorizes and applies a framework for studying the intersection of creative pedagogy and subversive identity by emphasizing the utility of embodied performance as an instructive tool. The work draws from and contributes to scholarship on intersectionality, the lived experiences of women of color and queer women; and the traditions of feminist studies, Black studies, LGBTQ studies, and feminist and critical pedagogies, particularly addressing the experiences and concerns of teachers in higher education with multiple intersecting identities who work across multiple disciplines. Documenting, the experiences, challenges, and reflections of three Black queer feminists for whom teaching itself is both a commitment and an identity, is as much a contribution as more abstractly theorizing a Black queer feminist pedagogy.

BODY OF KNOWLEDGE: BLACK QUEER FEMINIST THOUGHT,
PERFORMANCE, AND PEDAGOGY

By

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Preface — Body/ Text/ Classroom: Race, Sexuality, and the Performance of Pedagogy

So how can we *not* not teach about race and sexuality? We do it not necessarily through the material content of the course, but through our conviction and the material fact of our black gay bodies in the classroom, which always already signals a teachable moment.¹

— Bryant Keith Alexander

The presence of the black woman teacher in the multicultural classroom repositions the location of blacks and women in the academy and. . . repositions the texts of black women in the academic curriculum moving both from a position of margin to center.²

— Mae G. Henderson

Introduction

I often teach what I am, I often am what I teach: an intersectionality, an interdisciplinarity, a complex epistemology, and a pedagogical location. As I live and perform my multiple identities, teaching through institutional knowledge and understanding myself as embodied text,³ it has become apparent that the methods through which I teach women's studies must be intersectional and interdisciplinary. The way my students understand my identity becomes part of the project, as they sort out the complicated ideas of race, gender, sexuality, and class through interpreting

¹ Bryant Keith Alexander, "Embracing the Teachable Moment: The Black Gay Body on the Classroom as Embodied Text," in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 262.

² Mae G. Henderson, "What It Means to Teach the Other When the Other Is the Self," *Callaloo* 17, no. 2 (1994), 435.

³ *Ibid.*, 436.

texts, including the text constituted by my own embodied performance in the classroom. Like the content of my courses, the pedagogy that I practice grows out of women's studies, African American studies, queer studies, and performance studies, among many other fields. My social justice teaching pivots on intersectional analysis and theories of identity, while I work within these interdisciplinary fields. One way of expressing my identity in brief is to highlight that I am a woman, Black, and queer, hence both living at and teaching where these fields meet.

My identity informs and constructs the classroom both in its difference from expected teaching identity in the classroom, and in its creative pedagogical power. Bryant Keith Alexander asserts that Black gay bodies in the classroom open a “teachable moment”⁴; as a Black lesbian woman, teaching, learning, and being women's studies, I cautiously and thoroughly evaluate body, identity, and pedagogy. These categories merge; they are inseparable in my students' awareness of me, in the key aspects of how and what I teach, and in how I observe and use my students' perceptions of me in order to teach them the ideas and worldviews I believe are most valuable. When I evaluate my own pedagogical practices, I find a meaningful set of tools that emerge from a particular interpretation of the relationships among Black queer studies, Black Feminist thought, and the performance of pedagogy — an interpretation necessitated by seeing identities and the resulting identity-based knowledges as intersectional.

⁴ B. K. Alexander, “Embracing the Teachable Moment,” 249-50.

The term and concept of intersectionality,⁵ like that of interdisciplinarity, is increasingly emphasized in a range of fields of knowledges. One could say that the contemporary moment in the academy, at least in fields like women's studies, ethnic studies, and American studies, has been significantly shaped by the introduction of intersectionality and related practices of interdisciplinary research and teaching. This concept, or at least this particular terminology, originates particularly in the work of Black feminist scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberlee Crenshaw, Bonnie Thornton Dill, and others.

Broadly speaking, intersectional analysis as a conception of knowledge makes the following assertions: 1) that race, class, gender, and sexuality (as well as other meaningful categories of identity) mutually construct each other and cannot be interpreted separately (one is always simultaneously raced, classed, gendered, and sexualized); 2) that in a given social or cultural context, one category of identity may become more prominent than another but it never exists independently nor is experienced independently; and 3) that race, class, gender and sexuality simultaneously structure relationships of power and the experiences of all aspects of socio-cultural life. Intersectional analysis and perspective depends upon interdisciplinarity, which draws from multiple academic fields of study and

⁵ This use of "intersectionality" references Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberlee Crenshaw, and others who have named the term and explore how race, class, gender, and sexuality operate together. See Kimberly Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991), 1241-1299; Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning From The Outsider Within: Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*, ed. S. Harding, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 103-126; Patricia Hill Collins and M. Andersen, *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*, (Florence, KY: Wadsworth Publishing, 2006); Bonnie Thornton Dill and Ruth Enid Zambrana eds., *Emerging Intersections: Race, Class, and Gender in Theory, Policy, and Practice*, (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

methodological practices in order to pose and answer questions not amenable to exploration within a single discipline. Intersectional inquiries more fully explore and present the complexities of identity narratives and experiences. In order to examine the ways in which people experience their identities and social knowledges as intersectional, we must ask questions that can be answered only through interdisciplinary methods.. Using an interdisciplinary lens, this project considers the ways in which the body, identity, and performance function as “equipment” for teaching and learning in the college classroom and in the broader campus community.

Theorizing Black Queer Feminist Pedagogies

As I explore body, identity, and performance, I name and examine how the body functions as a text for some instructors who self-identify as Black queer feminist women, as attention is directly or indirectly drawn to or away from their own corporeal presence as racialized, gendered, and sexualized subjects in the feminist classroom. This dissertation theorizes and applies a framework for studying the intersection of creative pedagogy and subversive identity by emphasizing the utility of embodiment and performance as an instructive tool. My work contributes to scholarship on intersectionality, the lived experiences of women of color and queer women, the scholarly traditions of feminist studies, Black studies, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) studies, and feminist and critical pedagogies in ways that I hope can be considered and practiced by teachers with various identities working across multiple disciplines.

Using two feminist case studies and a self -study, I employ an intersectional feminist approach that envisages the body as a text for teaching about race, gender,

and sexuality in higher education. I focus on instructors who (1) self-identify as Black queer feminist women, and who (2) teach women's studies and/or other related interdisciplinary fields. My case study methods include conducting extended interviews and classroom observations, examining personal narratives and syllabi, reviewing course materials, and shadowing on campus. The self-study component to this project allows me to examine the ways in which I invest in my own corporeal presence in the classroom by employing reflexive autobiography, journaling, memory work, and personal narratives.

Shaped by the underlying premise that the body, identity, and performance can function as “equipment” for teaching and learning, the following research questions guide this project:

- Given that the intersectional experiences of Black women have often been rendered invisible in discussions of race, class, gender, and sexuality, how do Black queer feminist pedagogues utilize the body, classroom resources, materials, assignments, and personal narratives to address this erasure?

- How can explicating the crossroads of multiple fields of knowledge, including personal and experiential knowledge, illuminate the practices of pedagogues whose bodies and identities place them at the nexus of race, gender, and sexuality?

The data collected from the case studies and the self-study are explored on a case-by- case basis, and then reviewed in the context of a cross-case analysis that makes connections and highlights variations in teaching styles.

This study speaks to the absences and silences inherent in many fields of study, including women's studies, critical pedagogies, African American studies, queer studies, and performance studies, by considering the following:

- When teaching women's studies and/or other related interdisciplinary fields with subject matter regarding race, gender, and sexuality, do Black queer feminist pedagogues use personal experiences that reflect their own sexual identity, racial identity, and/or gender as examples or teaching tools; and if so, how?

- Do Black queer feminist pedagogues “come out,” or enunciate a queer sexual identity in the classroom? Is an enunciation of sexual identity, racial identity, and/or gender a part of the pedagogical project? Does this manifest itself on the syllabus and/or course design? If so, how?

- Do Black queer feminist pedagogues acknowledge the body and utilize the element of performance in the classroom? Does the body of the Black queer feminist pedagogue function as a “text” that inspires teachable moments? If so, how do these processes work? If not, what alternative pedagogies are employed to address issues of intersecting identities in the classroom?

This dissertation theorizes and applies a framework for studying the intersection of pedagogy and identity in ways that can be practiced broadly across disciplines and social locations by examining embodiment, identity, and performance in the college classroom and beyond. This research project's case studies and self-study are attentive to the ways in which intersectionality plays out in the classroom and in the broader campus community, with particular attention to the negotiations of multiple identities. The field of women's studies emphasizes pedagogy, knowledge

production, and shared knowledges; I highlight this project's relationship to feminist pedagogical inquiries. In seeking to explore issues of body and identity, and attend to the deployment of pedagogy through the lens of diversity, this project both presents a framework for studying body, identity, and performance, and stresses the importance of feminist and critical pedagogies to women's studies as an interdiscipline invested in examining intersectional identities and their implications for relations of power.

At the Crossroads

I take an intersectional approach to exploring the fields of Black feminist thought, Black queer studies, and critical and feminist pedagogies, placing these fields in conversation with one another and surveying central texts and authors in each area. I highlight the interconnectedness of these writings, speaking both to absences and silences and to interlocking ideas across disciplines. I highlight the interdisciplinary nature of these fields, illuminating their efficacy in generating a Black queer feminist pedagogy.

Chapter One, "Bodies of Literature/ Bodies in Literature: Reviewing Critical Conversations," theorizes the emergence of Black queer feminist pedagogy by reviewing and analyzing scholarship from key contributing fields. Specifically, the review of literature examines how the scholarship in the fields of Black queer studies, Black feminist thought, critical feminist pedagogies, and performance studies offer foundational tools for examining the precarious location of Black women and queer women within the academy. I apply and highlight interdisciplinarity as linked to intersectional analyses and methods.

Chapter Two, “Mastering Methodologies: Identity, Pedagogy, and Research Methods,” reviews the literature on qualitative methods, including feminist case study and self-study, as well as the methodological components utilized in this research project. I highlight the theoretical underpinnings of this project, including qualitative methods, feminist methodologies, experience as evidence, the evidence of felt intuition, *testimonio*, theory in the flesh, and reflexivity. I then review the five components used as models and methods in my multiple-method case study; these include elements of ethnography, interviews, observation, shadowing, and portraiture. I conclude chapter two by laying out the research design for this dissertation project, devised to observe Black queer feminist women’s embodiment and performance. It considers the individual characteristics of each pedagogue’s case and discusses the strengths and pitfalls of multiple methods qualitative research.

Chapter Three, “Black Queer Feminist Pedagogies in the Classroom and on Campus: Case Studies and Self-Study,” presents three separate cases, providing initial analysis for each case study, including my self study as a third “case.” I consider the individual characteristics of each of the three case studies, including my own. This chapter hones in on the deployment of pedagogies through Black queer feminist women’s embodiment and performance, and reveals the ways in which pedagogies are not limited by the classroom, but are shaped by and implemented within the context of the larger campus community.

Chapter Four, “On Common Ground: Cross-Case Analysis,” explores the connections and common themes across case studies, and highlights differences among them in their explorations of teaching and experience. During the interview

and observation process with the case participants and the review of my own self-study, several themes emerged as central to pedagogy and relationships with students and faculty. These include the process of developing as a teacher, the role of the Black queer feminist pedagogue in the classroom and on campus, and the challenges of negotiating identity and embodied text in the classroom and on campus. I place these three cases in conversation with one another, allowing me to discuss in detail the connections and distinctions between cases.

Chapter Five, “Conclusion: Toward a Black Queer Feminist Pedagogical Framework,” draws from the case studies in order to summarize how the case participants become racialized, gendered, and sexualized subjects in the classroom. I then pull together examples from the case and self-studies to theorize the ways in which attention is directly or indirectly drawn to or away from the corporeal presence of each pedagogue. I also illuminate how Black queer feminist pedagogues experience their precarious positioning beyond the classroom, in the context of their campuses, as they navigate the nexus of that which is Black, queer, and female. I conclude by laying out a framework for studying the intersection of pedagogy and identity in ways that can be applied broadly across disciplines and social locations.

This study is unique; there are no other comparable studies that explore the experiences and challenges of Black queer feminists in the academy using in depth case studies and self-study. The documentation of these experiences, challenges, and these women’s reflections on them, is a major contribution to the field, as much as theorizing a Black queer feminist pedagogy.

Dedication

For Black queer feminist pedagogues, past, present and future.

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Chapter 1 — Bodies Of Literature/ Bodies In Literature: Reviewing Critical Conversations

This chapter explores critical conversations in the literature attentive to race, gender, and sexual orientation as they intersect with the experiences of pedagogues in the academy. Drawing from the fields of Black queer studies, Black feminist thought, critical feminist pedagogies, performance studies, and work that interrogates the experiences of Black women and queer women navigating the academy, I place discussions of identity, pedagogy, and embodiment in conversation with one another.

These bodies of literature contribute to my discussion of Black queer feminist pedagogies. I have synthesized varying ideas and selected exemplary works from these fields with this project in mind. Although not exhaustive, this chapter reviews central ideas and principal concepts that define the parameters for these overlapping bodies of literature, and explicates the intersections of these areas of thought. I consider the bodies of literature as they formulate a discourse; I am also attentive to the ways in which Black, queer, and female bodies shape the discourse in these bodies of literature. It is important to locate my own research within the context of prior scholarship and theory, because this is the body of work that has shaped my project and that I hope to engage with and expand.

Formations of Black Feminist Thought

In her discussion of the epistemology of Black feminist thought, Patricia Hill Collins defines Black feminist ideology as “a specialized thought that reflects the distinctive themes of African American women’s experiences and that holds work,

family, sexual politics, motherhood, and political activism at its core.”⁶ Women’s existence, experience, and culture are therefore central to Black feminist epistemology’s emphasis on brutally complex systems of oppression. Black feminist epistemology can best be viewed as “subjugated knowledge,”⁷ with its central points of reference being the experiential, cultural, and political. It also speaks to the invisibility of knowledges produced by Black women. Black feminist thought, as defined by Collins, has many formations and manifestations, including some Black women’s daily insights, Black feminist cultural criticism, critical race theory, and critical race feminism, among others.

Collins identifies four central actions of Black feminist thought that are applied broadly to multiple inquiries in related sub-fields. She asserts that Black feminist thought reclaims, discovers, analyzes, and reinterprets the works of Black women thinkers and searches for alternative sites of knowledge that are produced and expressed by women not “commonly perceived as intellectuals.”⁸ This process of discovering, claiming, and creating new knowledges can also be applied to Black women’s studies. In their introduction to *Still Brave: The Evolution of Black Women’s Studies*, Stanlie James, Frances Smith Foster, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall comment:

Because Black Studies and Women’s Studies failed to adequately address the unique experiences of women of African descent in the United States and around the world, a few brave women created a new

⁶ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 251.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

field — Black Women’s Studies — to provide a conceptual framework for moving women of color from the margins to the center of Women’s Studies, for incorporating gender analyses into Black studies; and to be a catalyst for initiatives such as bringing “Minority Women’s Studies” (as it was called) into core curricula in diverse academic settings.⁹

Thus, Black feminist thought, in its relationship with Black women’s studies, seeks to bring Black women’s voices from margin to center¹⁰ and create new knowledges produced for, by, and about Black women.

This production of knowledge from a Black feminist standpoint has been crucial to multiple fields of study, areas of practice, and the production of theory. Sandra Harding asserts that standpoint theory itself produced knowledge that was “*for* women,” noting circumstances in which women “as a group — or, as groups located in different class, racial, ethnic, and sexual locations in local, national, and global social relations — became the authors of knowledge.”¹¹ Collins postulates the creative use of marginality, theorizing that the “outsider within” standpoint of Black women has produced opportunities to critique self, family and society.¹² Frances Beal articulated the phrase “double jeopardy”¹³ long before terms like “standpoint” or

⁹ Frances Smith Foster, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, and Stanlie M. James, *Still Brave: The Evolution of Black Women’s Studies* (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2009), xiii.

¹⁰ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000)

¹¹ Sandra Harding, *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 4. Author’s emphasis.

¹² Collins, “Learning From The Outsider Within,” 103-126.

¹³ Frances Beal, “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female,” in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, (New York: New Press, 1995), 146-156.

“intersectionality” entered the lexicon; the idea of “multiple jeopardy,”¹⁴ presented by Deborah King, is also closely aligned with the term “intersectionality.” Both phrases speak to the specificity of the intersecting locations and perspectives of race, class, gender, and sexuality for Black women.

Another formation of the outsider within or multiple consciousness standpoints is that of “cultural duality,” viewed through the lens of double racial consciousness, as articulated by Black feminist cultural critic Sherri Parks. Parks notes, “A common theme in the writings of Black women, and more recently, in Black feminist criticism, is that of cultural duality and double racial consciousness.”¹⁵ Gwendolyn Pough echoes this idea of cultural duality. I read Pough’s hip-hop feminist stance as applying Parks’ idea by taking part simultaneously in both majority and minority cultures. As Pough describes some hip hop feminists’ dual cultural consciousness, it includes both identifying as a child of hip hop culture and a lover of the music, and wishing to speak out actively against sexism and the larger social issues that contribute to sexism in the production and consumption of hip hop.¹⁶ In this instance, Pough’s duality or double consciousness takes the form of belonging to the hip-hop generation, loving and participating in its cultural production, while being able to simultaneously analyze and critique its formations.

Finally, a Black feminist standpoint as articulated by the Combahee River Collective unpacks the simultaneity of oppressions for Black women, specifically

¹⁴ Deborah King, “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology,” in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, (New York: New Press, 1995), 294-318.

¹⁵ Shari Parks, “In My Mother’s House: Black Feminist Aesthetics, Television, and A Raisin in the Sun,” in *Black Feminist Cultural Criticism*, ed. J. Bobo, (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), 108.

¹⁶ Gwendolyn D. Pough, *Home Girls Make Some Noise!: Hip-hop Feminism Anthology* (Mira Loma, CA: Parker Publishing, 2007), vii.

focusing on Black lesbian women, at the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. This foundational work insists:

This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression."¹⁷

As Black lesbian women, Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, Demita Frazier, and other members of the Collective pronounced a progressive commitment to ending all forms of oppression, notably, working in solidarity with Black men in the struggle against racism. The Collective's statement highlights the relationship between power and oppression from a Black lesbian feminist standpoint, declaring, "We do not have racial, sexual, heterosexual, or class privilege to rely upon, nor do we have even the minimal access to resources and power that groups who possess any one of these types of privilege have."¹⁸ The Combahee River Collective's identity politics and its commitment to ending all forms of oppression while centering the lived experiences of Black lesbian women establishes an intersectional basis for Black lesbian feminist theory and practice.

Queering Black Feminist Thought

In recent years, the intersectional identity politics as presented by the Combahee River Collective have become even more complex as Black "queer" positionalities have emerged. Continuing the Black feminist practice of discovering,

¹⁷ Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement," in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, (New York: New Press, 1995), 234.

¹⁸ Ibid., 236.

reclaiming, and reinterpreting texts, Laura A. Harris asserts, “of paramount importance to queer black feminist practice is the project of redrawing the parameters of feminism as history, practice, and theory.”¹⁹ Harris articulates a queer Black feminism that asks:

Should I speak to the history of my blackness as a black feminist or as a queer, or do I identify with both because I am a lesbian of African-American descent? Often, black lesbian, and the way that description of myself troubles identity, are terms that inform each other best about my differences. Reducing queer to its bottom line — a position opposed to normative heterosexual regimes — seems to indicate that I am queer because I am a lesbian, black, and feminist. But am I only queer in relation to hetero-normativity or perhaps also in the very categories with which I cast my opposition to it?²⁰

Harris interrogates the ways in which a Black queer feminist stance is both complex and convoluted. She contends that the multiple modifiers queer, Black, and feminist “illuminate contradictions and problems” as they “produce an axis where pleasure and politics and feminist bodies can compile their histories.”²¹ Interrogating these Black queer complexities is central to the political and intellectual project of Black queer studies. An examination of this emerging field and its relationship to Black feminist thought follows.

¹⁹ Laura Alexandra Harris, “Queer Black Feminism: The Pleasure Principle,” *Feminist Review*, no. 54 (1996), 10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

²¹ *Ibid.*

At the Crossroads: Black Feminist Thought and Black Queer Studies

In formulating a Black queer feminist pedagogy, one must consider the intersections of Black feminist thought and Black queer studies. Both fields draw on Black lesbian feminist thought, and both inform my intellectual and pedagogical practices and present a framework for examining bodies, sexualities, identities, and intersections. Placing these fields in conversation with one another also highlights critical questions regarding absences and silences within each field. These questions concerning the status of race, gender, and sexuality within each field emphasize the urgency of a Black queer feminist pedagogy.

When examining Black feminist thought's formations through the lens of subjugated knowledge, I specifically emphasize the invisibility, or perhaps rather the erratic visibility, of Black lesbian knowledges. This unevenness, located at the nexus of gendered, racial, and sexual "otherness," manifests itself as a series of epistemological omissions. These omissions of subjugated "Black lesbian" knowledges extend beyond the ideological systems shaped by white and/or male consciousness. This erratic visibility also pertains to uneven representations of gender in discussions of Black queer studies, to the silences of Black queer women and the specificity of that subjectivity within the framework of Black feminist thought, and to the discussions of (white) feminist and queer theory that omit or discuss only tangentially issues of race. As a foremother of Black feminist thought and foundational thinker on subjects of intersectionality (though she did not use that term), Audré Lorde, herself a Black lesbian feminist, designates a call to action in her

article “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference.” Lorde has reservations about the usefulness of marginalized bodies as teaching texts:

It is the responsibility of the oppressed to teach the oppressors their mistakes. . . . Black and Third-World people are expected to educate white people as to our humanity, women are expected to educate men. Lesbians and gay men are expected to educate the heterosexual world. The oppressors maintain their position and evade responsibility for their own actions. There is a constant drain of energy, which might better be used in redefining ourselves and devising realistic scenarios for altering the present and constructing the future.²²

Yet, in the same essay and throughout her work, she invokes her own Black, female, lesbian body pedagogically, as a site of both marginalization and power. I relate Lorde’s references to oppression and power as well as the concept of subjugated knowledge to the inconsistent presence of Black queer women within Black queer studies, whose foundations were built upon the work of Black feminist scholars, activists, and writers, and whose epistemological framework also examines silences and omissions, especially in regards to race.

Lesbian Feminist Foundations and Queer Terms of Endearment

Black queer studies as a field is useful in that it speaks to multiple locations and challenges particular formations of identity; however, I argue that the “double cross” model endorsed by E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson in their introduction to the foundational anthology *Black Queer Studies*. The double cross is

²² Audré Lorde. “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,” in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall (New York: New Press, 1995), 284.

described as a model, which values the nexus of “that which is Black” and “that which is queer,” articulating the relationship between and intersectional nature of race and sexuality.²³ I assert that this model is limited in its scope in regard to queer women. Given the inherent masculinity of queer subjectivity, and limitations to the double cross in explicitly naming a gender as a category of analysis when considering Black and queer subjectivities,²⁴ I assert that Black queer studies must make a more concerted effort to carve out a space for queer women’s voices and more fully articulate a “nexus” that explicitly includes queer women in its analysis of the nexus of Black and queer.

Black queer studies is indebted to Black feminist thought’s focus on lived experiences within intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and religion,²⁵ as well as on the way multiple identities take on multiple tasks within the academy and the classroom. As queer studies took shape, many Black feminist scholars critiqued the idea of “woman” as a universal category and questioned identity politics within the civil rights and women’s activist networks. Some Black scholars who recognized the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and other identities saw queer studies as a “remaking of discourse, a whitewashing.”²⁶ Given this critique of queer studies by Black feminists, it is important to note here the historical context of the word “queer” as an epithet,

²³ Johnson and Henderson, “Introduction: Queering Black Studies/ ‘Quarung’ Queer Studies,” in *Black Queer Studies*, 7.

²⁴ I acknowledge that discussions of “gender” within the field of Black queer studies do engage with issues of gender identity, and gender expression, often in the context of Black masculinities and transgender identities and expressions. I contend that these discussions of “gender” are limited in their attention to Black lesbian women.

²⁵ Johnson and Henderson, “Introduction: Queering Black Studies/ ‘Quarung’ Queer Studies,” in *Black Queer Studies*, 1-17.

²⁶ Holland, “Foreword: ‘Home’ Is a Four Letter Word,” in *Black Queer Studies*, ix-x.

reclaimed by “in-your-face” activists (most notably the organization Queer Nation), in which “queer” is often contextualized as connoting a white male experience. Cathy Cohen observes that queer activism and queer theory “are seen as standing in opposition, or in contrast to category-based identity politics of traditional lesbian and gay movements,”²⁷ civil rights movements, and feminist politics; for Black feminists who worked to legitimize racialized contexts within the category of ‘woman,’ embracing the broad category of ‘queer’ was viewed as another point of erasure. Black queer studies has challenged essentializations of ‘queerness’ that erase and silence racial and cultural differences, just as Black feminist thought has reclaimed Black women’s subjugated knowledges and ideas by discovering, reinterpreting, and analyzing voices that have been silent.²⁸

Constructing a ‘double cross’ framework at the intersection of race and sexuality silences the specific contributions of Black queer women. Indeed, Black queer women have been critical to the development of Black feminist and Black queer ideology and praxis. Black lesbians were critical to the founding of the National Black Feminist Organization in 1973, The Combahee River Collective in 1974, the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gay Men in 1978, *Azalea: A Magazine by Third World Women* in 1978, and Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press in 1981.²⁹ Guy-Sheftall notes that Black lesbians have been denied their rightful place in African American cultural, intellectual, and political history.³⁰ Thus, this trend of

²⁷ Cathy J. Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” in *Black Queer Studies*, 24.

²⁸ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 13.

²⁹ Beverly Guy-Sheftall, “The Combahee River Collective,” in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, (New York: New Press, 1995), 231.

³⁰ Ibid.

Black queer women's erasure within Black queer studies can be traced on a cultural, intellectual, and historical continuum. Acknowledging the past contributions of lesbian foremothers is not sufficient. As we have seen, Black queer studies can acknowledge the historical contributions of Black lesbians without taking into account contemporary Black queer women's presence in theory and in practice.

Some queer theorists, Black and white, have offered critiques of the double cross. Sharon Holland suggests that, although Black queer studies endorses the "double cross of affirming the inclusivity mobilized under the sign of queer while claiming the racial, historical, and cultural specificity attached to the marker Black,"³¹ these signs of inclusivity and specificity still obscure the presence and participation of Black queer women. Judith Halberstam argues, "Female sexual and gender behavior in general is already understood to be derivative of male identity."³² Collins, whose work I see as supporting Black queer feminist theory, contends that critical scholarship regarding Black women's sexuality, particularly scholarship in Black studies, has two systems of dealing with this topic when issues of race intersect with issues of sexuality. Black women's sexuality is either simply ignored, or included primarily in relation to African American men's issues.³³ Black queer studies, I argue, constructs Black queer women's sexualities in similar ways by assuming that an unarticulated presence of the Black queer woman is inherent under the sign of "queer" and the racial marker "black,"³⁴ thus reifying the 'double cross' model by

³¹ Johnson and Henderson, "Introduction: Queering Black Studies/ 'Quarung' Queer Studies," in *Black Queer Studies*, 6-7.

³² Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 77.

³³ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 124.

³⁴ Johnson and Henderson, "Introduction: Queering Black Studies/ 'Quarung' Queer Studies," in *Black Queer Studies*, 6-7.

ignoring Black female sexualities or defining “queerness” in relation to Black male sexualities.

Marlon Ross’s essay, “Beyond the Closet as a Race-less Paradigm,” asks for a consideration of class within Black queer studies. Here, Ross explores the limitations of scholarly and scientific formations of modern homosexual identity that place sexuality at the center of analysis,³⁵ without necessarily accounting for a racial and class identification. Ross notes that race and class become traditionally invisible when putative origins of modern homosexuality are discussed. Ross calls for a theoretical model that is attuned to the politics of in/visibility to take into account the complexities that race and class expose. However, Ross himself does not designate the in/visibility of gender.³⁶ Given his examination of the epistemological development of homosexual identity, Ross draws from texts that do not explore gender as a nuanced component of sexual identity. Thus, it is not his examination that is lacking, but perhaps the foundational theoretical texts that have defined sexuality as white and gendered as male. This represents yet another instance of the ‘double cross,’ again examining that which is “raced” and that which is “male.”

The anthology *Black Queer Studies* both represents and explores the erratic and uneven attention to Black queer women’s subjectivity. The introduction does include an examination of the contributions of Black lesbian foremothers; this list pays homage to scholars, artists, and activists, and points to their contributions to both Black studies and women’s studies. Johnson and Henderson write:

³⁵ Marlon D. Ross, “Beyond the Closet as a Raceless Paradigm,” in *Black Queer Studies*, 164-167.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 175.

Black feminist theorists including Alice Walker, Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, Barbara Smith, Cheryl Clarke, Audre Lorde, Toni Cade Bambara, and Angela Davis, among others, [who] worked to fill in the lacunae created by the omission of Black women from the historical narrative of Black studies. Notably, more than a few of these early interventionists were lesbians who sought not only to combat the sexism and homophobia within the Civil Rights and black studies movements, but also the racism and sexism within the emergent women's rights and feminist studies movements.³⁷

The editors note here that Black lesbian contributions have been foundational to the development of multiple movements; both scholarly and political endeavors have been built upon the intersectional analysis put forth by Black lesbian subjugated knowledges. However, the anthology *Black Queer Studies*, as constructed by the editors, notwithstanding the editorial bow toward a lesbian-influenced history, has its own limitations with regard to making visible the presence of lesbians within the field. A lean count of the articles included reveal that only two of the sixteen chapters are explicitly focused on the presence of Black lesbians. Ironically, both of these articles are about invisibility, absence, and giving voice to Black lesbians through, images, and creative texts.³⁸

Even the name of the field "Black queer studies," serves to complicate the ways in which various intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality are

³⁷ E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, "Introduction: Queering Black Studies/ 'Quarung' Queer Studies," in *Black Queer Studies*, 4.

³⁸ See Kara Keeling, "'Joining the Lesbians': Cinematic Regimes of Black Lesbian Visibility," in *Black Queer Studies*, 213-227; and Jewelle Gomez, "But Some of Us Are Brave Lesbians: The Absence of Black Lesbian Fiction," in *Black Queer Studies*, 289-297.

articulated. In her preface, Sharon P. Holland notes that defining a connection between Black and queer is a controversial undertaking, given that the word “queer” itself has the potential to “obfuscate the presence of lesbians.”³⁹ Harris echoes Holland, maintaining:

For me, as an umbrella term, queer has a gloss to it that can only be sharpened with feminist history: a history often grappling over and in contradiction with race and class and sexuality but with a saliency and experience of pushing bodies and politics against each other. Queer, as it is often claimed by academically powerful white masculinity, sometimes suggests and describes its political constituency as seductively fluid, unmarked, ambiguous, and chosen.⁴⁰

For Harris, the fluidity of “queer” is itself indicative of the status and privilege of white masculinity. She does, however, continue to use the term “queer,” adding the modifiers “Black feminism” to follow and qualify what I characterize as “which queer/in what ways queer.” Linda Garber acknowledges that the term “queer” is often “contested on grounds that it elides the presence of lesbians.” However, she asserts that it is used by many as an inclusive shorthand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, and/or is used specifically to reference the street activism of Queer Nation and Lesbian Avengers, and as a label representing an attempt or achievement of a coalition.⁴¹ I recognize the complexity of this term and use it in part to align myself with the emerging field of Black queer studies, which has named itself queer

³⁹ Sharon P. Holland, “Foreword: ‘Home’ Is a Four Letter Word,” in *Black Queer Studies*, ix.

⁴⁰ Harris, “Queer Black Feminism,” 20.

⁴¹ Linda Garber, introduction to *Tilting the Tower: Lesbians / Teaching / Queer Subjects*, ed. L. Garber. 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), x.

to reference activism, coalitions, and a critique at the intersection of (white) queer studies and (straight) Black studies.⁴² Black queer studies marks itself as queer, while specifying, as Harris does, the descriptor Black.

Disrupting the Double Cross

In my writing I am challenged to carefully use the name people have chosen for themselves, and to specify using (Black, lesbian, feminist, etc.) under the umbrella term “queer” as needed. For my own purposes, I use “Black queer women,” broadening the scope of the umbrella for several reasons: (1) to include women who may identify as queer but not necessarily as lesbian, (2) to include women who assert the queerness of their gender identity and expression in addition to embracing a lesbian sexual orientation, and (3) to align myself with Black queer studies, carving out a space for “Black queer women” within this field. I then use specific modifiers “Black,” “feminist,” and/or “lesbian.”

In the case studies, I was attentive to the multiple ways the participants named themselves. This included allowing them to choose their own pseudonym, their “name” in the most literal sense, as well as fluid uses of terms like lesbian, Black, and queer. I name myself, as Harris names her self, Black, queer, lesbian and feminist; all of these terms co-constitute each other and identify my social location. The Combahee River Collective, situated in a different time frame and community, name themselves “feminists and lesbians.” This dissertation utilizes all of these terms in an

⁴² See Aaronette M. White, “Psychology Meets Women's Studies, Greets Black Studies, Treats Queer Studies: Teaching Diversity and Sexuality across Disciplines,” in *Feminist Teacher: A Journal of the Practices, Theories, and Scholarship of Feminist Teaching* 16, no. 3 (2006), 205-215; Johnson and Henderson, “Introduction: Queering Black Studies/ “Quarung” Queer Studies,” 1-17; and Dwight McBride, “Straight Black Studies: On African American Studies, James Baldwin, and Queer Studies,” in *Black Queer Studies*, 68-89.

attempt to adhere to the terms used in particular contexts, fields of study, and time periods, for particular scholars and communities.

At the Porous Limits: Gendering the Double-Cross and Translating “Gender”

Some Black queer studies scholars contend that a gendered analysis is inherent in any inquiry into the intersections of race and sexuality. Dwight McBride does complicate the “double cross” of race and sexuality in stating:

Black queer studies locates itself at the porous limits of both African American studies and queer studies; it is also an articulation of the complexity of racial identities with an acknowledgement that whenever we are speaking of race, we are always, already speaking about gender, sexuality, and class.⁴³

McBride’s inclusion of “gender” among the things that Black queer studies is “always already” speaking about may indeed make reference to and include Black queer women. However, when situated within the “double cross” of Black queer studies, “gender” itself becomes so porous one sees right through it. Thus, the realizations of this intersectional ideal are left unarticulated.

It is important to point out that articulations of “gender” within a women’s studies context have different connotations than articulations of “gender” in a queer studies context. In her article “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” Joan Scott contends:

In its most recent usage, “gender” seems to have first appeared among American feminists who wanted to insist on the fundamentally social

⁴³ McBride, “Straight Black Studies,” 86.

quality of distinctions based on sex. The word denoted a rejection of the biological determinism implicit in the use of such terms as "sex" or "sexual difference." "Gender" also stressed the relational aspect of normative definitions of femininity. Those who worried that women's studies scholarship focused too narrowly and separately on women use the term "gender" to introduce a relational notion into our analytic vocabulary.⁴⁴

In this iteration, "gender" is used to stress social and structural conditions in order to more fully discuss the status of women in relation to men; this usage is characteristic of many feminist inquiries. Maxine Baca Zinn, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Michael A. Messner offer revisions to the ways in which "gender" has changed over time, moving from a focus on differences *between* women and men that begged the question "which women?" to exploring differences *among* women and men, including the voices of "other" women, and recognizing men as gendered beings.⁴⁵ This formation of "gender" begins to bridge the gap between uses of "gender" that allude to the position of "women" in relation to "men," and uses of "gender" that survey multiple locations of power and oppression that include an intersectional analysis of race, class gender, and sexual orientation, and other social formations.

I argue that within a Black queer studies context, conceptions of "gender" become even more porous with a focus on gender performance and spectatorship,

⁴⁴ Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986), 1054.

⁴⁵ Maxine Baca Zinn, P. Hondagneu-Sotelo, and M. A. Messner, "Gender Through the Prism of Difference," in *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*, ed. Patricia Hill Collins and M. Andersen, (Florence, KY: Wadsworth Publishing, 2006), 166-174.

with particular attention to performances of Black masculinity.⁴⁶ Roderick A. Ferguson, Bryant Keith Alexander, and E. Patrick Johnson, among other Black queer studies scholars, refocus the possible applications of “gender,” and often speak in terms of gender identity, gender expression, and gender performance in contrast to feminist usages of “gender” that continue to imply a focus on the social location of “women,” whether among women, or between women and men.

We are Here! We are Queer! We are Women . . .

Although the work of Laura Harris, Kara Keeling, Cathy Cohen, and Sharon Holland,⁴⁷ among others, explores Black queer women’s experiences, Black queer studies remains defined as the double cross at the nexus of “that which is Black” and “that which is queer.” In her review of Catherine Bond Stockton’s text *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where “Black” Meets “Queer,”* Magdalena Zaborowska notes that this book’s “inclusion of lesbian texts and female queer bodies is a welcome reminder that one should not judge a field of study (Black Queer Studies), or a book, solely by its seemingly masculinist, if not black-and-white, cover.”⁴⁸

Although I maintain that Black female bodies are by no means dominant in Stockton’s text, Zaborowska’s sarcasm reasserts the challenge of explicitly

⁴⁶ See Bryant Keith Alexander, “Embracing the Teachable Moment”; Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations In Black: Toward A Queer Of Color Critique*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2003); and E. Patrick Johnson, “Quare Studies or (Almost) Everything I know about Queer Studies I learned from My Grandmother,” in *Black Queer Studies*, 124-157.

⁴⁷ See Harris, “Queer Black Feminism,” 3-30; Holland, “Foreword: ‘Home’ Is a Four Letter Word,” ix-xiii; Kara Keeling, *The Witch’s Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Durham NC: Duke University Press), 2007; Cathy Cohen “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” in *Black Queer Studies*, 21-51.

⁴⁸ Magdalena J. Zaborowska, review of *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where ‘Black’ Meets ‘Queer,’* by Catherine Bond Stockton, *Studies in the Novel* 40, no. 3 (2008), 381.

articulating gender as a category of analysis within a Black queer studies “nexus.” Zaborowska draws attention to the nude Black male bodies on the covers of both *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* and *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where “Black” Meets “Queer;”* and offers a critique that calls out Black queer studies with a recognition of the historical contexts of both Blackness and queerness, which have traditionally been read as male unless otherwise specified. By proposing an analogy based on the cover art of these “black /meets queer” texts, Zaborowska references the limited visibility of Black queer female bodies in relation to inquiries in Black queer studies.

I highlight the intersections of Black feminist thought and Black queer studies in order to frame the experiences and contributions of Black queer feminists in the classroom. Do they mobilize their intersectional identities in order to address invisibility when teaching about race and sexuality and navigating the academy, and if so, how? What kinds of pedagogical projects are generated by Black queer women who teach from and live within the porous limits of “that which is Black” and “that which is queer?” The following sections hone in on social location and gender and racial performance, and sexual politics within the academy, then move to analyze pedagogical practice and performance.

Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation in the Academy

The body of literature examining the experiences of Black faculty, lesbians in the academy, and women in higher education addresses a range of issues. I have chosen to focus on texts and materials that employ personal narrative and interview; these methodologies are closest to my own interests. Cumulatively, these texts

examine access to higher education, obtaining a doctoral degree, the job market, the tenure process, perceptions of peer faculty and students, and institutional politics. A survey of the literature on Black faculty and on lesbian faculty documents the need for more recent and intersectional work. In surveying the literature with the intention of focusing on personal narrative and interview, I found that the literature on Black faculty often focused narrowly on issues of status in the academy and underrepresentation, emphasizing statistical information about both faculty and students. The literature also emphasized structural and legal issues in admission, hiring, and graduation rates, as indicators of minority “success” or as indicators of discrimination and lack of access and equity.

Much of the work on lesbian women in the academy focuses on coming-out narratives, situated within the classroom and as a part of the pedagogical project or in a campus context. Significantly, few of the “Black faculty” texts address sexual orientation, and “lesbian faculty” texts include but a few intersectional perspectives by women of color. This dissertation seeks to bridge this gap in the literature and draw together perspectives on race, gender, and sexual orientation for Black queer feminist pedagogues. I highlight both the structural concerns of status, invisibility, and discrimination, and the personal intersections of identity and experience in the classroom and on campus. Both of these lenses offer critical information regarding the lived experiences of pedagogues.

In this section, I review the literature in three parts: first, I look at literature on the experiences of Black women in the academy, then I survey issues presented by lesbians in the academy, noting that these inquiries are most often articulated

separately. Finally, I examine specific themes related to the intersections of race, gender, and sexual orientation in higher education as articulated by the case study participants and illustrated by the case and self-studies.

Black Women in the Academy

A 2011 report by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics indicates that only 2,948 of the 67,716 doctoral degrees conferred in the U.S. in 2009 (the most current numbers available) were conferred to Black women.⁴⁹ Thus, Black women accounted for approximately 4.3% of all degrees, including PhD, EdD, and comparable degrees at the doctoral level. The low numbers presented here are rooted in a history of a segregated sub-par educational system for Blacks and the denial of access for many women, among other legal, social, and economic factors at the intersections of race, class, and gender. In *Faculty of Color in Academe: Bittersweet Success*, Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner and Samuel Meyers reflect on educational apartheid during the years before *Brown v. Board of Education* through the 1970s, a period in which they maintain “there was no dispute as to (1) whether minorities were, in fact, underrepresented in higher education, or (2) whether that underrepresentation was attributable to patterns of discrimination and segregation.”⁵⁰

However, debates that hone in on affirmative action and “reverse-discrimination,” have now shifted contemporary discussions regarding underrepresentation. Turner and Meyers contend that these contemporary arguments

⁴⁹ National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education* (Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Education, 2011)

⁵⁰ Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner and Samuel Meyers, *Faculty of Color in Academe: Bittersweet Success* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2000), 62.

question whether or not underrepresentation really exists, given the drastically shifting numbers of “minorities,” depending on who is being included. These arguments also allude to underrepresentation as a result of the lack of qualified minorities, and whether or not we need to worry about underrepresentation – if indeed, it does exist.⁵¹ It is significant that the very limited numbers, particularly of Black women, are so easily obscured by anxieties about overrepresentation, or the perceived threat of forced hiring of unqualified minorities.

In *A Long Way to Go: Conversations about Race by African American Faculty and Graduate Students*, Darrell Cleveland asserts that “what makes African American [faculty] issues more pronounced are the very low numbers of Black PhD holders, and what the noted international scholar Na’im Akbar calls the ‘stimulus value’ placed upon us.”⁵² Danielle Conway notes that for Black women, the low number of Black PhD holders, combined with the “strong Black woman” stereotype,⁵³ leads to unfair expectations and negative consequences. Black female PhD holders in particular are asked to be “all things to all people,” including a role model, a resource to faculty and administrators, a bridge to the community, and an ethnic representative,⁵⁴ in addition to teaching, research, and service responsibilities, necessary for tenure or promotion. Also, the sheer volume of requests for service that Black faculty receive compared to those received by majority faculty make the advice

⁵¹ Ibid, 63.

⁵² Darrell Cleveland, *A Long Way to Go: Conversations About Race by African American Faculty and Graduate Students* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004), x.

⁵³ See Melissa V. Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

⁵⁴ Danielle Conway, “Being All Things to All People: Expectations of and Demands on Women of Color in the Legal Academy,” in *From Oppression to Grace: Women of Color and Their Dilemmas Within the Academy*, ed. T. R. Berry and Nathalie Mizelle (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2006), 21-30.

(often given by majority faculty) to “just say no” a much more complex dilemma. Kerry Ann Rockquemore and Tracey Laszloffy use Conway’s same phrase in *The Black Academic’s Guide to Winning Tenure—Without Losing Your Soul*, acknowledging that too often Black faculty feel that they must “be all things to all people.” During the tenure-track years, they encourage faculty to focus on what will win tenure while spreading other goals out over the course of one’s entire career.⁵⁵

The challenges facing Black women enduring the tenure process are a key concern in the literature. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* announced longitudinal study results from *The State of Blacks in Higher Education*, published in 2008, noting:

In crunching data derived from the surveys, the researchers found that black women were about twice as likely to transfer from a tenure-track faculty position to an adjunct research path as members of other groups, including black men. They were substantially less likely than other segments of the population to be retained in tenure-track faculty positions, and more likely to go from having a postdoctoral fellowship to being unemployed.⁵⁶

These statistics are indicative of some of the challenges Black women face as they enter the academy. In her introduction to *Sisters of the Academy: Emergent Black Women Scholars in Higher Education*, Reitumetse Obakeng Mabokela upholds the importance of access and entry to higher education; she notes, however, that

⁵⁵ Kerry Ann Rockquemore and Tracey Laszloffy, *The Black Academic’s Guide to Winning Tenure—Without Losing Your Soul* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008), 118-119.

⁵⁶ Peter Schmidt, “Many Black Women Veer Off Path to Tenure, Researchers Say.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 9, 2008, sec. Faculty. <http://chronicle.com/article/Many-Black-Women-Veer-Off-Path/41578>.

“even more critical is the quality of the educational and professional experiences that these women received once they gain admission to the academy.”⁵⁷ These professional experiences are mediated by the social location at the nexus of race and gender. Rockquemore and Laszloffy offer practical advice for negotiating the politics of tenure promotion and articulate the impact of the racial hierarchy in the U.S., stating that it “not only dictates that black faculty are in a permanent one-down status across social contexts, but also infiltrates academic institutions, influencing how black and white faculty experience the very same departments.”⁵⁸

The experiences of Black female faculty, then, are shaped by racialized (and gendered I would add) assumptions about who is an insider, who does not belong, who is merely being tolerated and who is welcomed. Race and gender dictate who receives the benefit of the doubt, whose opinion is valued, who gets mentored, and who is invited into collaborative opportunities.⁵⁹ All of these factors shape the professional experience of minority faculty. At the nexus of race and gender, Black women in the academy must grapple with the assumptions and costs of being an “outsider within.” The testimonies imparted in *Sisters of the Academy* represent what Lee Jones describes as “tri-consciousness.” The first level of this state of consciousness is articulated as being that of an African American woman in America; the second, that of a woman in a male-dominated institutional system; and the third, being that of a woman *within* African American communities of scholars, facing

⁵⁷ Reitumetse O. Mabokela, introduction to *Sisters of the Academy: Emergent Black Women Scholars in Higher Education*, ed. R. Mabokela, and A. L. Green (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2001), xvi.

⁵⁸ Rockquemore and Laszloffy, *The Black Academic's Guide*, 2.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 2-3.

inequities between African American men and women.⁶⁰ This concept of “tri-consciousness,” identified by Lee, complicates Black feminist formations of multiple consciousness, cultural duality, double racial consciousness, and an outsider-within stance, discussed above.

Reviewing the literature pertaining to faculty of color, Christine A. Stanley lists thematic phrases used to describe the experiences of faculty of color that surface in essays published in *Faculty of Color: Teaching in Predominantly White Colleges and Universities*. These themes echo the themes of conflict, tension, and navigating multiple locations. Stanley’s list includes multiple marginality, otherness, living in two worlds, the academy’s new cast, silenced voices, ivy halls and glass walls, individual survivors or institutional transformers, from border to center, visible and invisible barriers, the color of teaching, and navigating between two worlds.⁶¹ In the hopes of provoking change at predominantly white colleges and universities, Stanley warns that a failure to acknowledge the legitimate experiences of faculty of color, and a failure to learn from the talented people that colleges and universities strive to recruit and retain, will result in a continued cycle perpetuating the concepts listed above, plaguing the academic discourse in higher education.⁶² Referencing the contradiction of being recruited to teach at a predominantly white college or university, while suffering through both “being all things to all people” and the failure to acknowledge legitimate concerns of faculty of color, Cleveland writes:

⁶⁰ Lee Jones, preface to *Sisters of the Academy*, viii.

⁶¹ Christine Stanley, “An overview of the Literature,” in Stanley, *Faculty of Color: Teaching in Predominantly White Colleges and Universities* (Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company, Inc., 2006), 9.

⁶² Ibid, 22.

This plethora of contradictions first manifests itself when we are told, whether subtly or blatantly, that our research interests (passions) are slanted towards ‘minority issues’ and therefore do not fit a predetermined, narrow view of ‘authentic’ scholarship. Not only are we forced to reevaluate our research agenda, but we are also forced to struggle with philosophical, spiritual, and psychological internal debates.⁶³

The predetermined, or perhaps over-determined, position of faculty of color in the academy emerges as a refrain in many of the narratives and essays included in *From Oppression to Grace, Faculty of Color in Academe, Sisters of the Academy*, and *Power, Race, and Gender in Academe*. Repeatedly, the act of adding a few diverse faces to the department and simply stirring the pot in order to achieve a more diverse recipe falls short of what is needed. This causes distress within the institution and deep personal pain for faculty of color, particularly women faculty of color whose gendered and racialized bodies signal outsider status. In her chapter “Now That They Have Us, What’s the Point?” Sandra Gunning relates how her department rapidly diversified in terms of faculty of color without a deep exploration of what these changes meant beyond the presence of racialized bodies. She writes; “What was getting all the attention was the recruitment of faculty members of color, as if the answer to questions of diversity rested merely on the achievement of recruitment goals.”⁶⁴ Rather than undertaking “philosophical refiguration,” Gunning’s department

⁶³ Cleveland, *A Long Way to Go*, x.

⁶⁴ S. Gunning, “Now that they have us, what’s the point?” in *Power, Race, and Gender in Academe: Strangers in the Tower?* ed. S. G. Lim and M. Herrera-Sobek (New York: Modern Language Association, 2000) 171-182.

hired “traditionally underrepresented” scholars without answering a “range of ideological and social questions that could never be adequately answered to everyone’s satisfaction,” making the diversification of the department seem a matter of “add women and people of color and stir.”⁶⁵ Indeed, institutions of higher education have by choice, and by legal mandate, attempted to insert if not integrate minorities into the system. However, many of the testimonies of faculty of color, particularly Black women in the academy, indicate that structural oppressions remain deeply imbedded in ways that impede access, employment, tenure and promotion, and retention.

In similar ways, the literature on queer women navigating the academy indicates that the contradictions of being an “outsider within” are applicable to sexual minorities as well. This status is heightened for queer women of color at the intersection of racial and sexual identity. In her chapter “Explicit Instruction: Talking Sex in the Classroom,” Wendy Chapkis proposes:

Unfortunately, just as women and minorities have been accused of politicizing the classroom, queers will be accused of sexualizing it. But politics, including sexual politics, are always already there.⁶⁶

The following section explores the experiences of queer women navigating the academy with an emphasis on issues of silence, coming out, and cultural conflicts for women at the intersection of race, gender, and queer sexual orientation.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 172-4.

⁶⁶ Wendy Chapkis, “Explicit Instruction: Talking Sex in the Classroom,” in *Tilting the Tower*, 11-15.

Queer Women in the Academy

The literature centering the experiences of queer women in the academy is somewhat limited and dated; most texts were published in the mid 1980s and '90s and many share stories of closeted isolation or coming out narratives set in the late 1960s and '70s. Although sexual orientation has become part of the discourse in many fields of study, and queer studies has emerged as a key area of inquiry, discussions about queer women in the academy as faculty are secondary to other discussions, such as discourses of diversity on campus or accounts of liberal campus climates. Other discussions that include queer women in the academy, but do not center these narratives, also emerge in discussions of feminist and/or queer pedagogies, which often focus on the performance of gay men, discussions of the presence of women and/or feminist politics in the academy, and discussions of teacher activism. Writing about lesbians, particularly in the form of personal narrative, is fraught with professional and personal dangers in many cases. Penelope Dugan's essay "Degrees of Freedom" emphasizes the risk involved in writing about lesbian issues, and surveys the experiences of some faculty who were advised not to claim publications with lesbian content, particularly personal essays, or to remove these texts from their CV's.⁶⁷ Esther Rothblum comments on the varying degrees of being out for lesbian faculty:

At one extreme, no one knows or even guesses that the faculty member in question is a lesbian. At the other extreme, she is known all over campus and in the community as a lesbian. Most faculty are

⁶⁷ Penelope Dugan, "Degrees of Freedom," in *Lesbians in Academia: Degrees of Freedom*, ed. Beth Mintz and Esther D. Rothblum (New York: Routledge, 1997), 203-209.

somewhere between these two extremes. They may be out to just a few friends or relatives but not to anyone on campus. They may be out in the campus lesbian and gay community. They may or may not attend lesbian and gay events.⁶⁸

The risks involved in publishing about one's self as a lesbian, and the varying degrees of being out, partially account for the limitations on the body of work in this topic area. Notably, the language of these works is quite specific in the use of the term "lesbian." These texts explicitly privilege lesbian identity.⁶⁹ Although a small number of bisexual women and straight women who consider themselves to be queer subjects are included, these essays are explicitly named by the editors as different from those written by "lesbians, whose identities remain central."⁷⁰ For the purposes of this project, I have surveyed literature that uses personal narrative or interview to discuss experiences of lesbian faculty in the context of higher education. These texts act as a model for constructing the qualitative narratives presented in the case studies and echo many of the personal themes articulated by participants.

Two anthologies, *Tilting the Tower: Lesbians / Teaching / Queer Subjects* and *Lesbians in Academia: Degrees of Freedom*, gather together narratives shared by lesbians in the academy, anthologize essays that bring into focus the nexus of gender and sexual orientation within the context of the academy. Both texts point to the silence surrounding lesbian faculty and the need to hear their stifled voices. Editor

⁶⁸ Esther Rothblum, "Lesbians in Academia," *NWSA Journal*, 7(1) (1995): 124.

⁶⁹ See Linda Garber, ed., *Tilting the Tower: Lesbians / Teaching / Queer Subjects* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Beth Mintz and Esther D. Rothblum, eds. *Lesbians in Academia: Degrees of Freedom*. 1st ed., New York: Routledge, 1997; Rothblum, "Lesbians in Academia," 123-130; and doris davenport, "Black Lesbians in Academia: Visible Invisibility," in *Lesbian Studies: Present and Future*, M. Cruikshank ed. (New York: Press at CUNY, 1982), 9-11.

⁷⁰ See Garber, *Tilting the Tower*; Mintz and Rothblum, *Lesbians in Academia*.

Linda Garber notes that the enthusiasm from contributors and others for *Tilting the Tower* indicated the importance of a text that functioned as a forum in which lesbian faculty could share their pedagogies and strategies for professional survival and success.⁷¹ Mintz and Rothblum's anthology *Lesbians in Academia: Degrees of Freedom* provides a variety of accounts of academic life "lesbian style," that ask what it means to be a lesbian in a college or university setting, how being "closeted" or "out" affects the personal and professional lives of academic lesbians, and delivers a collection that captures the variety and complexity of life for lesbians as academics.⁷²

Central to both of these anthologies, and other essays on lesbians in the academy, are coming-out narratives. Christine Cress shares a story about how participating in a focus group opened her up to the idea of being out on campus. In her essay "In, Out, or Somewhere In-Between," she catalogues the reasons some faculty choose to be out on campus, while others are unable to do so, given the risks. Cress asserts that whether or not a faculty member chooses to be out is "highly dependent on whether or not that person had tenure or hoped to get tenure." Other factors included feeling "pressured by the student population to be out and act as role models," or to avoid indirect harassment from students who crossed boundaries by commenting on gays and lesbians negatively without knowing they were insulting their instructor.⁷³

These anthologies also offer insightful essays that tie together coming out, building relationships, and maintaining boundaries with students and other faculty,

⁷¹ Garber, *Tilting the Tower*, ix.

⁷² Mintz and Rothblum, *Lesbians in Academia*, 3.

⁷³ Christine Cress, "In, Out, or Somewhere In-Between," in *Tilting the Tower*, 23-30.

while traversing the intersections of race, gender and sexuality on campus. In her essay “Of African Decent: A Three-fers Story,” Akilah Monifa rebuffs, with humor, the notion of the highly marketable minority who is of African descent, a woman, and a lesbian. She goes on to discuss her own coming-out process in the classroom and on campus and her growth as a role model for students.⁷⁴ Acting as a role model and mentorship are common themes; however, the intimacy of this mentor-mentee relationship is ambiguous and complex. In “Consenting to Relations: The Personal Pleasures of ‘Power Disparity’ in Lesbian Student-Teacher Partnerships,” Stacy Wolf and Jill Dolan trouble the notion that power-differentials within an academic setting always negate the possibility for a consensual amorous or sexual relationship. They assert that all relationships are about power, refute the assumption that student-teacher relationships negate the possibility of mutual consent, particularly in a lesbian context, and maintain that these teacher-student relationships can in fact be mutually beneficial in some instances.⁷⁵

The central theme of navigating relationships with students is echoed by doris davenport, who reflexively assesses the ways students see her multiple identities. In her chapter “Still Here, Ten Years Later, ” she revisits her earlier essay “Black Lesbians in Academia: Visible Invisibility”:

If attendance was high, it was because many of [the students] were entertained and amazed, daily, just to look at a black woman [sic] with dreds, with a PhD (allegedly), who was also a lesbian. (I was

⁷⁴ Akilah Monifa, “Of African Decent: A Three-fers Story,” in *Tilting the Tower*, 134-140.

⁷⁵ Stacy Wolf and Jill Dolan, “Consenting to Relations: The Personal Pleasures of ‘Power Disparity’ in Lesbian Student-Teacher Partnerships,” in *Tilting the Tower*, 192-198.

constantly perceived as a circus act, even if I did nothing but hand out the syllabus.)⁷⁶

Applying what Bryant Keith Alexander calls “embodied text”⁷⁷ to the “circus act” that is the Black female lesbian pedagogical body of davenport-as-professor can lead to a discussion of the ways in which the body, identity, and performance factor into the pedagogical project for Black lesbian women. A survey of the literature concerning critical and feminist pedagogy that connects these elements of body, identity, and performance follows.

The Emergence of Black Queer Feminist Pedagogy

I have explored Black feminist thought and Black queer theory, and literature examining the experiences of Black women and lesbian and queer women in the academy. I now shift my focus to an exploration of the intersections of these standpoints with the pedagogical project. This requires an examination of texts from the fields of critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, and performance studies, which have complex and overlapping genealogies in women’s studies, education, theater, and communications studies, and studies of instructional practices in specific contexts.⁷⁸ I survey these pedagogical locations, then further examine the body as text through the lens of Black feminist pedagogies, highlighting the emergence of what I call Black queer feminist pedagogy. In the context of this dissertation, I characterize Black queer feminist pedagogies as pedagogical projects that 1) mobilize the body as

⁷⁶ davenport, “Black Lesbians in Academia,” in *Lesbian Studies*, 218. Author’s parenthesis.

⁷⁷ See B. K. Alexander, “Embracing the Teachable Moment,” and Henderson, “What It Means to Teach the Other.”

⁷⁸ Jennifer Gore, “What We Can Do for ‘You!’ What Can ‘We’ Do for ‘You?’: Struggling over Empowerment in Critical and Feminist Pedagogy,” in *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*, ed. Antonia Darder, Maria Baltodano, and Rodolfo D. Torres (New York: Routledge, 2002), 332.

text and recognize its potential as an instructive tool, 2) envision the act of performance as a method for teaching about race, gender, and sexuality, and 3) negotiate between enunciation and erasure of “lived” identities in the classroom and beyond.

Formations of Critical Feminist Pedagogies and Performance Studies

Critical feminist pedagogies examine the omissions and silencing of women’s knowledges, highlighting women’s experience and shared knowledges. They also seek to transform consciousness, and to provide students with ways of knowing that enable them to know themselves better and live in the world more fully.⁷⁹ In her text *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, bell hooks reflects on the impact of Paulo Freire⁸⁰ on her teaching, noting:

Early on, it was Freire’s insistence that education could be the practice of freedom that encouraged me to create strategies for what he called “conscientization” in the classroom. Translating that term to critical awareness, and engagement, I entered the classroom with the conviction that it was crucial for me and every other student to be an active participant, not a passive consumer.⁸¹

In his own words, Freire asserts: “Education must begin with the solution of the teacher student contradiction.” He maintains that the polar relationship between teacher and student must be reconciled so that “both are simultaneously teachers and

⁷⁹ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁸⁰ See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000) and Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy Of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy Of The Oppressed*. (New York: Continuum, 2004).

⁸¹ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 14.

students.”⁸² This shift in power differential and rigid classroom dynamic does open the door to a more physical and emotional exchange. To an extent, according to some pedagogical thinkers, including hooks (though not Freire), this may mean that the erotic may enter into the classroom as an aid to the learning process.⁸³ Michèle Aina Barale elaborates on Jane Gurko’s suggestion that all intellectual exchange is potentially sexually stimulating; Barale notes; “the presence of a queer instructor serves to further eroticize the classroom exchange.”⁸⁴

Thus, the very presence of the queer subject, as embodied by the instructor, can serve to eroticize the classroom space, making the exchange of knowledge not a disembodied intellectual endeavor, but an embodied erotic exchange. Sexuality, then, is potentially hyper-present. The out queer instructor, teaching in a context in which “queerness” is almost inevitably otherized as a specifically erotic “difference,” makes sexuality and the erotic difficult to ignore, particularly in a classroom that centers sexuality as a subject of inquiry and discussion. Critical and feminist pedagogies center the study of bodies and identities in the classroom, and offer feminist teachers a framework that acknowledges experiential teaching and learning. I find an examination of these educational theories useful in constructing a Black queer feminist pedagogical framework, given my emphasis on teaching through

⁸² Paulo Freire, “From Pedagogy of the Oppressed,” in *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*, 58.

⁸³ Michèle Aina Barale, “The Romance of Class and Queers: Academic Erotic Zones,” in *Tilting the Tower*, 16-24. For more discussion of the uses of the erotic in the classroom, see also Chapkis, “Explicit Instruction,” 11-15, and bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 191-200.

⁸⁴ Barale, “The Romance of Class and Queers,” 18.

acknowledgements and explorations of identity and the significance of bodies in signaling a teachable moment.⁸⁵

Like critical and feminist pedagogies, the field of performance studies participates in an ongoing redefinition of cultural, social, and educational practices. The classroom, from a performance studies perspective, is a charged space, a site of performance, as well as a place invested in studying cultural performances. In their introductory chapter to *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies*, “Performance Studies at the Intersections,” D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera grapple with performance as a contested concept. They note that performance has “evolved into ways of comprehending how human beings fundamentally make culture, affect power, and reinvent their ways of being in the world” rather than being seen simply as a form of entertainment.⁸⁶ This more complex definition of performance has produced new pedagogical inquiries.

Stucky and Wimmer’s *Teaching Performance Studies* designates a performance studies pedagogy that emphasizes embodiment and teaching with self-reflexivity, and engages a heightened awareness of methods, attitudes, hidden curricula, postures, and inflections.⁸⁷ Within performance studies, there is an expressed need for a “holistic approach to education,” which “strive[s] to promote

⁸⁵ Critiques of the term “identity” render it essentialist; I believe students do indeed engage with limited and prescribed “identities,” rather than nuanced analysis of subjectivities. I use the terms “identity/identities” in alignment with Bryant Keith Alexander’s articulation of how the teacher’s textual and tangible identity gives rise to a “situation in which the course content serves as the primary text and the gay identity of the teacher is the subtext through which the material, teaching, and classroom experiences are filtered.” See B. K. Alexander, 250.

⁸⁶ D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera, “Performance Studies at the Intersections,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies*, ed. D. S. Madison and J. Hamera (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), xi-xxv.

⁸⁷ Nathan Stucky and Cynthia Wimmer, *Teaching Performance Studies (Theater in the Americas)* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University, 2002), 1-3.

cultural health within its students and teachers,” and which is expressive of “not only mind, body, and spirit, but cultural constructs and contexts.”⁸⁸ Each time pedagogues enter the classroom, they enter with body, mind, and spirit; Black queer feminist pedagogues enter marked by race, gender, and sexuality. These identities move through the classroom proper — in the room/ in the building/ on the campus/ where pedagogues interact with students — and into the world, through what M. Jacqui Alexander calls “the multiple makeshift classrooms we inhabit.”⁸⁹ Throughout this exploration of identity and pedagogy, I will refer to “the classroom” with the intention of taking into account both formal sites and negotiations of the everyday sites of teaching and learning.

What do we do within these multiple pedagogical sites? What role does embodiment of multiple identities play within multiple sites? Indeed, conceptions of embodiment may have as many variations as there are bodies. For my purposes here, I employ a conception of embodiment drawn from Stucky and Wimmer:

[Embodiment] demonstrates its concern with what happens to the bodies of teachers and students in the classroom. Coming to know one another as human beings (as closely as one can ever accomplish such a goal) necessarily involves an embodied response to the human condition. A substantial development in performance studies pedagogy has been a consistent attention to enactment, to experiential learning in the classroom.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁹ M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005), 8.

⁹⁰ Stucky and Wimmer, *Teaching Performance Studies*, 3.

Thus, a discussion of embodiment within the context of pedagogy does three things. First, it connects the bodies of teachers and students in the classroom with the mind and intellectual exercises of teaching and learning. Second, it is acutely aware of the body's role in teaching and learning through enactment and experience. (I will further examine debates about the use of "experience" or personal narrative as "evidence" in the methods chapter.) Third, it imagines the classroom as an everyday space that does not sanitize the body and cannot erase visible and performed bodily signifiers. Locating bodies within the classroom is structurally at odds with the construction and tradition of the academy, which emphasizes a disarticulation between the body and the mind, the intellectual and the physical. On the contrary, the presence of gendered, raced, and sexualized bodies — "othered bodies," in particular, Black queer women's bodies — are a disruption, as they contradict normative social constructions of Black womanhood, racial hierarchy, meaning systems, and institutionalization.⁹¹

The Body as Text: The Nexus of Black Queer Feminist Pedagogies

Reflecting on the presence of her Black female body in the classroom, hooks draws attention to how being conscious of one's body as separate from one's self "invites us to invest deeply in the mind/body split so that a Black woman student or professor is almost always at odds with the existing structure."⁹² This academic structure, hooks asserts, has not become accustomed to the Black female presence or

⁹¹ Rose M. Brewer, "Theorizing Race, Class, and Gender: The New Scholarship of Black Feminist Intellectuals and Black Women's Labor," in *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*, ed. Stanlie M. James and Abena P. A. Busia (New York: Routledge, 1993), 17.

⁹² bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 193.

physicality.⁹³ This disruption caused by the Black female body within the academy stems from controlling images of Black women that originated during the slave era. Collins presents the images of mammies, Jezebels, breeder women of slavery, smiling Aunt Jemimas, Black prostitutes, and welfare mothers, as negative stereotypes applied to African-American women that have been fundamental to Black women's oppression.⁹⁴ These racist and sexist ideological dimensions of U.S. Black women's oppression permeate social structures and institutions, including the academy, to such a degree that these portrayals become hegemonic, namely, seen as natural, normal, and inevitable.⁹⁵

Black queer female bodies potentially signal both racist and sexist narratives about Black women and cue emotional debates concerning intra-racial homophobia. In her chapter "Being Queer, Being Black: Living Out in Afro-American Studies," Rhonda Williams addresses the homophobia within Black cultural nationalist discourse as another ideological formation. Williams shares experiences in which she highlighted the intersections of her racial identity and sexual orientation. She came out in the campus newspaper and was interviewed for a piece in the Black student publication, specifically discussing homophobia in the Black community. She also designed and taught a lesson challenging Black cultural nationalist homophobia in her large African American Studies introductory level class. Williams critiqued the cultural nationalist response to homosexuality articulated by some of her Black students. She acknowledges the stigmatizations of Black sexuality, and the ways in

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 5.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

which Black homosexuality is made to represent Black sexual pathology for some nationalists who see themselves as struggling for a new narrow redefinition of Black familial and sexual wellness.⁹⁶ By constructing homosexuality as “a white thing,” this narrative took hold for her students, who framed the Black cultural nationalist identity itself as a cure. Williams’s body-as-text read as a counter narrative to the nationalist texts that she presented, then challenged, in this lesson. Significantly, many of her colleagues were present in the classroom; they attended this critical lecture to show their solidarity.⁹⁷ Williams noted that several of her Black male students spoke up for her publically, or came to her office, countering homophobic nationalist arguments and expressing their support for her. Williams associated the lack of supportive Black female student voices with an attempt to retain their only site of privilege, heterosexual privilege.⁹⁸

I argue that Black queer women’s bodies in the classroom can disrupt racialized, gendered, and sexualized tropes of Black womanhood, making a disembodied theorization of intersectional oppressions and identities nearly impossible. In Williams’s classroom, the notion that homosexuality is a “white thing” was disrupted by the Black queer female body of their African American studies professor. This disruption may indeed signal a “teachable moment.” Regarding the disruption caused by his Black gay male body in the classroom, Bryant Keith Alexander argues:

⁹⁶ Rhonda Williams. "Being Queer, Being Black: Living Out in Afro-American Studies." In *Is Academic Feminism Dead: Theory in Practice*, The Social Justice Group at the Center for Advanced Feminist Studies, University of Minnesota (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 276.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 268.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 278.

In addition to the performance of education, which is fraught with policies and procedures that are cemented in ritual practice, issues of sex, gender, and race, come to mediate the educational endeavor . . . With this in mind, the thought of outing one's self in the classroom is always already equated with risk: risk to the physical body, of course, but also risk to pedagogical authority. But not to engage the fullness of our character — when necessary, when doing so would make a meaningful impact — is to risk missing the teachable moment.⁹⁹

Engaging the fullness of one's character is central to the pedagogical process for many pedagogues, and it is in part the teachable moments that result that I seek to elucidate. In their essay "Classroom Coming Out Stories: Practical Strategies for Productive Self Disclosure," Kate Adams and Kim Emery also discuss the importance of gay and lesbian pedagogues' engaging with something as "central to their identity as sexuality, something that constructs their social relationships as well as their sense of community."¹⁰⁰ Adams and Emory note that a lack of integration requires pedagogues to teach out of a context of anxiety, maintaining that not disclosing one's full self results in attempts to "speak encircled by silence." This cheats both the pedagogue and students "out of the full use of an important teaching tool."¹⁰¹

Assumptions about the intellectual shortcomings of women and people of color and hyper-sexual stereotypes are ever present in the classroom. These negative

⁹⁹ B. K. Alexander, "Embracing the Teachable Moment," 250.

¹⁰⁰ Kate Adams and Kim Emery, "Classroom Coming Out Stories: Practical Strategies for Productive Self Disclosure," in *Tilting the Tower: Lesbians / Teaching / Queer Subjects*, ed. L. Garber. 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 25-26.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

stereotypes can coalesce to justify the oppression of Black queer women, particularly in the context of the academy. The Black queer female body of the teacher both signals the collective presence of these controlling images and challenges their accuracy. The representations of Black womanhood discussed previously by Collins, along with Williams's, Alexander's, Adams's, and Emory's assertions that issues of identity come to mediate the educational endeavor, emphasize the significance of the relationship between pedagogy and identity within the classroom. Alexander observes that the bodies of Black gay teachers are "racially historicized, sexualized, physicalized, and demonized," Black gay bodies are disruptions to socially constructed norms. These norms are further disrupted when Black gay teachers "present ourselves in the classroom as gay,"¹⁰² which further upsets the academic tradition of disembodied intellectual exercise.

That disruption can be compounded by the presence of the Black queer woman's body when presented *as* Black, female, and queer. This body simultaneously represents multiple racial, historical, sexual, and physical narratives that contest the possibility of the mind/body split as it "mediates the educational endeavor."¹⁰³ The women's studies classroom is not only a location of embodiment, but also a scene for teaching about bodies and embodiment through the exploration of subjects related to race, gender, and sexuality. Feminist pedagogy is a site for engaging the female body in the classroom, whether as object of knowledge or as a site of pedagogical method. On the Black queer woman's body, these functions merge. More specifically, this pedagogy critiques the mind/body split, so that

¹⁰² B. K. Alexander, "Embracing the Teachable Moment," 250.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 255.

women's studies itself has functioned as a "subversive location in the academy," holding one of the central tenets of feminist critical pedagogy as the "insistence on not engaging this mind/body split."¹⁰⁴

Embodiment as discussed in the work of performance studies scholar Elyse Lamm Pineau considers "the body [as] a medium for learning [that] requires the rigorous, systematic exploration-through-enactment of real and imagined experience in which learning occurs through sensory awareness and kinesthetic engagement."¹⁰⁵ Thus, embodiment becomes a complex construction when racialized, gendered, and sexualized bodies are proposed as producers and consumers of "embodied knowledge." Embodied knowledge will represent the complex presences and corporeal signs produced by racialized, gendered, and sexualized bodies in the classroom. Here, I want to re-member the role of both the consumer and producer of queer women's signification, as this project sees pedagogy as dialectic, a relationship not only between mind and body, but among multiple minds and bodies.

Keith Clark's essay "Are we Family? Pedagogy and the Race for Queerness" locates the classroom as a site for this racialized, gendered, and sexualized body knowledge. He writes, "The classroom, by virtue of the raced, gendered, and sexualized nature of the texts, faculty, and students, is not a depoliticized zone."¹⁰⁶ Thus, his presence and sense of embodiment within the classroom function as a "veritable corporeal sign system that is contextualized and mis-contextualized, read

¹⁰⁴ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 193.

¹⁰⁵ Stucky and Wimmer, *Teaching Performance Studies*, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Keith Clark, "Are we Family? Pedagogy and the Race for Queerness," in *Black Queer Studies*, 269.

professionally, intellectually, racially, sexually, and physically.”¹⁰⁷ By recognizing the body knowledge produced and consumed in his classroom, Clark sets the tone for a Black queer pedagogical framework. I complicate this framework by insisting that gender, specifically the bind of gender-constituted intersectionality in Black queer women’s embodiment, cannot be omitted. I am presenting a complex system of meaning that requires both a Black feminist analysis and a Black queer analysis to interpret it.

Three concepts define this study’s areas of focus: (1) “queer pedagogy” as articulated by Mary Bryson, Suzanne de Castell,¹⁰⁸ and Deborah Britzman,¹⁰⁹ (2) “Black feminist pedagogy,” as presented by Barbara Omolade,¹¹⁰ and (3) the “embodied text” of Black gay body as conceived by Bryant Keith Alexander.¹¹¹ In the classroom, queer pedagogy takes the form of an educative praxis implemented deliberately to interfere with, and to intervene in, the production of “normalcy” in the classroom. I will explore the framework of queer pedagogy to make sense of being a Black queer feminist pedagogue, both for LGBTQ students, and for students who do not identify as LGBTQ. I also interrogate the deviant performance of queer educators, teaching material on feminist, queer, and racialized subject matter. My conception of queer pedagogy refers to reflexively teaching through queer identity,¹¹² and creating curricula and environments that center queer identities. Queer pedagogy also refers to

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 266.

¹⁰⁸ Mary Bryson and Suzanne de Castell, “Queer Pedagogy: Praxis Makes Im/Perfect,” *Canadian Journal of Education* 18, no. 3 (1993), 285-305.

¹⁰⁹ Deborah Britzman, “Is There a Queer Pedagogy? Or, Stop Reading Straight,” *Educational Theory* 45, no. 2 (1995), 151-165.

¹¹⁰ B. Omolade, “A Black Feminist Pedagogy,” *Women's Studies Quarterly* 15 (1987), 32-39.

¹¹¹ See B. K. Alexander, “Embracing the Teachable Moment.”

¹¹³ Bryson and de Castell, “Queer Pedagogy,” 285, 298-299

the deliberate production of subjectivities as deviant performance.¹¹³ I point to this deviant performance of pedagogy in the classroom to interrogate the ways in which this pedagogical approach assists students in decoding how race, class, gender, and sexuality are embodied, performed, and read in the classroom space and beyond. Using the ways in which Black queer feminist pedagogues “call out” their identities as a model, I also encourage students to consider their own bodies, identities, and performances.

Black feminist pedagogy explores the principles of instruction of Black women by Black Women and about Black women; it utilizes learning strategies informed by Black women's historical experience with race/gender/class bias and the consequences of marginality and isolation while contradicting Western intellectual traditions of exclusivity and chauvinism.¹¹⁴ Omolade presents three foci for examining a Black feminist pedagogy. First, she considers how instructors openly interrogate the source and use of power within the classroom. Student “peer” instruction and an emphasis on creating a learning community, in which everyone is both teacher and student (echoing Freire) constitutes Omolade’s first tenet. Next, Omolade’s second imperative considers the syllabus and its assignments as representing a methodology for developing strong teaching and writing skills. Omolade’s third tenet considers how Black feminist pedagogues struggle with students to push through the course requirements and definitions of success to establish a personal definition of growth and development. I place Omolade’s tenets in conversation with Bryant Keith Alexander’s concept of the black gay body as

¹¹³ Bryson and de Castell, *Queer Pedagogy*,” 285, 298-299

¹¹⁴ Omolade, “A Black Feminist Pedagogy,” 31.

“embodied text” in the classroom, and consider the ways in which this pedagogical body is critical to a Black queer feminist pedagogy. How do instructors teach about race and sexuality both through the material content of the course and through the material fact of black gay bodies in the classroom, or rather, through a gendered analysis of the Black gay body, acknowledging that the body’s text is ‘always already’ racialized, sexualized, and gendered for Black queer men and women and for those on the transgender spectrum. This study makes an important contribution to the field and presents a unique approach to exploring the experiences and challenges of Black queer feminist pedagogues. There are no comparable studies that identify name, and examine the ways in which the body functions as a text for some instructors who self-identify as Black queer feminist women using in depth case study and self-study.

The following chapter, “Mastering Methodologies: Identity, Pedagogy, and Research Methods,” examines the literature on qualitative methods, including feminist case study, self-study in education, interviews, participatory research, shadowing, and data analysis. It presents the multiple methods qualitative research design utilized in this dissertation project. I consider the individual characteristics of each pedagogue’s case and focus on the deployment of the research design devised to observe and analyze Black queer feminist women’s embodiment and performance.

Chapter 2 — Mastering Methodologies: Identity, Pedagogy, and Research Methods

The self-study of teacher education practices is also moral work because it has a normative, teleological component — we don't want to just study our practice, we want to improve it in a particular direction that will affect what happens in our colleges, universities, and schools.¹¹⁵

— Allan Feldman

[I am] suggesting that other sociologists would also benefit from putting greater trust in the creative potential of their own personal and cultural biographies.¹¹⁶

— Patricia Hill Collins

When shadowing is used in an interpretive vein, both actions and explanations for those actions are reflected in the resulting rich, thick descriptive data.¹¹⁷

— Elizabeth Quinlan

Overview

This chapter reviews the literature on feminist case study and self-study, as well as the qualitative components utilized in carrying out each. First I survey the theoretical underpinnings that support feminist qualitative inquiry, including qualitative methods, feminist methodologies, experience as evidence, the evidence of

¹¹⁵ Allan Feldman, "Validity and Quality in Self-Study," *Educational Researcher* 32, no. 3 (2003), 27.

¹¹⁶ Collins, "Learning From The Outsider Within," 103.

¹¹⁷ Elizabeth Quinlan, "Conspicuous Invisibility," *Qualitative Inquiry* 14, no. 8 (2008), 1483.

felt intuition, *testimonio*,¹¹⁸ theory in the flesh, and reflexivity. I review the five methodological components used as models and methods in my case study method, including elements of ethnography, interviews, observation, shadowing, and portraiture. I then present the research design for this dissertation project, discussing the strengths and pitfalls of multiple methods qualitative research. I consider the individual characteristics of each pedagogue's case and focus on the deployment of the research design, devised to observe Black queer feminist women's embodiment and the performance of pedagogy. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the self-study component of this dissertation.

I draw methodologies from both feminist research frameworks and the field of education research in order to examine issues of identity and embodiment in the classroom and beyond, and discuss my own pedagogical practice, and that of others. I utilize two case studies and my own self-study to examine the practices and experiences of Black queer feminist pedagogues. This multiple methods construction has proved critical to examining my own performance of pedagogy and that of other Black queer feminist pedagogues.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Feminist Qualitative Inquiries and Concepts

Foundational to this project are feminist qualitative methodologies, which have allowed me to engage with case participants in ways that unearth the significance of ephemeral moments, habits and happenings, and ways of being and doing in the classroom and beyond. Often, the brief exchange with a student or the

¹¹⁸Testimonio references the act of acknowledging the voices, stories, and testimonies of Latina women at PWIs, recognizing that these testimonies are vital for their survival in higher education. See Judith Flores and Silvia Garcia, "Latina Testimonios: a Reflexive, Critical Analysis of a 'Latina Space' at a Predominantly White Campus," in *Race, Ethnicity & Education* 12, no. 2 (2009), 156.

routine classroom activity proved to be significant pedagogical performances. Intimate access to these Black queer feminist pedagogues, to their classrooms, and to other on-campus locations, as well as interviews, casual conversations, and engagement with syllabi and course material, generated a plethora of data for this dissertation. The feminist methodologies and methods at the heart of this project have constituted a foundational framework for undertaking a project that explicates the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality in relationship to pedagogy.

Qualitative Methods and Feminist Methodologies

This project utilizes qualitative methods in order to examine the intersecting identities of pedagogues themselves and of their pedagogy and classroom performance. Qualitative research can be defined as research that does not rely on quantifiable procedures but instead uses various techniques to probe for depth in the analysis of the object studied.¹¹⁹ In the context of this dissertation, ethnography is used as a model methodology. Ethnographic elements shaped my multiple methods qualitative project. The methods utilized to form the feminist case study include interviews, observation, shadowing, and portraiture. These are important components for many feminist inquiries. These qualitative methods revealed the intentions of the pedagogues and ways in which they see themselves and conceive of their pedagogical projects. They also provided access to moments of success and disappointment and insight into how these were received by students, faculty, and staff within their campus community.

¹¹⁹ R. Samaras and A. Freese, *A Self- Study of Teaching Practices Primer* (Peter Lang, 2006), 13.

Scholars writing about feminist methodologies recognize that feminism is a perspective, not a research method itself. Shulamit Reinharz's resource text, *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, asserts that the perspective of feminism informs a methodology that uses multiple research methods, involves ongoing critique of non-feminist scholarship, is guided by feminist theory, may be transdisciplinary, and aims to create social change.¹²⁰ Although these characteristics can be identified as distinguishing features of feminist methodologies, Sampson, et al., note:

There is, however, no single feminist approach to research methods, or methodology, and no clearly distinctive and separate feminist research "method" which can be advocated and straightforwardly applied.¹²¹

This article speaks to the complexity and ambiguities of feminist approaches to research. Similarly, Sandra Harding collects a "wide range of feminist theoretical approaches"¹²² in her book *Feminism and Methodology*, anthologizing the work of Bonnie Thornton Dill, Catherine A. MacKinnon, among others. Harding asserts:

My point here is to argue against the idea of a distinctive feminist method of research. I do so on the grounds that preoccupation with method mystifies what have been the most interesting aspects of feminist research processes.¹²³

Harding also provides useful parameters for thinking about methods and methodologies. Methods are defined as techniques for gathering evidence, while a

¹²⁰ Shulamit Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 240.

¹²¹ Helen Sampson, Michael Bloor, and Ben Fincham, "A Price Worth Paying?: Considering the 'Cost' of Reflexive Research Methods and the Influence of Feminist Ways of 'Doing'," *Sociology* 42, no. 5 (2008), 921.

¹²² Sandra Harding, *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1988), vii.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 1.

methodology is described as a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed.¹²⁴ This project employs these parameters when using the terms methods and methodologies.

The three texts named here insist that feminism is not itself a “method,” and that feminist approaches are diverse in their deployment. This dissertation utilizes feminist methodologies as characterized by Reinharz: it represents human diversity, includes the researcher as a person with a specific location and specific investments, attempts to develop a special relationship with the people studied, and defines a special relationship with the reader.¹²⁵ As researchers undertake projects that employ feminist methodologies, they often also engage with another characteristic of feminist inquiry, examining women’s experience as evidence.

Experience as Evidence

Key to many feminist inquiries and theorizing is experiential evidence. Although speaking from experience can be a political act for women, researchers must also ask “which women” and “whose experiences” are recorded and represented as being the voices of “women.” Many feminist scholars have critiqued the “universality” of women’s marginal status and exclusion from public discourse. Chandra Mohanty complicates notions of the “universal” category of “woman” in her chapter “Feminist Encounters: Locating the Politics of Experience.” She asserts:

The status of “female” or “women/women’s” experience has always been a central concern in feminist discourse. After all, it is on the basis of shared experience that feminists of different political persuasions

¹²⁴ Ibid., 2-3.

¹²⁵ Reinharz, *Feminist Methods*, 240.

have argued for unity among women. . . . Gender is *produced* as well as uncovered in feminist discourse, and definitions of experience, with abundant notions of unity and difference, form the very basis of this production.¹²⁶

Mohanty notes that we cannot avoid and do not want to ignore the politics of experience;¹²⁷ however, we must undertake a theorization of experience. Mohanty suggests that historicizing and locating political agency is a necessary alternative to formulation of the “universality” of gendered oppression and struggles.¹²⁸ Thus through a “politics of location,” women’s voices can be situated in the “historical, geographical, cultural, psychic, and imaginative boundaries which provide the ground for political definition and self-definition for contemporary U.S. feminists.”¹²⁹

In her influential article “The Evidence of Experience,” Joan W. Scott argues that “making visible the experience of a different group exposes the existence of repressive mechanisms, but not their inner workings or logics.”¹³⁰ Thus, simply citing an “un-problematized” experience, without recognizing that it is simply one person’s story, “avoids examining the relationships between discourse, cognition, and reality, the relevance of the position or situated-ness of subjects to the knowledge they produce, and the effects of difference on knowledge.”¹³¹ Scott, however, is concerned that individual experience is “always contested and always political,” stating:

¹²⁶ Chandra Mohanty, “Feminist Encounters: Locating the Politics of Experience,” in *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*, eds. L. Nicholson and S. Seidman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 70. Author’s emphasis.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 71.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 69.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 68.

¹³⁰ Joan W. Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991), 779.

¹³¹ Ibid., 783.

It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced.”¹³²

Scott argues that individual experience cannot be the foundation for knowledge production; rather, accounts of our individual experience must be read with a kind of skeptical analysis as themselves produced by relations of power.

Other feminist scholars, however, have reclaimed narratives of experience as a source of knowledge. Laura Downs counters Scott’s argument by insisting that “[experiences] are no less real . . . than they are socially constructed.”¹³³ Downs cites such feminist scholars as Chandra Mohanty, bell hooks, Norma Alcaron, and Chela Sandoval, who engage with narratives of experience “in part through a fruitful set of discussions about what it means to live with the tensions of a ‘fragmented self’.”¹³⁴ Shari Stone-Mediatore contradicts Scott’s assertion that the experiences of individuals are not “authoritative” evidence, citing the importance of the contributions of feminist thinkers and writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, and Michelle Cliff, who “continue to write experience-oriented texts, for such texts play a key role in publicizing the contradictions of contemporary capitalist

¹³² Ibid., 779-780.

¹³³ Laura Downs, “Reply to Joan Scott,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35, no. 2 (1993), 448.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 450.

democracies.”¹³⁵ Scott’s influential critique notwithstanding, the feminist tradition of theorizing from lived experience remains powerful, and involves the work of many queer women of color. Their theoretical and political contributions are grounded in the evidence of lived experiences of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and other formations of oppression. The work examining Black queer feminist “experience” is situated within a Black feminist epistemology valuing Black women’s experience.¹³⁶

Evidence of Felt Intuition

A complementary concept to feminist conceptions of “evidence of experience” comes from Phillip Brian Harper’s essay, “The Evidence of Felt Intuition: Minority Experience, Everyday Life, and Critical Speculative Knowledge.” Through the lens of Black queer studies, Harper examines “the evidence of intuition” and “speculative knowledge” as experienced and utilized by minority communities. He grapples with how scholars, particularly those whose inquiries are at the nexus of racialization and sexuality, begin to consider the meaning of an experience, “no concrete evidence of which exists,” and “of which we can therefore claim no positive knowledge.” Harper notes that “as far as queer studies is concerned, theory may in some respects be all that we have, if by theory we mean . . . *a way of seeing* that allows us to apprehend our world in different and potentially productive ways.”¹³⁷ He

¹³⁵ Shari Stone-Mediatore, “Chandra Mohanty and the Revaluing of ‘experience,’” *Hypatia* 13, no. 2 (1998), 116-133.

¹³⁶ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 256.

¹³⁷ Phillip Brian Harper, “The Evidence of Felt Intuition: Minority Experience, Everyday Life, and Critical Speculative Knowledge,” in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 6, no. 4 (2000), 655. Author’s emphasis.

asks, “what might happen in the instances where the objects of our analysis are so ethereal that they appear to offer us no hard evidence at all?”¹³⁸

Similar to claiming women’s experience as evidence that supports larger theoretical claims about power, oppression, and inequality, Harper suggests that scholars may opt to rely upon what he calls “the evidence of felt intuition,” a method of contemplation through which one can construct a speculative conclusion. He asserts that this evidence characterizes a significant percentage of work on minority experience.¹³⁹ He writes:

If speculative reasoning often appears as the only tool we have by which to forward the type of critical analysis our situation demands, such reasoning itself is necessarily conditioned by the material factors in which it is undertaken, and those material factors without exception all have histories that themselves can serve to guide us in our critical work.¹⁴⁰

Harper illustrates the use of this tool by taking the reader through the experiential elements of an encounter with a middle aged white man during a train ride. Harper’s “intuition” made evident that the man was attracted to him, and made assumptions about his race/ethnicity based on Harper’s aesthetic, lack of an accent, and act of reading a book while traveling on a train. Once he worked out that Harper was in fact African American, from Detroit (not Sri Lanka), and dealt with (somewhat accidentally) finding a Black man attractive and interesting, the white man

¹³⁸ Ibid, 655.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 651.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 654.

“awkwardly lumbered away” and they did not speak again.¹⁴¹ By sharing this story, during which he intuits what the white man is thinking, Harper offers a framework for documenting experiential evidence, and an approach to performing cultural criticism based in the ephemeral moment for which there is little concrete “evidence” as to what the man was really thinking. Harper’s act of putting words to the man’s facial expressions, elaborating on and translating his comments (exploring what was *really* meant), and placing this encounter into a larger cultural context, was a useful methodological tool for me as a researcher when interviewing, shadowing, and observing Black queer feminist case participants. At times I was able to inquire about specific happenings, interpretations, or feelings. However, I frequently used the “evidence” derived from felt intuition to frame a broader picture. I also found Harper’s work useful in interpreting the “intuitive evidence” presented by my case participants. Although they could not present direct evidence about the perceptions of students and colleagues, they made sense of the world around them, made meaning, and produced theory through the interpretation of their own experiences, without access to concrete evidence.

In the case studies, I do not attempt to present “the truth” through the use of speculative knowledge. Rather, I reflexively acknowledge that some of my perceptions as the researcher are filtered through my own felt intuition. Also, many of the interpretations reported to me by my participants are based on their own intuitive interpretations. I do not present their explanations or understandings as ultimate,

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 642-43.

verifiable truths. However, I do honor the interpretations of my participants as real, authentic, and valid perceptions, grounded in their own experience.

Harper considers the practice of speculation in this case to be “thoroughly bound up with the material factors that constituted [his] subjectivity within it, and it is in relation to those factors that my speculative rumination derives its ultimate meaning, however abstractly theoretical it may appear at first blush.”¹⁴² Throughout the case study and interview process, participants regularly used “the evidence of felt intuition” to garner meaning from encounters with others. Although there was often no direct “evidence” of people stating their outright feelings about the racial/ethnic identity, sexual orientation, and/or gender expression of the participants, they characterized the nature of relationships with students, staff, faculty and administrators in ways that I see as parallel to and an operationalization of Harper’s theory. Thus, the evidence of felt intuition was a useful tool for me as a researcher as I applied it both to my own observations and used it as a tool to understand the interpretations of my case participants.

Testifying: Black Religious Traditions, Latina Testimonio, and Theory in the Flesh

Both the concepts of experience as evidence and the evidence of felt intuition may take the form of “testifying” to one’s experience. In *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*, Rosetta Ross examines the meaning and practice of *testifying*; articulating some account of God’s interaction with one’s life in the context of Black religious traditions. She writes:

¹⁴² Ibid., 654.

Continuing in some contemporary Black American religious traditions, *testifying* occurs both as interpersonal narration of divine interaction with everyday life and as a normal portion of worship wherein believers share in community what God has done in their lives.¹⁴³

Thus, the concept of *testifying*, can be incorporated into feminist methodologies, particularly as it relates to Black women's accounts of spiritual signification in their everyday lives.

Similarly, in their article "Latina Testimonios: a Reflexive, Critical Analysis of a 'Latina Space' at a Predominantly White Campus," Judith Flores and Silvia Garcia illuminate the concept *testimonios*. The act of *testimonios* takes a holistic approach to self, and includes spirit and emotion, recognizes individual/communal struggles, allows for self naming, recording history, and choosing one's own destiny. The authors draw from Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's¹⁴⁴ conception of "theory in the flesh" and assert that the act of naming experiences, telling and writing stories, and "theorizing our own lives," aligns *testimonies* with theories of the flesh.¹⁴⁵

Testimonio and "theory in the flesh" are parallel feminist theories that center women's experience as evidence and recognize testimony as a form of theory and knowledge production. Flores and Garcia note, "Theorizing from our own experiences and writing our own stories have allowed us to produce new knowledge, recognition, and forms of empowerment. Thus, we became the subjects and objects of

¹⁴³ Rosetta E. Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights* (Fortress Press, 2003), 14.

¹⁴⁴ See Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 1st ed. (Watertown, Mass: Persephone Press, 1981).

¹⁴⁵ Judith Flores and Silvia Garcia, "Latina Testimonios: a Reflexive, Critical Analysis of a 'Latina Space' at a Predominantly White Campus," *Race, Ethnicity & Education* 12, no. 2 (2009), 156.

our own inquiry and voice.”¹⁴⁶ *Testimonios* also trouble formations of the “universal” woman/women’s experience, while involving the individual on behalf of the community. Sharing individual experiences while making connections to a larger narrative allows *testimonios* to “move beyond speaking from the voice of the singular, ‘I.’” Individual identities and experiences “express the complexities and connections of our communities as a whole” across identities, nationalities, and mixed cultural heritage in ways that continue to illustrate “how memory, speaking, and writing are linked to identity trans(formations), empowerment, and social change.”¹⁴⁷

I incorporate the concepts of testifying, *testimonio*, and theory in the flesh, and apply them in this project as my case participants and I speak our experiences. While our testimony does not involve the sacred, it does connect our deepest commitments with the practices of our work and daily lives. As I testify, both as a researcher and research subject, I must reflexively interrogate my own relationship to the project and its participants.

Reflexivity and Self-Disclosure

Feminist reflexive research methods are qualitative research methods that incorporate reflexivity at their core; Sampson et al. describe reflexive projects as encouraging researchers to become more conscious of power relationships and responsibilities in research, and more sensitive to arguments about knowledge — how it is “created,” endorsed or identified, and by whom — and as engaging the

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

possibility of emotional risk.¹⁴⁸ They assert the importance of considering power relationships, writing:

What feminist researchers have in common in their consideration of social science methods is a strong concern with reflexivity, with research relationships, and with the protection of the research. . . . This emphasis on reflexivity, on the consideration of power within research relationships, and on the potential for researchers to harm participants, is not exclusive to feminist researchers, but it has been emphasized and brought to the fore in their writing.¹⁴⁹

Reflexivity then, involves the researcher's attention to power and risk, as well as broader concepts related to knowledge production. In her chapter "What it Means to Teach the Other When the Other is the Self," Mae Henderson emphasizes that a self-reflexive approach to teaching [and by implication to research] not only focuses on personal experience, but reads it in terms of a broader social (con)text of difference and identity.¹⁵⁰ Although this article focuses on pedagogy, I find Henderson's discussion of reflexivity within the context of teaching to be applicable to self-reflexive research as well. Henderson makes connections with relationships beyond the self, and includes responsibility to a larger social framework as part of self-reflexive work. She links self-reflexivity and self-reflection, noting that the two guide us to "an activity leading not to an 'authentic' or 'inauthentic' product," but to a process "in which the teacher [researcher] and text and students simultaneously

¹⁴⁸ Sampson, et al. "A Price Worth Paying?" 920-23.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 921.

¹⁵⁰ Mae Henderson, "What it Means to Teach the Other," 435.

affirm and challenge notions of self, textual identity, and interpretation.” For Henderson, the focus, then, is on process rather than product.¹⁵¹

Parallel to notions of self-reflexivity and self-reflection is the act of self-disclosure within the context of the feminist research project. Reinharz stresses that many studies argue that self-disclosure is a good feminist practice, and that many interview participants are put at ease by this act and are more likely to open up regarding sensitive topics such as rape and fear of aging.¹⁵² Self-disclosure is a reflexive act that engages the researcher and participant in a conversation and allows both to co-create knowledge, like the simultaneous act of self-reflexivity and self-reflection between teacher/researcher and student as described by Henderson. Reinharz claims that researchers who self-disclose are reformulating the researcher’s role in a way that maximizes engagement of the self but also increases the researcher’s vulnerability to criticism, both for what is revealed and for the very act of self-disclosure.¹⁵³ A reflexive approach situating the researcher as a part of the research project is complicated, and there is risk involved in the acts of self-reflexivity, self-reflection, and self-disclosure on the part of the researcher, who chances rejection, suspicion, or disruption of the research process, as well as charges of self-indulgence from readers when it becomes part of the written work. Still, this approach is foundational to feminist qualitative methodologies in that it addresses power dynamics within the researcher/participant relationship, builds trust, and makes room for knowledge exchange that produces multiple ways of knowing.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 436.

¹⁵² Reinharz, *Feminist Methods*, 32-33.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 34.

Making the Case for Theoretical Underpinnings

This review of qualitative methods, feminist methodologies, experience as evidence, the evidence of felt intuition, testifying, *testimonio*, theory in the flesh, reflexivity, and self-disclosure, serves as a foundation for the case-study method developed and carried out in the project. In constructing the case studies for this project, each of these dimensions of feminist methodology played a part. In the following section I will discuss validity and quality in case study and self-study, then lay out the multiple methods utilized as components of my feminist case studies.

Validity in Case Study and Self-Study

In social science research, validity usually refers to the degree to which a study accurately reflects or assesses the specific topic that the research is attempting to measure. Because there are few measurements made in qualitative studies, other criteria have been developed, such as believability, credibility, consensus, and coherence, to replace accuracy as a warrant for validity.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, case study and self-study look for specificity, exceptions, and completeness, rather than illustrating generalizability.

Field researchers use qualitative methods such as case study and self-study in order to give detailed illustrations. For this reason, I have selected case study and self-study as the most appropriate framework for undertaking an inquiry into Black queer feminist pedagogical projects. Observations and conceptualizations garnered through the process of qualitative field research are valuable in their own right and can

¹⁵⁴ Feldman, "Validity and Quality in Self-Study," 26.

provide superior validity as compared to surveys and experiments.¹⁵⁵ The “chief strength” of qualitative field research “lies in the depth of understanding it permits.” Being in the field “is a powerful technique for gaining insights into the nature of human affairs in all their rich complexity.”¹⁵⁶ Indeed, it is the complexity of the relationship between embodiment, performance, and pedagogy that I seek to illuminate using case study and self-study.

Case Study: Employing Multiple Methods

I have selected case study as the most appropriate method for the study of Black queer feminist pedagogues; this project surveys multiple sites and experiences, including the classroom, the department, and the broader campus community, using multiple qualitative methods. Using case study I draw on interviews, observation, shadowing, and portraiture to constitute the case. These multiple methods coalesced within the context of case building, allowing me to deeply engage with my participants on multiple levels while constructing cases using the data gathered in these various ways.

Using case study as my primary method offered the opportunity to delve into great detail with my participants and combine inquiries into the diverse elements of identity, pedagogy, and performance. Reinharz notes that case studies provide the “opportunity for the intensive analysis of many specific details that are often overlooked with other methods.”¹⁵⁷ In *The Art Of Case Study Research*, Robert Stake

¹⁵⁵ Earl R. Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 10th ed. (Belmont, C.A.: Wadsworth Publishing, 2003), 308.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 307.

¹⁵⁷ Reinharz, *Feminist Methods*, 164.

defines the case study as “a specific, a complex, functioning thing.”¹⁵⁸ It is the specificity and complexity of Black queer feminist pedagogy that I have examined using the case study method. I employed feminist case study methods to examine how self-identified Black queer feminist pedagogues use personal experiences as teaching tools, enunciate or obfuscate a queer sexual identity in the classroom, and use or consciously refrain from using the body as a “text” to inspire teachable moments. In the following sections, I first review the five methods utilized in carrying out the case study. I then lay out the specifics of the case study research design.

Case Element One: Ethnography

This project uses ethnography as a model for multiple methods case study. As noted by Reinharz, “Contemporary ethnography or fieldwork is multi-method research,” and usually involves observation, participation, archival analysis, and interviewing¹⁵⁹ as complementary methods. Reinharz lays out three goals mentioned frequently by feminist researchers undertaking ethnography: (1) to document the lives and activities of women, (2) to understand the experience of women from their own point of view, and (3) to conceptualize women’s behavior as an expression of social contexts.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, this project documents the activities of Black queer feminist pedagogues and their academic lives, seeks to understand these experiences in their own words, and seeks to place these experiences, expressions, and pedagogical projects in a larger context by considering the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality in the classroom and in the academy.

¹⁵⁸ Robert Stake, *Qualitative Research: Studying How Things Work* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2010), 3.

¹⁵⁹ Reinharz, *Feminist Methods*, 46.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 51.

As I pursue these goals, I grapple with the ethics of feminist ethnographic endeavors. D. Soyini Madison articulates the ways in which ethnography “begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain.”¹⁶¹ Her book, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* addresses theory, method, and technique, with particular attention to the ethnographer’s subjectivity as an inherent part of research within the project. Madison writes:

We are not simply subjects, but we are subjects in dialogue with the Other. . . I contend that critical ethnography is always a meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among the Other(s), one in which there is negotiation and dialogue toward substantial and viable meanings that make a difference in the Other’s world.¹⁶²

For Madison, identifying one’s own subjectivity and co-authoring meaning with and on behalf of the Other is a critical component of research, but these acts are not without their challenges. Madison posits that researchers must do more than recognize their subjectivity; but that the practice of ethnography must also be a dialogue, which creates meaning, knowledge and change. Madison’s assertion that the recognition of the researcher’s subjectivity and that of the other is of critical importance is reiterated in Kamala Visweswaran’s *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, which calls for recognition of “feminist ethnography as failure.” Visweswaran tracks failure as both ethnographic and epistemic; she notes that there is considerable

¹⁶¹ D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 5.

¹⁶² Ibid, 9.

confusion about how to consider the multiple axes of oppression as constituted by the intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality.

Our failures are as much a part of the process of knowledge constitution as are our oft-hearted “successes.” Failure is not just a sign of epistemological crisis (for it is indeed also that), but also, I would argue, an epistemological construct.¹⁶³

However, Visweswaran asserts that pointing out the difficulties in epistemological assumptions and representational strategies allow the acknowledgement of failure through an accountable positioning to reconstitute the feminist project; the practice of failure is then pivotal in representing the possibility of “success-in-failure.”¹⁶⁴ Thus, failing to wholly represent the ethnographic subject (which is in itself inevitable) leads to a particular version of success, one that may present more questions than answers. Visweswaran maintains that the recognition of failure encourages feminist ethnographers to seek out new possibilities engendered by this recognition.¹⁶⁵ In my own work, I found that the fear of inadequately representing the wholeness of my participants’ lives and experiences was a great hurdle to overcome. I was deeply concerned that the fullest representation would compromise their anonymity — and that the most anonymous representation would not do justice to the participant and her case. I engaged Visweswaran’s work in response to my fears, noting that the compromises I made in representing my case participants may have been “failures”; but that these compromises created “new possibilities” for

¹⁶³ Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 99-100.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

presenting the wholeness of each case within the context of anonymity. I followed parameters such as describing the case participants only as they described themselves, obscuring specifics about their institutions while providing a broad sketch for context, and renaming courses based on their subject matter, in order to maintain a balance between anonymity and deep description.

This dissertation uses ethnographic methods in the fieldwork process; these include interviews, observation, shadowing, and portraiture. I am guided by the three feminist ethnographic goals as laid out by Reinharz: 1) documenting lives and activities, 2) understanding experiences as viewed by women, and 3) conceptualizing women's behavior as an expression of social contexts. I am also guided by considerations of reflexivity and subjectivity as posited by Madison, and the ways in which the shortcomings or "failures" of the ethnographic project present new possibilities for "failure as success" as articulated by Visweswaran.

Case Element Two: Interviews

This project utilizes semi-structured in-depth interviews with case participants. Reinharz describes semi-structured interviewing as a qualitative data-gathering technique, characterizing open-ended interview research as an exploration of "people's view of reality" that "allows the researcher to generate theory."¹⁶⁶ Leslie Rebecca Bloom's text, *Under the Sign of Hope: Feminist Methodology and Narrative Interpretation*, was influential to the completion of this project, and prepared me for its interview component. Bloom's project studies "the life histories of feminist teachers to understand how they became feminists" and applies "feminist

¹⁶⁶ Reinharz, *Feminist Methods*, 18.

methodological theories in practice.”¹⁶⁷ Bloom navigated complex relationships with her two participants and produced both narratives and theoretical applications; these examples were models for my own work. As a researcher, Bloom’s attention to the relational production of subjectivity was critical. This viewpoint suggests that feminist coalitions may be positive sites for the production of subjectivity, and that subjectivity can also be produced through contradictions and conflict, which cause subjectivity to fragment.¹⁶⁸ I applied this assertion to my own interview process; Bloom provided me with ways to think through the subjectivities I observed, as well as those that the participants and I produced in relation to one another throughout the interview process.

Correspondingly, the in-depth interview, as described in the Family Health International *Data Collector’s Field Guide*, is a technique designed to elicit a vivid picture of the participant’s perspective on the research topic, in part by allowing the participant to be the expert as the researcher learns from the participant, as a student would.¹⁶⁹ This field guide was a particularly useful tool, offering step-by-step procedural maps, do’s and don’t’s in the field, as well as broader discussions about the strengths and pitfalls of qualitative fieldwork. The depth of this style of interviewing offers researchers the opportunity to delve deeply into the topic with the participant, going beyond superficial questions and answers, seeking to probe for a more reflective insight and understanding.

¹⁶⁷ Leslie Rebecca Bloom, *Under the Sign of Hope: Feminist Methodology and Narrative Interpretation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 43.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹⁶⁹ Family Health International, “Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector’s Field Guide,” (2005), 29.

In-depth interviews are useful for learning about the perspectives of individuals, as opposed to, for example, group norms of a community, for which focus groups are more appropriate. They are an effective qualitative method for getting people to talk about their personal feelings, opinions, and experiences. They are also an opportunity for us to gain insight into how people interpret and order the world.¹⁷⁰

This research project includes multiple in-depth interviews with two subjects. Reinharz comments on the value of multiple interviews, noting the importance of developing a relationship between the researcher and participant over time. Thus, the interview process can be adjusted to consider the uniqueness of each woman's personality:

Multiple interviews are likely to be more accurate than single interviews because of the opportunity to ask additional questions and to get corrective feedback on previously obtained information. As time passes, the researcher also can see how thoughts are situated in particular circumstances.¹⁷¹

Participants in this project sat for multiple interviews over time; the project utilized a "response-guided strategy." The interviews with each participant lasted between one and two hours and took place three times over the course of the semester, one at the beginning, one mid-semester, and one at the end of the term per participant. The response-guided interview strategy, as described by R. Murray Thomas in *Teachers Doing Research: An Introductory Guidebook*, takes on the

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 30.

¹⁷¹ Reinharz, *Feminist Methods*, 37.

characteristics of a tennis match: “the nature of the interviewer’s next question can depend on the interviewee’s response to the previous question.”¹⁷² Murray maintains:

In using the response-guided approach, the researcher begins with a prepared question, then spontaneously creates follow-up queries that derive from the interviewee’s answer to the opening question. This technique enables the researcher to examine in some detail the respondent’s understanding of issues related to the initial question.¹⁷³

The interviews for this research project followed the response-guided approach, with three to six prepared topic questions with notes about possible follow-up items. The format is described more fully in “Case Study Procedures: The Interview,” below. As the first topic questions were posed, the participant’s response inspired a series of follow-up questions and answers, open dialogue, and the sharing of examples, stories, and scenarios. Once the initial topic question and its theme had been exhausted, the next topic question was posed and the same processes followed. In some instances the initial topic and its responses were followed for the duration of the interview; in other instances, all of the prepared topics were explored. Transitions were managed through dialogue by my asking questions such as “is there anything more you would like to say about that?” or “would you like to move onto the next topic,” or a participant saying, “I really want to mention something else to you, if we have finished with this subject.” We negotiated together how to proceed.

Madison points to the significance of dialogue, indicating how ethnographic interviews can open realms of meaning that permeate beyond rote information. In this

¹⁷² R. Murray Thomas, *Teachers Doing Research: An Introductory Guidebook*, (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2004), 103.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

format, the interviewer is not seeking the “truth,” but rather using this method of interviewing to focus on the partnership and exchange between interviewer and interviewee. Madison asserts:

The interviewee is not an object, but a subject with agency, history and his or her own idiosyncratic command of a story. Interviewer and interviewee are in partnership and dialogue as they construct memory, meaning, and experience together.¹⁷⁴

This method of interviewing was employed, including partnership, dialogue, and exchange as central to the process. In addition to the interview, my relationship with each participant evolved through formal “observation” time spent in the classroom, and informal or unstructured time spent “shadowing” my participants around campus. The following sections address these methods as central to the development of the case study.

Case Element Three: Observation

The observation method provided rich data with which to supplement the interviews. I was able to (1) draw from events that happened in the classroom and inquire about them, (2) review the syllabus and reading assignments, then observe the performance of pedagogy and “experience” the lesson, and (3) balance both my perception of what happened in the classroom and what my subjects recounted, with some knowledge of the actual event.

My presence as an observer in the classroom is a hybrid of participant observation; because I was not *actually* a student, I apply this term loosely and

¹⁷⁴ Madison, *Critical Ethnography*, 25.

descriptively. The *Data Collector's Field Guide* describes participant observation as observation that takes place in community settings believed to have some relevance to the research questions. Engaging with participants in their offices, classrooms, and on their own campus was critical in that it provided me the opportunity to witness them in action in their own element. I was not only able to “ask” about institutional culture, students and classes, interactions with staff, and teaching style, performance, and presence; I was able to witness these first hand, then inquire about these factors and happenings. Through this practice, I became an “insider” in limited ways; having “been there” when something was said, or an event occurred. However, though I “participated,” particularly in the classroom setting, I remained an outsider, in that I did not “belong” as a student in the class or the campus community in earnest.

The [participant observation] method is distinctive because the researcher approaches participants in their own environment rather than having the participants come to the researcher. Generally speaking, the researcher engaged in participant observation tries to learn what life is like for an “insider” while remaining, inevitably, an “outsider.”¹⁷⁵

Another strength of using participant observation in concert with other methods, particularly in-depth interviews, is the way in which it serves as “a check against participants’ subjective reporting of what they believe and do.” As participants described their pedagogical intentions, or readings of particular events, I was able to add subjectively what I had observed in order to construct a deeper

¹⁷⁵ Family Health International, “Qualitative Research Methods,” 13.

“understanding of the physical, social, cultural, and economic contexts in which study participants live; the relationships among and between people, contexts, ideas, norms, and events; and people’s behaviors and activities – what they do, how frequently, and with whom.”¹⁷⁶

In his text *The Practice of Social Research*, Earl R. Babbie explores the varying roles a participant observer might take on, including the “complete participant,” “the complete observer,” or a role that falls inbetween.¹⁷⁷ This in-between role might include both participating in a particular activity as a member, and announcing one’s role as researcher. This is characteristic of my project. As a classroom “participant,” I observed the performance of pedagogy from multiple perspectives; I was at once situated as a student in the classroom, receiving instruction, as well as a researcher, observing the pedagogical process. This in-between status allowed me to “experience” the pedagogy of my participants from a student location; I read the homework assignments and took class notes on the material. I also documented the participant’s teaching performance, and classroom phenomena, as they occurred in the progression of the lesson. This in-between status differed between my two case participants; I left the preference for announcing, explaining, and/or ignoring my presence in the classroom and on campus up to them.

One participant felt it most comfortable to announce that I was visiting the classroom periodically to “do teaching observation.” This was not unusual for her classroom, given that visitors frequented her classes for a myriad of reasons, including tenure and promotion review and prospective student visits. We discussed

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 14.

¹⁷⁷ Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 285-86.

that students likely had visitors in their other classes as well. The large education program at the institution also meant that students probably had some understanding that their peers were being required to “observe” classroom teaching. This participant did not feel that I was particularly notable or suspicious and felt comfortable with maintaining anonymity in this way.

The other case participant felt it most appropriate not to announce my presence at all, and to simply let me blend into the class as if I were a student. Although *she* knew I was a researcher, her students did not know my role and did not inquire. She also had a graduate teaching assistant, whose behaviors and presence seemed to match mine and who likely made my presence even less obvious. Due to the large number of students in one of the lecture classes I frequented, and enrollment fluctuation in the other, the participant and I both assumed there was little if any attention paid to my “attendance.”

Although I participated by taking notes, taking a worksheet, then passing the stack on to the next student, and engaging non-verbally in the goings on (laughing at a joke by the professor, nodding if I had seen the movie mentioned by a student, etc.), I did not answer questions, participate in group activities, or “present” my homework assignments. I would simply sit quietly at the edge of the room, still in proximity to the rest of the class, writing in my notebook. Indeed, I was never the only person on the periphery or participating in any given activity. There were students who behaved as I did at times for myriad reasons. All of these activities were fairly informal, and my lack of participation did not seem to attract attention. I characterize the method of

research in the classroom as “observation”; beyond the classroom, however, I employed the more specific method of shadowing.

Case Element Four: Shadowing

Most often used in management and organizational research, I adapted the method of shadowing and applied it in this case study. Although the classroom site is critical to the study of Black queer feminist pedagogues, many things happened beyond the classroom, out in the campus community, in the department hallway, on errands to the library, and so on. In her article, “‘Being There’ the Experience of Shadowing a British Muslim Hospital Chaplain,” Sophie Gilliat-Ray describes shadowing as “a method for gathering empirical data within qualitative ethnographic fieldwork-based research.”¹⁷⁸ In relation to ethnography, she notes:

Where ethnography typically involves some degree of participant observation in the world of a particular group of people, an organization, or a social practice over time, shadowing is ethnographic work where the focus of attention is upon the daily practice of a single individual living and working within a complex institutional setting.¹⁷⁹

Focusing on individual Black queer feminist pedagogues is central to the construction of this project’s case studies. Whereas an interview offers the researcher the opportunity to explore the information that interviewees want to tell in response to the research questions, shadowing or ‘being there’ over a period of time offers the opportunity to gather data of a qualitatively different kind.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Sophie Gilliat-Ray, “‘Being There’ the Experience of Shadowing a British Muslim Hospital Chaplain,” *Qualitative Research* 11, no. 5 (October 2011), 470.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 471.

Shadowing is related to but also distinctive from both participant observation as discussed in the previous section, and non-participant observation in which the observer is completely removed from the activities being observed. Unlike a participant who is an actual or honorary member, proactively involved in the activities being studied, or passive non-participants, the shadow participates by being present and is allowed to do what observers do rather than perform an action as a “member.”¹⁸¹ This research project allowed me as the “shadow” to simply be present during the events of the day. I did not participate in interactions with faculty or students; rather, I observed them as a shadow.

In “Studying Actions in Context: A Qualitative Shadowing Method for Organizational Research,” Seonaidh McDonald describes shadowing as a research technique that “involves a researcher closely following a member of an organization over an extended period of time.” In both cases, I would arrive on campus at least an hour before the first class in the morning and shadow through late afternoon, when the participants had completed their teaching and office hours and other commitments on campus. McDonald prescribes that throughout the shadowing period, the researcher should ask questions, which will prompt a running commentary from the person being shadowed, some for clarification, and others to reveal intent or context.¹⁸² I was able to ask about, or participants freely revealed their thoughts about, an incoming phone call from a colleague or partner, another faculty member passing on the sidewalk, or a student email coming in as their inboxes chimed.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 471-72.

¹⁸² Seonaidh McDonald, “Studying Actions in Context: A Qualitative Shadowing Method for Organizational Research,” *Qualitative Research* 5, no. 4 (2005), 456.

Shadowing also allowed me as the researcher to become closely connected with the case participants, spending many additional hours together on campus informally chatting between classes, sharing tea, coffee, or a meal; as well as the opportunity to observe the larger context of the campus as experienced by the participant. Shadowing allowed me to learn much more about the habits, preferences, and personal lives of the participants, knowledge which led us in compelling directions during the more formal interview sessions.

The main advantage of shadowing, as described in *Shadowing: And Other Techniques for Doing Fieldwork in Modern Societies*, is by definition its mobility. Czarniawska-Joerges remarks that shadowing creates a particular duo – the person shadowed and the person doing the shadowing; thus, the dynamics of cognition become complex. The “duo” creates a state of mutual observation and establishes similarities and differences. However, the focus of the duo is on the movements of the person shadowed, and the double perception of the activities followed; the researcher guesses (and asks about) perceptions of the events as well.¹⁸³

In shadowing Black queer feminist pedagogues, being a “duo” harbored the possibility for attracting attention. The rarity, or perhaps spectacle, of seeing two Black women (at least one of whom was known to be or appeared to perform in the role of faculty) walking together or having lunch on a predominantly white institution’s (PWI) campus was one factor; let alone two Black lesbian women (at least one of whom was known to be or appeared to perform in the role of lesbian – and myself, the attentive companion, by association) may have been notable to some.

¹⁸³ Barbara Czarniawska-Joerges, *Shadowing: And Other Techniques for Doing Fieldwork in Modern Societies* (Copenhagen Business School Press DK, 2007), 56.

Czarniawska-Joerges comments on the challenge of blending in in order not to attract attention to the activity of shadowing; although minimized, this can not always be completely avoided. In this case, the participants and I simply became the “Other,” two in number, in predominantly white heterosexual spaces. Difficulties with blending in include negotiating and re-negotiating access (being somewhere I should not be, the faculty copy room for instance), note-taking while on the move, and negotiating the blurred lines between participant observation and shadowing.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, all of these circumstances had to be negotiated and/or had some impact on the data collected. McDonald notes that the observer effect cannot be ruled out nor measured;¹⁸⁵ thus, there is no way to know how my shadowing may have in some way shaped the events or interactions that occurred during the practice of shadowing participants.

However, I did practice stillness and attempted to be as unobtrusive as possible, which for me as a very outgoing and animated person was quite a challenge. I employed a technique that McDonald describes as “loitering with intent — without being conspicuous.”¹⁸⁶ If students appeared for office hours, or lingered after class to discuss a paper, I would quietly slip out of the office or classroom and loiter close by, in the hallway with my notebook. When participants engaged in conversation with other faculty or staff, in order to avoid introduction, I would linger a few steps behind as they greeted each other, then loiter around a corner or adjacent corridor, or on a bench or garden wall while they chatted. Not surprisingly, academic buildings are

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 55-56.

¹⁸⁵ McDonald, “Studying Actions in Context,” 459.

¹⁸⁶ Gilliat-Ray, “Being There,” 471.

very accommodating in this practice, as if deliberately designed to create spaces in nooks and crannies for the act of “waiting” to speak to someone of great importance and intelligence.

The richness of the ethnographic data gathered through interviewing, observation, and shadowing, leads to questions about how to present this data and what methods of analysis best suit the abundance of information and the specificity of each case. For the purposes of this project, the method of portraiture provided a solution for how to present and analyze the data collected.

Case Element Five: Portraiture

Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot developed the “art and science” of portraiture, describing it as a method of inquiry and documentation in the social sciences that seeks to combine systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression, blending art and science, humanistic sensibilities and scientific rigor, designed to capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural contest, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences.¹⁸⁷ This strategy is well suited for composing the narrative portions within my case studies, which seek to express the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of Black queer feminist pedagogues and pedagogies.

This strategy combines artistry with a commitment to address the research needs and requirements of social science inquiry. Lawrence-Lightfoot comments on the emerging desire of researchers to merge the realms of art and science in an effort to (1) represent the nuance and complexity of the whole and speak about things in a

¹⁸⁷ Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffmann Davis, *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 3.

way that resists reductionism and abstraction, (2) challenge the disciplinary tyranny of the academy, and (3) build bridges between theory and practice, research and action.¹⁸⁸ This project incorporates these values, acknowledging that the research here in its focus on specific individuals, indeed resists reductionism and abstraction, exceeds academic borderlines and boundaries by combining qualitative methods of observation with personal narrative, and builds bridges between Black queer feminist theory and teaching practices.

Providing context in the course of data analysis is critical, particularly in regard to the intersectional aspects of identity and performance when exploring Black queer feminist pedagogies. Lawrence-Lightfoot writes:

Rather than viewing context as a source of distortion, [portraitists] see it as a resource for understanding. The narrative, then, is always embedded in a particular context, including physical settings, cultural rituals, norms, and values, and historical periods . . . [The portraitist] is interested not only in producing complex, subtle description in context, but also in searching for the central story, developing a convincing and authentic narrative.¹⁸⁹

It is these characteristics that have attracted me to the portraiture method. I have painted “portraits” of each of my case subjects, as well as my own “self-portrait,” in order to offer in-depth descriptions and provide context for each case.

I then offer narrative examples for analysis from each case, which together constitute an *aesthetic whole*. Lawrence-Lightfoot defines the *aesthetic whole* as

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 7.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 12.

inclusive of context, voice, relationship, and emergent themes. She notes, “In developing this aesthetic whole, we face tensions inherent in blending art and science, analysis and narrative, description and interpretation, structure and texture.”¹⁹⁰ The method of portraiture is also concerned with the feminist methodological element of reflexivity and the recognition of one’s subjectivity. The portraitist must “sketch herself into the context,” and assert perspective as a researcher, inviting “the reader to join actively in the journey of discovery of understanding.”¹⁹¹ With portraiture, the person of the researcher – even when vigorously controlled – is more evident and more visible than in any other research form.¹⁹² Thus, portraiture is aligned with feminist methodologies in ways that allow me to be reflexive and creative, and to give voice to the participants in their own image.

Making the Case for Employing Multiple Methods

The methodology for this project uses ethnography, interviewing, observation, shadowing, and portraiture to create two case studies. Having reviewed these multiple methods and situated them within the context of the case study, I present my case study research design.

Research Design: Feminist Case Study

Feminist case study refers to research that “focuses on a single case or single issue” and that can illustrate ideas, explain the process of development over time, show the limits of generalizations, explore uncharted issues by starting with a limited case, pose provocative questions, and be utilized as a tool of feminist research to

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 243.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 67.

¹⁹² Ibid, 13.

“document history and generate theory.”¹⁹³ Reinharz points to the work of Bernice Carroll, a feminist historian, who warns, “feminist theory is impoverished without case studies.”¹⁹⁴ This project is an intervention into feminist theory as it investigates body, identity, and pedagogy, while centering the Black queer feminist pedagogue. Reinharz goes on to lay out the three major purposes for feminist case studies: (1) generating a theory, (2) analyzing the change in a phenomenon over time, and (3) analyzing the significance of a phenomenon for future events and analyzing the relationships among parts of a phenomenon.¹⁹⁵ Although the last two principles may apply, I have focused on the first, “generating a theory,” as I explore the applications of my theoretical framework for a Black queer feminist pedagogy.

The Multiple-Case Design

I have selected the multiple-case design for this project and observe three cases within this framework: two case studies of Black queer feminist pedagogues and one self-study of my own pedagogical project. In his text *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, Robert Yin writes, “The evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust.”¹⁹⁶ Reinharz also observes that individual feminist case studies are embedded in a theoretical perspective to permit analysis as well as description, and that these cases are sometimes combined in order to examine the relation between

¹⁹³ Reinharz, *Feminist Methods*, 164, 167, 174.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 164. See also Bernice Carroll, *Liberating Women's History: Theoretical and Critical Essays*, 3rd Printing (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976).

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 46.

cases and particular social structures and processes.¹⁹⁷ Drawing from the fields of critical and feminist pedagogies, feminist theory, and queer theory, I employ a theoretical perspective that relies on the description as well as the analysis, and finally, produces theory.

Multiple case studies require replication logic, or the literal replication of the framework used for both cases, rather than sampling logic. Yin writes, “Each case must be carefully selected and the replication of procedures should develop a rich theoretical framework that states under what conditions a particular phenomenon is likely to be found.”¹⁹⁸ Replication can be used to predict similar results or to produce contrasting results for predictable reasons. Yin encourages researchers to settle for two or three case study replications in the instance of multiple case design, when the research topic demands a less excessive degree of certainty.¹⁹⁹ I have selected a three-case design for this reason. In using the three-case model, Yin posits that researchers have the benefit of analytic conclusions drawn from at least two separate cases, thus strengthening one’s findings. He writes:

Even if you can only do a “two-case” case study, your chances of doing a good case study will be better than using a single-case design; the analytic benefits from having two cases may be substantial. Even with two cases, you have the possibility of direct replication and analytic conclusions independently arising from two cases will be more powerful than a single case. If under these varied circumstances

¹⁹⁷ Reinharz, *Feminist Methods*, 169-72.

¹⁹⁸ Yin, *Case Study Research*, 47.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 46, 51.

you still can arrive at common conclusions from both cases, they will have immeasurably expanded the external generalizability of your findings, again compared to those from a single case alone.²⁰⁰

Although my central purpose is not to establish a firm generalizability for Black queer feminist pedagogy, “generating and testing a theory” in line with the Reinharz model for case study is my aim. I have used the case study as my primary method and included the multiple method approach, using ethnography, interviewing, observation, shadowing, and portraiture for both cases in order to substantiate and expand upon my claims. I have theorized the necessity for Black queer feminist theory, and hypothesized the importance of embodiment in Black queer feminist pedagogy as a specific contribution to that theory.

Case Selection

This study focuses on the intersections of race, gender, sexual orientation, and the deployment of pedagogies through Black queer feminist women’s embodiment and performance. Thus, the participants embody these characteristics and identities. Two case subjects were identified, each of whom committed to participating in this project. “The goal of the screening procedure is to be sure that you identify cases properly prior to formal data collection.”²⁰¹ Each case study subject was known to me through professional networks and was approached informally concerning participation. Both candidates are well suited to the parameters of the dissertation and were excited about their inclusion in such a project.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 53.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 78.

Sample Constraints

This research project uses two case studies and one self-study to produce three cases. Thus, this is not a project in which findings are meant to be generalizable; rather the “case-study refers to research that focuses on a single case or single issue, in contrast to studies that seek generalizations through comparative analysis or compilation of a large number of instances.”²⁰² According to Reinharz, feminist researchers select the case they will study in order to illustrate a particular point of theory that may be posed as a question,²⁰³ and instead of generalizability, they look for specificity, exceptions, and completeness.²⁰⁴ Reinharz also contends:

Some feminist researchers have found that social science’s emphasis on generalizations has obscured phenomena important to particular groups, including women. Thus, case studies are essential for putting women on the map of social life. . . . The power of the case study to convey vividly the dimensions of a social phenomenon or individual life is power that feminist researchers want to utilize.²⁰⁵

Case studies are needed to represent the diversity of women as well. The three cases presented in this project delve into specificity and explore the ways in which the body, identity, and performance function as “equipment” for teaching and learning by naming and examining how Black queer feminist pedagogies are deployed in the college classroom. I maintain that exploring and theorizing the specificity of Black queer feminist pedagogies produces knowledge that can then be applied as a

²⁰² Reinharz., *Feminist Methods*, 164.

²⁰³ Ibid., 165.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 174.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

framework for studying the intersection of pedagogy and identity in ways that can be practiced broadly across disciplines and social locations by examining embodiment, identity, and performance in the college classroom.

Anonymity

For the purposes of this project, each case subject uses a pseudonym to shield her identity. In the case study portrait, I provide generalizations about their institutions and courses, but will not name them. The most common rationale for using anonymity is to protect the real case and its real identities; and to protect against the issuance of a case report affecting the subsequent actions of those that were studied. Although anonymity may restrict access to important background information about the case, and the mechanics of composing the case may be more difficult, disguising the names of a case or individual may be necessary when the case is on a controversial topic. Evelyn Hammonds warns: “The hyper-visibility of Black women academics and the contemporary fascination with what bell hooks calls the ‘commodification of Otherness’ means that Black women today find themselves precariously perched in the academy.”²⁰⁶ According to hooks, the Black woman student or professor is almost always at odds with the existing academic structure, which has not become accustomed to the Black female presence or physicality.²⁰⁷ Given the discussion of sexual identity, racial identity, and gender, as well as the vulnerability of Black women in the academy, it has been necessary to shield the identities of both case subjects.

²⁰⁶ Evelyn Hammonds, “Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality: The Problematic of Silence,” in *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, eds. J. Price and M. Shildrick (New York: Routledge, 1999), 99.

²⁰⁷ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 193.

Research Site and Situated Context

Each case study took place on the case participants' campus; centering the classroom, the research site and its situated context went beyond the classroom to include other locations such as the office, the student union pathway, the snack cart, and other locations frequented during shadowing. Situated context can be defined as the actual place where a phenomenon is studied and where the teaching and living occurs, e.g. the classroom, school, program.²⁰⁸ Articulating the situated context in which the teaching takes place is critical to self-study. With the classroom at the heart of the study, the case study portrait illustrates multiple significant locations on campus.

Case Study Procedures

The two case studies were conducted over the course of the fall 2011 semester, and included six classroom visits over the course of the sixteen-week semester for each case. During site visits, I reviewed the current semester's syllabi, course materials, and lesson plans with the participants, and observed the performance of pedagogy in the classroom. Each participant gave three interviews and allowed me to shadow her for the duration of my visit.

The Interview

This project utilized semi-structured in-depth interviews; each case subject participated in three interviews lasting between one to two hours, for a total of six interviews. The only equipment was a digital recorder, used with the consent of case subjects. All information was recorded in such a manner that subjects cannot be

²⁰⁸ Samaras and Freese, *A Self-Study of Teaching Practices Primer*, 13.

identified. No subject names, departments, programs, institutions, or course titles are used in the study. All materials refer to the pseudonyms selected by case subjects.

In *The Art Of Case Study Research*, Stake makes clear:

Case study fieldwork regularly takes the research in unexpected directions, so too much commitment in advance is problematic. So the researcher makes a flexible list of questions, progressively redefines issues, and seizes opportunities to learn the unexpected.”²⁰⁹

Using this response-guided approach with participants, I prepared the following thematic questions; I then followed the participants in their discussion, returning to the interview script only after exhausting all avenues of the previous inquiry.

Demographic Questions: How would you characterize yourself in terms of your social identities? (e.g. racial, national, and ethnic identifications, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, etc.) Which of these aspects of your identity do you think of as especially salient in your classrooms? Why?

Identity Intersections and Complexities: In your experience, how do these identities intersect with and co-constitute one another? How do you reveal these identities to others? How do you believe others see you with regard to these intersecting ‘categories’ of identity?

Using Personal Experience: When teaching women’s studies and/or other related interdisciplinary fields with subject matter regarding race, gender, and sexuality, do you use personal experiences that reflects your own sexual identity,

²⁰⁹ Robert Stake, *The Art Of Case Study Research*, 1st ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 28-29.

racial identity, and/or gender as examples or teaching tools? If so, how? If not, why not?

Coming Out in the Classroom: Do you “come out,” or enunciate a queer sexual identity in the classroom, and if so, how, when, and why? Is an enunciation of sexual identity, racial identity, and/or gender a part of your pedagogical project? How does this manifest itself on the syllabus and/or in your course design?

Performing Pedagogy through the Body: How do you acknowledge the body and utilize the element of performance in the classroom? For example, does the body function as a “text” that inspires teachable moments?

In the same vein as the response-guided approach, Stake lays out a framework for redefining research questions during the course of fieldwork. First, a “topical question” leads to a “foreshadowed problem” that hypothesizes the reasons for a particular phenomenon. The “evolved issue pursued” can then be addressed by a follow-up question, formed with more knowledge of the situation. Finally, an assertion can be made once the case has provided further information on the topic in question. In this way, researchers are able to remain open to the nuances of increasing complexity.²¹⁰ I incorporated this technique throughout the interview process.

Classroom Observation

My case studies included observing two semester-long courses taught twice a week by each of the participants. I visited the classroom of each participant for full class periods of her choice over the course of the sixteen-week semester; three visits

²¹⁰ Ibid., 21.

for each course for a total of six classroom visits per participant and twelve total classroom visits.

During these classroom visits, I observed the uses of course materials, applications of lesson plans, and the deployment of pedagogies. No recording equipment was used during classroom visits. My classroom observation rubric examined the following categories: appearance, verbal behavior and interactions, physical behavior and gestures, personal space, traffic/ movement, people who stand out, and other.²¹¹ Using a field journal and a classroom observation rubric, I documented classroom proceedings.

Making the Case for Self-Study

The case participants and case studies described up till now in this section constitute two of the three cases explored in this project. The third case examined is a case study of my own pedagogical project, which was undertaken prior to going into the field to complete case study research. The following section explores the method of self-study and lays out the self-study design for this project.

Research Design: Self-Study in Education

I identify as a Black woman, a lesbian, queer, a feminist, a scholar, and a teacher—thus living and teaching at the intersections of all these identities. I include my experiences as a self-study to contradict the academy's and the classroom's mind/body split. I invest in my own corporeal presence, the narratives I construct about it, and the intersections they evoke with my students. I recognize that these are my interpretations, remembrances, journals, and conceptions – situated within the

²¹¹ Adapted from Family Health International, "Qualitative Research Methods," 20.

context of my own experience. I utilize the self-study model to analyze and learn from my experiences and to theorize a Black queer feminist pedagogy as it pertains to my own work as well as the work of others.

In their text *Self- Study of Teaching Practices Primer*, Anastasia Samaras and Anne Freese remark, “Self-study examines the practical and brings the theoretical underpinnings of one’s work to the forefront.”²¹² The practice of self-study in education is a teacher’s systematic and critical examination of their actions and their contexts as a path to develop a more consciously driven mode of professional activity. Self-study involves a thoughtful look at texts read, the self as text, the experiences a teacher has, people she has known, and ideas she has considered.²¹³ This education model of self-study is a core method for my project.

The self-study of teacher education practices has a moral and teleological component. In his article, “Validity and Quality in Self-Study,” Alan Feldman describes the way in which researchers go beyond the study of the practice of teaching, also desiring to improve teaching in ways that will affect what happens in the classroom.²¹⁴ Unpacking the practical, exploring my own theoretical underpinnings, and exploring how my pedagogical project can be improved by examining body, identity, and praxis is a core element of this self-study. Samaras and Freese use the term “self-study methodology” to refer to a stance toward research questions that employs many methods. These methods include reflexive autobiography, journaling, memory work, and personal narratives. These methods can

²¹² Samaras and Freese, *A Self- Study of Teaching Practices Primer*, 47.

²¹³ Ibid, 11-12.

²¹⁴ Feldman, “Validity and Quality in Self-Study,” 27.

enhance teaching practice and provide evidence within their specific context to enhance understanding their practice.²¹⁵ Using the model adapted from Samaras and Freese, my self-study plan was conducted as follows:²¹⁶

Personal Portrait

I begin each case study with a portrait of each participant. Self-study also includes a method for thinking through the personal by using a “personal history self-study” perspective. Within the context of self-study the personal history is the study of influence of one’s culture, context, and history on one’s teaching practices.²¹⁷ This method is useful as I apply it to my own racialized and queer cultural, contextual, and historical contexts. Using the portraiture method, this personal history becomes my self-study portrait and aligns with the portraits of case study participants.

This personal history/autobiography statement reflects on demographics, a short personal history, a history of teaching, and a teaching philosophy. Following the format of the case study portraits, my self-study questions mirror those used in the case study interviews.

Review and Compose: Teaching Journals, Memory Work, and Narratives

After considering the questions above, I reviewed my teaching journals, engaged in memory work, and drafted narratives that illustrated or contended with the research questions in a format that matches narratives and examples in my case studies. Just as interviews, observation, and shadowing provided data for each case

²¹⁵ Samaras and Freese, *A Self- Study of Teaching Practices Primer*, 56-57.

²¹⁶ Samaras and Freese, *A Self- Study of Teaching Practices Primer*, 66-68.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 7.

study, these narratives served as my self-study data, representing specific events and examples of particular pedagogical vignettes.

Case Analysis

Articulating case findings can be unique to the researcher's case design. My case design findings are reported in a number of ways, including discussing both case subjects individually using portraiture, and drawing examples from interviews, as well as a cross case analysis that looks at similarities, differences in experience, and pedagogical approach, both for case participants and for my own self-study. Yin affirms:

Multiple-case studies often contain both the individual case studies and some cross-case chapters. This report will contain multiple narratives, usually presented as separate chapters, or sections about each of the cases singly. In addition to these individual case narratives, your report will also contain a chapter or section covering the cross-case analysis and results.²¹⁸

I follow this model of reporting, presenting two separate individual cases, then including my self-study as a third case in a single chapter, followed by a second cross case analysis chapter. This model allows me to present the depth, nuance, and detail of each case, then make connections and point to the distinctions between cases.

In the following chapter, "Black Queer Feminist Pedagogies in the Classroom and On Campus: Case Studies and Self-Study," both case studies and the self-study are examined individually. First, each of the three participants is described using the

²¹⁸ Ibid., 147.

method of portraiture. Then I provide an analysis of particular thematic elements of each case as derived from interviews, portraiture, and shadowing. I consider the individual characteristics of each pedagogue and focus on the deployment of pedagogies through Black queer feminist women's embodiment and performance. In Chapter Four, "Cross-Case Analysis," I emphasize the commonalities and assess the differences among the cases. This model allows me to make comparative connections and point to the distinctions between cases. The cases considered together set the stage for proposing a theoretical framework for Black queer feminist pedagogies in the final chapter.

Chapter 3 — Black Queer Feminist Pedagogies in the Classroom and On Campus: Case Studies and Self-Study

This chapter introduces Dr. Mariposa and Professor Deborah, and inquiries into my own pedagogical project, in three separate cases, providing initial description and analysis for each case study and including my self-study as a third “case.” It is significant that my own self-study was done prior to going into the field. Many of the questions I had and assumptions I made based on my own self-study were not borne out in the case studies, particularly in relation to the ways in which my participants articulated, negotiated, or rejected enunciating their identities in different settings. Unlike my own pedagogical practice of teaching through articulated identities, case participants were less invested in enunciating their own identities as a part of the pedagogical project, and were more guarded about discussing their identities in the classroom, and at times, in other academic settings. What I see as common to all three cases, however, are the ways in which negotiating the body’s explicit and implicit identities remained a part of the pedagogical project, and how the more legible performances and expressions of identity created disruptions, were used as tools, or inspired teachable moments in all three cases.

The participants in this study selected their own pseudonyms: Dr. Mariposa and Professor Deborah. It is significant to note that students only addressed Dr. Mariposa using her title and her last name. Professor Deborah’s students addressed her as “Professor,” or used only her first name. My students only address me using my first name, Mel. Gender identity and expression also emerged as an important factor among the cases. The terms “butch,” “masculine/masculinity,” “femme,” and “feminine/femininity” are used as case participants identify and describe themselves.

Dr. Mariposa identifies as a Butch and described her gender expression as masculine. For her, this included the wearing of men's clothing, the movement of her body, and the tone and tempo of her voice. Professor Deborah describes herself as consciously "mixing" masculine and feminine, noting that this act of mixing is "intentional." I identify and present as "fem/feminine," both referencing lesbian subcultural subjectivities and more conventionally feminine characteristics such as dress, mannerisms, and roles. Discussions and descriptions of gender identity and expression included in the cases are heavily reliant on how the case participants describe themselves. This project does not provide explicit definitions of gender identity or expression; rather, discussions of gender identity and expression here use the words and perceptions of the pedagogues themselves.²¹⁹

Drawing from interviews, classroom observation, shadowing, portraiture, and self-study methods, I consider the individual characteristics of each pedagogue and focus on the deployment of pedagogies through Black queer feminist women's embodiment and performance. Each case also explores topics related to the Black queer feminist experience in the academy, drawing on our own words.

Case One: Dr. Mariposa

Yeah, [I'm] a genuine article of this [intersectionality] thing.

[Students] were not expecting a black person, they weren't expecting someone so young, and they weren't expecting this masculinity.

— Dr. Mariposa

²¹⁹ See Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, Harris and Crocker, *Femme*; Lisa Walker, *Looking Like What You Are: Sexual Style, Race, and Lesbian Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); and "How to Recognize a Lesbian: The Cultural Politics of Looking Like What You Are," *Signs* 18, no. 4 (Summer 1993): 866–890.

Portrait

Dr. Mariposa is a tall handsome African-American butch woman whose presence quietly fills the room. Always in a freshly pressed oxford button down shirt, dark slacks, and leather loafers or lace up leather dress shoes, she saunters into the classroom with confidence and control. Although she does not greet her students upon entering the classroom, her solid frame in the doorway is read as a signal for them to settle into their chairs and rummage through their backpacks for their notebooks.

She starts up the computer and projector, and then spreads out her notes on the table at the front of the room. The once boisterous room of fifty student voices becomes almost silent. A few whispers remain, inquiring about the length of their neighbor's writing assignment, "Hey . . . Did you finish the paper? How long was yours?" and asking, "Man, you got a pen I can use?" At 10 a.m. on the dot she begins, "All right class, let's get started," or "OK, everyone, draw your attention to the outline on the screen."

Dr. Mariposa teaches at a state research institution on the east coast, a predominately white institution (PWI) with few Black students or faculty. The campus is large, industrial, and impersonal save for a few timeworn buildings with towering white columns. Dr. Mariposa rarely socializes or comes to campus on days that she is not teaching; she commutes from a nearby city. She describes herself as Black, lesbian, feminist, middle class, and butch. She notes that her gender expression is read through the lens of Black masculinity, and that students correctly read her queer butch gender identity as a marker of lesbian sexual orientation. She is a junior

faculty member weighing a bid for tenure against a plan to move to another institution.

During the study, I visited Dr. Mariposa's classrooms as she taught Social Constructions of Gender (SCG), an introductory course with fifty students, and Identity Studies: Examining Race, Class, and Gender (ISE), an upper level seminar course of 15-20 students.²²⁰

The Politics of Gender Expression

Dr. Mariposa often thinks about the ways in which other people "read her" body on campus. In our interviews, she cited her physical appearance and gender expression and pointed out how her Afro-centric hairstyle, particularly on a PWI campus, might act as an indicator of her politics and her age and is an element in how her gender identity is received. As she described her ways of expressing Blackness, she said:

Um, well I certainly read as Black; but a particular kind of Black because I do have locks, which marks me as a certain type of Black person I'm sure, to students. I mean I think it reads as young, I think it reads as hip. Um, but it also could read as militant, I'm not sure. I don't think I've ever had a recoil reaction from it. It's not as uncommon as it used to be, but I think it makes some type of statement, more maybe that I'm political in some way, for students.

²²⁰ The course titles, Social Constructions of Gender (SCG) and Identity Studies: Examining Race, Class, and Gender (ISE) have been modified for the purposes of maintaining anonymity. The substituted titles reflect the subject matter, and the descriptions provided are representative of the course itself.

Dr. Mariposa does not see herself as militant; in fact, she describes herself as someone who is “naturally more retiring,” she says. She is “naturally reserved” personally and in regard to her politics. Her unobtrusive demeanor frames how she “comes across in spaces” and she tries her best “not to have a lot of attention.” She notes that being reserved has mixed results when it comes to her attempt to deflect attention. She concludes, “people pay a lot of attention *to* me . . . it’s just that being [reserved is] my comfort zone.”

As we discuss Dr. Mariposa’s butch gender identity, we delve into how she sees herself expressing her gender, and how this is interpreted or erased by her campus community. When asked to describe the ways in which she performs masculinity, she says:

I think I read as masculine to people. I mean, I wear men’s clothes and things that deliberately try to look masculine, and I think that comes across to students. Not much jewelry . . . I wear earrings and a watch but no other jewelry . . . Uh, you know, um I think they are put off by it — at first. You know, I mean, I’ve definitely come into . . . I mean I think I notice it more in [the] smaller class [ISE] . . . And there are a lot of women in the class. There are a number of them who identify as feminist . . . So, a lot of women in the school that I have seen are more traditionally feminine.”

In the classroom, Dr. Mariposa recognizes that her stature and aesthetic draw attention, particularly for students who are “put off” by her butch expression. During visits to her smaller class of 15 to 20 students, I made note that she very rarely stood

up or went to the front of the room. This was markedly different from her larger class of 50, where she stood at the front, walking the length of the room, back and forth.

During classroom visits, I noted ways in which physical negotiations of power were connected with masculine gender expression. Usually extraordinarily patient with students while awaiting a response to a question, Dr. Mariposa has several physical cues to indicate frustration, or to show that “time is up.” In her class of 50, I observed the following:

While discussing Miliann Kang’s “The Managed Hand,” students found it easy to discuss the race and class of the Black and white salon clientele, but were hesitant to describe the service providers as Korean immigrant women, as discussed in the text. She asks for the third time, “Who are the women working in the salon?” The students shuffle in their seats and gaze at their books blankly. Silence. Dr. Mariposa puts her right hand high on the wall and leans on it looking away from the class for a long moment. Turning back to the class, she makes her other hand into a fist and places it on her hip and plants her left foot with a loud impatient thud. She stands at the front of the room with a wide stance, scanning the room intensely. Immediately, five hands go up.²²¹

Dr. Mariposa responded to my inquiry about the difference between her physical and active presence in the larger class, and her stationary performance in the small class. Her practice of remaining seated derived from a pedagogical commitment to a more egalitarian classroom. She preferred sitting in a circle with a small class,

²²¹ See Miliann Kang, *The Managed Hand: Race, Gender, and the Body in Beauty Service Work* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

taking up less space and giving off less of “the body’s information.” She felt conspicuous in such a small classroom with fewer students; almost half were male in contrast to her other course, with 10 male students out of 50:

I think part of it is that I sit down in [the smaller class] so I’m not doing so much with my body to be read as masculine. So I think there’s less information to attach to the masculinity in that class. It’s the nature of the class, you know, a seminar class, and I try to have them sit in a circle so we can all see each other.

I found it interesting that Dr. Mariposa valued sitting in a circle so that everyone in the room could “see each other” (a pedagogical choice discussed more fully in “Feminist Practices below), but at the same time did not stand up or position herself at the front of the room in order to limit expressing “the body’s information” about her masculinity. Although she saw herself as not “doing so much” with her body in this class, I saw her masculinity as readily apparent while the class was seated in the circle, in ways that the students noticed.

Both tall and “rounded” as she describes herself, Dr. Mariposa sits sideways, in the small wooden, one-piece desk with her feet wide apart and shoulders spreading beyond the boundaries of the sturdy seat. I read this as an expression of her masculinity and power and note that students almost always sit one desk away from her on each side when space is available, or scoot their desk over to allow her more room. In my reading, this is less about avoiding sitting near the professor and more about the ways in which

masculine bodies are seen to claim and be deserving of more space than traditionally feminine ones.

Dr. Mariposa also frequently uses body language to cue students. Scooting forward on her chair and leaning out of the opening of the desk with her hands clasped and forearms on her knees signals that Dr. Mariposa is ready to comment; this stance literally puts her body into the center of the circle and student comments trail off as they wait for her to speak. Sitting back, arms folded on the desk or across her chest, signals time for open discussion; when she is in this “listening pose,” students take the floor and a natural conversation flows without the raising of hands. Dr. Mariposa leans forward and firmly plants both feet on the floor with a thud.

This signals an important or passionate point; students take careful notes and politely raise their hands for her to repeat her comments to be sure they have it down. In Dr. Mariposa’s case, I find that students are very responsive to physical cues, and that she is very consistent in both the ways those cues are expressed, and their intention, and in producing the desired outcome.

Notably, Dr. Mariposa said that in other contexts, unlike the classroom, her butch identity was invisible to or ignored by her male colleagues. “I think the men that I interact with see me just as, just as another woman, and I think they erase my masculinity, even though I think it’s obvious for folks. I think I’m just a little lady for them.” Being perceived this way feels uncomfortable and upsets her. Male faculty say things like, “oh, young lady, how are you doing young lady?” she reports; that’s “not

how I identify at all, but for them, I'm just young lady." She wrestles with what it would mean to correct her colleagues:

It grates on me because my masculinity is a key part of my identity, but I don't know how to assert that. I'm not invested in kind of [saying] "No! I'm not a young lady!" and you know it's not *that* important to me, but yeah, so for them, I think my masculinity is erased for them. Except for one colleague that I have in African American Studies . . . we've had ongoing talks since I've been here, talking about hip hop and masculinity.

For Dr. Mariposa, this Black male colleague has an "unspoken" understanding of her butch identity; she feels he recognizes that she is a "masculine Black person," although that's never been stated. She notes, "I think it's there in the room when we talk about it, so I think he wrestles with my masculinity in a certain kind of way, if, behind the scenes." Other than this one colleague, she is continually seen and addressed by her male colleagues as "a young lady," whether by insult or invisibility.

Dr. Mariposa and I explored the implications of her intersectional identities in the classroom. One of her first responses to this line of inquiry was the initial shock her body and identity posed to students meeting her for the first time:

This student population, they are predominantly white, and a lot of them are from the suburbs, so they have, a lot of them may not have met very many Black people. So, [students] were not expecting a black person. They weren't expecting someone so young, and they weren't expecting this masculinity. It's like [Speaking as student waving

hands], “Whoa! What’s happening! Like Ooooooh! I’m not sure I’m OK with this!” [Laughs]. Yeah, I feel them kind of do a double take like [Speaking and gesturing as student with hands up shrugging shoulders], “Oh! She’s the professor? SHE’S the professor?”

Overcoming the expectations of students is a major barrier for Dr. Mariposa, particularly at the beginning of the semester. For Dr. Mariposa, the critical first class meetings are as much an exercise confirming that her body and identity represent “the professor,” as it is about helping her students master foundational material:

And I still, I think as the class progresses . . . where we are talking about gender, um, you know I think they are trying to figure out what’s OK to notice about the professor because she isn’t traditionally feminine. And we are talking about gender, so . . . what’s ok, [Speaking as student], “What is she going to be offended by?” It’s in the room in a certain way. I think for that class in particular [ISE]; less so for the bigger classes that I teach.

In her courses, which specifically center on and interrogate gender, Dr. Mariposa points to the ways in which her own gender expression becomes a text to be considered in the classroom. The students not only focus on the assigned text, but also question her textual body. She senses student questions about, “What’s OK?” or offensive. Thus, the embodied presence of Dr. Mariposa’s subversive gender expression, “in the room,” is canvas for interrogating gender.

The Challenges of Teaching Intersections

As a feminist pedagogue, Dr. Mariposa teaches through the lens of intersectionality; however, she struggles with student recognition for her own intersectional identities. Dr. Mariposa names the ways in which her race, sex, and gender expression “pop” at different times, depending on the topic of the class. However, she notes that her race, more than any other dimension of identity, manifests as a “master status” in the eyes of her students:

I think my master status for students is just Black most of the time . . .

I mean, in [SCG] I think my gender . . . both my sex and my gender identity becomes more salient because of the kind of stuff I’m talking about. But, for other classes . . . for [ISE], I think I’m the Black person, I think I’m the professor talking about *x*, *y* and *z*. So yeah, [laughs]! Just without thinking about it much, I think it depends on the class, I think it depends on what I’m teaching.

Dr. Mariposa points to race as her master status, noting that she is seen as “the Black person,” unless the class is specifically addressing issues of gender. Significantly, in her estimation they do not see her as a Black “woman” in this situation, but as a Black “person.” When gender is addressed, she points to the recognition of the subversive elements of her gender, she notes that the students do not seem to focus on her identity as a Black woman:

[W]hen I teach intro . . . If I’m talking about gender, suddenly my gender pops . . . they might think like [speaking as student], “OH!

Well she's kinda' doing something funny with some gender right now!" [Laughs]

When read as "the Black person," or as "doing something funny with some gender" by her students, Dr. Mariposa notes that they fail to take an intersectional approach, even to her identity. "Well it's hard, I mean, they want to return to one identity or another, and I have to insist on intersectionality." Although she believes she embodies the concept of intersectionality, and she insists on her students using an intersectional analysis, she continues to see her students taking a singular approach. She admits she is not always able to foreground all intersections at once in the lesson, saying:

We are talking about, as much as we can, we are trying to bring in multiple identities. But even I don't always do it. There was a section in the lecture today about the Pascoe reading, and I left off the section where she says [masculinity is] raced. So when Black men are doing stuff about being good dancers and dressing well, that's not gonna' be called a fag because it's raced. I forgot it because I get, you know, so even for me it can be hard to keep all these balls in the air.²²²

In this instance, Dr. Mariposa did not expand upon a racial analysis of narrowly defined gender roles for men during the class meeting. However, when she does highlight race, she feels that her students object more strongly than with gender, and surprisingly, more than with sexuality:

²²² See C. J. Pascoe, *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

I think that's where the heat is, around race, I mean even though I do a whole bunch of queer stuff. You know, I was obviously on the side of the queer people in the movie [*Paris is Burning*], though I don't say that, I mean, you can tell I am on the side of the queer people. The tension, the kind of explosiveness is around race, and so because I'm also talking about anti-racist stuff, I think that's where they feel challenged. It's not that they're OK with gays or anything, it's just they don't feel as endangered about talking about stuff about gays, but race they do . . . And as much as I push them about race that's where they're going to buck back at me, about race, so that's why I think my master status is race. If I was a Black teacher who didn't talk anything about race and inequality, it may not necessarily be [my master status]. Maybe my gender would pop, maybe my sexuality would pop, but because I talk about racial inequality that's where it hits them.²²³

Because race is "where the heat is," Dr. Mariposa acknowledges that she is "much more out there with gender and sexuality stuff" in her classes "than with my racial politics." She points out the difficulty of teaching about race as a Black lesbian feminist butch woman without her students "shutting down" or becoming hostile towards her, or at the very least, towards the lessons and course materials:

I haven't figured out how to play in those waters yet in a way that doesn't cause students to shut down, to just become hostile and have an antagonistic relationship. So I do a whole lot more with, you know,

²²³ *Paris Is Burning*, dir. by Jennie Livingston (2005; Miramax, DVD).

um, pushing on queer theory and . . . you know having students go there with stuff rather than racial reparations, which is not something I'm . . .but you know . . . if I were I wouldn't do that. It feels a lot safer to go for pushing stuff about gender and sexuality than it feels like doing stuff with race. Even the tiniest kind of ripples in the water about race feel really hard to manage.

I asked Dr. Mariposa how she deals with racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise hostile comments in the classroom. She immediately revisited a comment made in the class period we had just concluded. The students were discussing experience with jobs that require physical labor, and one student characterized the Black males working with her at the mall as Santa's elves as "ghetto":

It's hard, it's hard, the student today was talking about the ghetto elves, and I have a reaction to that! And I haven't quite figured out how to respond to it, because I don't want to shut the student down, and say, "Well, that was racist and here's why!" But, she changed from "ghetto" to "thug" and I don't know if that's any better, she was trying, so that's a lot to carry. I mean this is a learning space and I want to be respectful of the students, of their process and where they are at the moment . . . at the same time I don't want to leave off the wall stuff unchallenged, and I don't know how to do that quite yet. But meanwhile it feels a certain kind of way for me, and I'm trying not to register or look appalled with something like that, when someone says

something, and you know, so that's emotional labor not to, not to wince like, "Oh! Not *Ghetto!*"

I immediately commented on an incident in another class following a screening of the film *Paris is Burning*. During the discussion, a student made openly derogatory comments regarding the transgender identities of some of the featured personalities in the documentary.

A Black female student comments on the intersection of class status and nonconforming gender presentation. I'm impressed; this observation is well thought out and smart. The student calls Octavia St. Laurent²²⁴ by name, referring to her notes, then follows with a snicker saying "she, or he, or what ever." Dr. Mariposa interrupts the student with measured frustration, indicating to the class that St. Laurent's gender identity is female and that "she" and "her" were the appropriate pronouns to use. She turned the floor back to the student who briefly concluded her comments and sat silently through the rest of the discussion.

Dr. Mariposa shared the emotional impact of these comments as a masculine, gender non-conforming, lesbian woman: "She! She! She identifies as she," Dr. Mariposa says, referring to St. Laurent. "Yeah . . . um, I have to try to make . . . you know . . . hold that in myself in order to have the class progress." She notes that these microaggressions²²⁵ "are ubiquitous" and that she rarely has an outlet for her frustration:

²²⁴ Octavia St. Laurent, a transwoman featured in *Paris is Burning* was a central figure and performer in New York's "ball culture" of the 1970s and 80s.

²²⁵ In the context of this dissertation, microaggression refers to unconscious and subtle racist behaviors. See Daniel Solorzano, Miguel Ceja, and Tara Yosso. "Critical Race Theory, Racial

There are a lot of little things like that . . . I think I just stockpile those kinds of experiences. Like, geez, I wish she hadn't of said that, but she did so . . . There's never a place to go. Students will say especially stuff about race and class, about poor Black people just all the time, and I can't respond to it all the time, so I just have to store it up, for some other time.

Another common response that is painful and frustrating to Dr. Mariposa is white students' tendency to see discussions about racial inequality through a lens of "reverse discrimination." Although at this institution, she feels that students are less inclined to talk about ostensible reverse discrimination openly in class, she has had experiences teaching at other institutions where students were hostile toward her and course materials focused on white privilege and racial inequality. At her current institution, white students "buck back" at her, particularly in large classes. She notes:

[In a large class] there's anonymity, allows people to think that they can just do whatever; in classes where there's much more accountability because it's smaller, there's less people tryin' to test me! It can be really, um, rude! It usually happens in the bigger class, where someone says, "We've been talking about race for so long in the class and I don't think we should keep talking about race." Or, something about you know, "Black criminals," *x*, *y* and *z* and daring me to challenge them. And, right, because it's [so many] students, because I'm way, way up here on the stage, it's hard to just make that

Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate: The Experiences of African American College Students," *The Journal of Negro Education* 69, no. 1/2 (2000): 60–73.

moment about you and I. You know, it's easier to get away with stuff,
I think, in those bigger classes.

It is noteworthy that the anonymity of a large class, as well as safety in a large majority of white students, makes room for rude challenges around race in Dr. Mariposa's classroom. In her smaller classes however, she notes that there is more "accountability."

During a classroom observation, I noted that Black students also pushed back regarding race when asked to maintain an intersectional lens. During this class period, the students reviewed themes from McGuire's book *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance: A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*, which they had been reading for two previous class periods.²²⁶

A white student raises her hand, "Well, they really didn't mind being . . . you know . . . in the background," she says, in an attempt to tease out why Black women participating in the civil rights movement would agree to take supporting positions, while Black men rose to leadership. Dr. Mariposa makes a face at the student, frowning and turning up the side of her mouth, "Really?" she asks with a "let's critique that" tone. A second white woman jumps in, agreeing that "during that time" Black women really couldn't be leaders in public. Two Black women sitting next to one another at the other side of the room raise their hands simultaneously; they smile at each other, noting the humor of both hands popping up at the same time. "You

²²⁶ Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance--A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Knopf, 2010).

know, they're really important, but as long as we know that, then no one really has to talk about it that way," says the first woman. The second woman breaks in, "Yeah, my mom and my family always talk about how the women were really the ones doing the work. As long as we know women were in there . . . we are taught about that," she answers. Dr. Mariposa continues to frown and shakes her head. The students look at each other, convinced of their arguments, then look to Dr. Mariposa, who is silent for a long moment, then moves on to another point about the construction of the Rosa Parks discourse.

Dr. Mariposa and I spoke at length about these student comments. She grappled with why she thought students were so invested in the narrative of Black male leadership. She said she begins the lesson on this text by "starting out the class talking about when you think about race — you don't think about gender. When you think about gender — you think about white women; essentially that's what I was trying to say." However, as the class went on, the students were so devoted to this perspective that the white women insisted that Black women "really didn't mind" working behind the scenes; and the Black women in the class were unwilling to interrogate the Black men's leadership "so long as *we* know" that Black women really were the force behind the movement. She highlights this as one of those moments in the classroom where we as pedagogues wish we could go back in time and say the things that escaped us in the ephemeral moment:

Yeah, I mean, if I were thinking more on my feet I would have tried to say something! Say, "Why are you invested in that story?" That's what

I was thinking but I couldn't have the words to say it because there is an investment in the story; we could just talk about, you know, why is that version of the story comforting, or what does it do for us to have that version of the story? I don't know, I can't think of a way to elicit from students to . . . it's not just that, a lot of people are invested in the story of Black men reclaiming their Black masculinity, and that's a good thing, why would you even be critical of that? I'm not saying that Black men shouldn't have a sense of masculinity, but not at the expense of male dominance. That shouldn't be the way that we want to go forward thinking about civil rights.

This text was assigned for this class to point students in a new direction, seeing the civil rights movement through an intersectional lens. She was somewhat surprised by the student's reactions and did not want to be seen as challenging Black masculinity by pushing an interrogation of gender politics. She explained her intentions in having students read McGuire's text in ISE.

Well, one of the things I was trying to do is to have them see the um . . . the forest for the trees . . . I mean the book *is* about the intersection of race and gender and class. In a smaller way in shaping the civil rights movement, that *is* the premise of the book, and that is what they had been talking about in the class in a certain way . . . how central women were to the civil rights movement. But then [the students] disavowed it. . . . Then I think I tried to make it even more pointed, to make the argument that the civil rights movement had be

framed about Black masculinity in a certain way . . . I think when you start to parse out power dynamics within discussions of race between men and women . . . um, I think it gets hard, I mean I think it gets hard you know, I don't know how to bring it.

Dr. Mariposa remarks that with this text, the students “were willing to go so far but not any further” during those first class periods focused on McGuire’s work. I also observed the hesitation of the students during the class period and agree with Dr. Mariposa. She hopes that subsequent class meetings will provide opportunities to push students to think more critically about women, gender, and Black masculinity within the context of the civil rights movement, and allay their fears about delegitimizing the role of Black men as leaders simply by investigating gender.

“Trying to Make Use of My Identity In That Way”: Teaching Inclusively in the Women’s Studies Classroom

Dr. Mariposa struggles with discussions about race, gender, and sexual orientation in the classroom, particularly as they are read upon her body. However, she asserts her middle class identity as a way to find common ground with many of her students. She notes that she does “little things about my gender, but it isn’t as a consistent a thing, it’s not as declared a thing as my sexual orientation.” Dr. Mariposa adds that she does “a lot with making my middle class-ness known.” Thus, she teaches through her masculinity by doing “little things,” she “declares” her sexual orientation, and she frequently and intentionally highlights her middle class identity. She contemplates this connection with her students:

What is the commonality that we share? It’s not going to be race, but I’m from the middle class, and to make that manifest can um, make

students more comfortable with me. So, I talk about where I went to school. I do cultural references that can mark me as middle class. I'm a rock fan, so I mention rock bands. I think that marks me as middle class and maybe breaks down barriers with what they can listen to from what I've said. [Speaking as student], "Well, she's not the Black person from the ghetto." So anyway, I do a lot to mark my middle class-ness."

The students in Dr. Mariposa's classes are predominantly white middle class men and women of traditional college age. She feels that "white" middle class references in particular put students at ease, and allows them to accept her more readily. She intentionally makes many of these references at the beginning of the semester:

I think they are surprised at first when I do it, and they are continually surprised. This could just be me seeing what I want to see, but I mean I throw out a reference, I say, I'm a hip hop fan too, right off, because I study hip hop, too. I put that out there because it's what you would expect from a Black person. And then at other times in class I say "And my favorite band right now is Belle & Sebastian." And they are like [Speaking as student], "Who is Belle & Sebastian?" And so I just keep it off kilter. You know, have them not think they know who I am and what I'm about. I think that it's kind of exciting! Like, [Speaking as student] "Well what's Dr. Mariposa gonna' talk about now because she's off the wall! [Laughs]

Dr. Mariposa finds it exciting to keep her students guessing about who she is. In this way, she believes she is able to address certain issues from a more neutral location. In her estimation, a middle class-identified Black person who likes a “white” rock band is able to critique white privilege without automatically being rendered and dismissed as a militant one-dimensional stereotype.

Since students can’t pin down “what she is about,” Dr. Mariposa is able to traverse contentious terrain around race and class; she claims this as a part of her pedagogical project. “I do kind of want to keep them off balance, not to settle on who and what I am, what I’m up to, so that they can receive information . . . disarming . . . I’m trying to disarm them in a certain way.” She describes her teaching style as one well suited for middle class white students, highlighting this practice of “disarming.” However, she acknowledged that she might alienate students of color and working class students as she performs this pedagogy:

I think my style works best with middle class white students because I’m drawing on a lot on middle class cues, middle class references, white middle class references, and um, deliberately . . . that’s who’s in the room more than Black middle class students for instance. Um, so I think I alienate Black students sometimes, because particular styles of thinking, feminism and whatever, lesbian . . . not even lesbian, queer feminism . . . I’m doing queer feminism . . . they may not have been all up on that. You know, they may, but the white feminists in the class are [already all up on that].

The most pronounced differences among white middle class students and students of color and working class students is their knowledge base, Dr. Mariposa explained. She is often concerned about excluding students who are completely unfamiliar with feminism, or social critiques in general. “I want to make the umbrella big enough for all kinds of people to get something out of the class,” she said. We discussed moments from her classes in which she gave special attention to Black female students who had not encountered a feminist perspective before, and who did not have the same level of education and experience as some of her other middle class white students:

So even the student in the class who’s Black is thinking, “You know feminism makes a lot of sense,” she hasn’t read Butler and whatever. So [when] I make a joke about Butler, it works better with the White middle class students than with the Black students. So, it’s um, I think it’s a tight rope, like it’s a balance that I’m trying to walk for the students.

In this instance, Dr. Mariposa made a joke about the difficulty in reading Butler. She made note that the middle class white students found it funny, whereas the humor was lost on one of her Black female students. She attributed this to the student being first, unfamiliar with Butler and her role as a prominent feminist theorist, and second, having true difficulty in reading her complex deeply theoretical writing. Similarly, during an SCG class period, Dr. Mariposa and one of her few Black female students negotiated the use of a new vocabulary word.

Looking as if she is cursing herself for raising her hand, the student repeats the word several times, “hegemonic, um, hegemonic, humph, heg-e-mon-ic!” To her credit, she keeps at it with Dr. Mariposa’s guidance. A few members of the class giggle as the student continues to stumble over the word, “hegemonic, uh, heg-e-mon-ic!” Eventually, they move on to defining the word. However, once the other students recognize that Dr. Mariposa’s coaching is not meant to embarrass the student, but to get at the importance of this term, they begin to make a few notes and wait patiently through the exchange.

Dr. Mariposa describes this exchange from her point of view, explaining her intentions in pressing this student to work through the pronunciation and make meaning out of the phrase “hegemonic masculinity”:

So today in the class, the one Black female student was having trouble saying “hegemonic masculinity.” I was like, “hegemonic!” “hegemonic!” [laughs] You know, not to clown her or to emulate, but OK, it’s a long crazy word, you haven’t heard it before, I hadn’t heard it till I came to school, just *let’s* just go from there. So that could be a moment where I distance myself, but then try to ally myself you know, I’m not gonna’ make fun of you for saying it! So [I’m] trying to make enough space so that all kinds of people can function in the class.

The act of “making mistakes not be shameful,” as Dr. Mariposa puts it, is a way to “compensate” for the alienation some students of color or working class students might feel in her classroom. “If someone’s struggling, to have somebody else help

them out, rather than have them be out there on a limb not knowing what they're saying; that kind of stuff" becomes a bridge and a part of her pedagogical project.

Dr. Mariposa also sees her gender expression as a bridge for her male students. She observes that many of her male students find her more approachable than some of her female students and seem to identify with her in terms of masculinity. This allows her male students to feel they have a place in the feminist classroom, which is inclusive of masculine perspectives and performances through Mariposa's embodiment.

I'm trying to make use of my identity in that way. I mean, I am really trying to [get them to see] hey, I'm a masculine person, and it's ok to think women are equal to you as a masculine person, kind of jumping up and down silently doing that. And, I think that's how it works, I think that's how they are responding to me. Imagine another situation where they really take against me, like [speaking as student], "Who's this Black butch? Talking all this bullshit about gender, shut up Dr. Mariposa," but they don't, you know, they don't. So I think they are kind of maybe not consciously saying, [as student], "Yeah, well she's thought about masculinity, she's an ally towards masculinity, she's doing her own kind of masculinity, so it's OK for me to think critically about this stuff. And I hope it works that way.

Having a gift for teaching about masculinity through a butch gender expression and winning a positive reception is important to Dr. Mariposa. Although some of her female students are standoffish, many of her male students seem quite

fond of her. Several “favorite” male students would stay after class to chat and bantered with her in class. One male student in particular would pretend to object when she called on him, “Aw man, come on, why you got to pick on me?” he would protest. Dr. Mariposa would chuckle and respond, “Come on man, I know I can call on you.” Then they would both laugh; this seemed to be a running inside joke. The ways in which Dr. Mariposa described her own gender identity, as well as my observation of her gender expression, led me to read her body and its masculine gender expression as described above as a critical masculinities text through which male students read multiple formations of masculinity.

Feminist Practices/The Classroom

As Dr. Mariposa discussed teaching about gender through her embodied text, she also named several intentionally feminist pedagogical practices used in her classroom. The most critical for her were sitting in a circle in the classroom, playing the devil’s advocate, drawing from students’ experiential knowledge, role-play exercises, and the use of humor in the classroom. Dr. Mariposa considers the value of having students arrange their desks in a circle. “It’s so much easier for students to talk when everybody’s in a circle. You are not looking at the back of people’s heads.” She notes that when students can see one another, they are better able to assess how the conversation is taking shape. Dr. Mariposa finds this convenient:

I play off of the students seeing that someone seems ready to talk, as the student, it seems like this person is bout’ to talk and see how they respond and you’re responding, you just have more information when

you are all sitting in the circle, I mean, in a way it's less hierarchical, but not really. [Laughs]

The dynamic of the circle shifts power in ways that allow students to feel that they are equal participants in the learning process and knowledge production rather than simply vessels to be filled with knowledge. However, Dr. Mariposa is careful not to give up all of her power:

They still know that I'm the professor and everybody's turned towards me even though we are in the circle. So, it's a feminist practice to have a circle, but it doesn't undercut all the power dynamics there. But it does something to do with that I think, you know looking, you can scan the whole circle to see who might say something, it's not just me who might say something. So it's deliberate in the smaller classes. I mean I do it in [ISE]. I try to have us sit in a circle, in [SCG]. With 50 students you can't really.

In addition to shifting power, the circle also allows students to converse with one another more openly. Dr. Mariposa sees this as a feminist practice in the classroom as well:

Yeah, having them talk to each other, having them respond to each other, that's what I want, that would be the ideal state of the classes that we'd have some discussion, and they would just play off each other, I mean for me to fade into the background and have it be on topic and them talking to each other.

Part of shifting the power dynamic within the classroom is also about maintaining a positive relationship; Dr. Mariposa notes that “trying not to have an adversarial relationship with students” is of the utmost importance. She credits the circle for preventing her from being “didactic, in a way that I’m the great authority, and what you say is stupid.” Rather, the circle creates a constructive atmosphere based on mutual respect and collective knowledge production.

Another feminist pedagogical practice named by Dr. Mariposa is the strategy of assuming the role of the “devil’s advocate.” This strategy shifts the power dynamic in the classroom and allows space for contentious voices to engage. She recognizes that her need to perform this role of the devil’s advocate “often happens about race and class, a lot less about gender,” and is most often necessitated by male students. “I play devil’s advocate sometimes so that [when] I know there’s some disagreement in the room that people would be hard pressed to say it because they think they would get shot down, so I just try to do it for them,” she said. She described one instance in which she played the devil’s advocate in response to the documentary film *Killing Us Softly 3*, reviewing the politics of gender and advertising:²²⁷

Actually one student did challenge me [about gender], but this is just asking a question. We were watching *Killing Us Softly 3* and I was feeling . . . some dissent about the tenor of the movie, so I was like, “And how is this a bunch of bullshit? What do you guys think?” Some male students were like, “Well, she was cherry picking her examples and it’s not this way and she was looking for the worse cases.” So OK,

²²⁷ *Killing Us Softly 3*, dir. by Sut Jhally (1999 DVD)

sure, that's in the room too. But he asked respectfully; he didn't just say it's nonsense, you know.

Dr. Mariposa finds this practice to be efficacious; when she acts as the “sacrificial person who says something that a lot of people might be thinking, but are afraid to say,” even if the unspoken is a perspective with which she disagrees, she is able to keep her students engaged and prevents them from checking out or “being cross in the background,” as she describes it.

Eliciting knowledge from group experience and the observations of students is also central to Dr. Mariposa's pedagogy. “I give them something broad to start out with, it's cultural, we all know something about culture.” During a class period examining rape myths and rape culture, she utilized this practice to begin the conversation on a difficult subject:

The students seem reluctant to engage in the conversation on rape myths. Dr. Mariposa goes to the board and asks the class to shout out myths about rape, particularly in a college campus context. “Nothing's wrong,” she says, “you know, you don't come up with the wrong answer here.” One student speaks up, “Oh! That, you know, girlfriends can't be raped . . . that's probably a myth.” Without turning to note who was speaking, Dr. Mariposa writes this myth on the board. “Yes, any other myths?” she says. Another student yells out, “How it's hard to say you were raped if you were drunk.” Dr. Mariposa lists this on the board as well. Finally, the students begin to chime in one by one, offering their myths.

I inquired as to why Dr. Mariposa kept her back to the class for the entire time she was writing on the board. She did not turn around to address the students as they yelled out their examples on purpose; “It’s kind of anonymous so they don’t have to feel under the spotlight for what they are saying.”

Dr. Mariposa calls this inductive approach “taking an anonymous class poll.” She announces to the class that it is time for a poll and intentionally turns her back to the class. She makes clear that she is not looking at the students or considering who is speaking as she writes their responses on the board. This technique is also useful for measuring and engaging general understandings of cultural knowledge when students have not read the homework closely, or at all:

I try to raise issue[s] that they might have personal experience with, and I’ll listen to what they are talking about. First [I] have them tell me what happened, tell the class what happened, and then to try to draw the concepts from that. It doesn’t have to be the book, you can take apart your own life experience, using the concepts from the book if we all just talk about what’s happened. We might be able to draw some patterns.

Role-play exercises are particularly useful for Dr. Mariposa in her larger classes. At times she participates in the role-play or performs things herself at the front of the room. She notes that she has been doing more role-play recently but that this practice “has been in my curriculum for a while.” One effective role-play I observed involved both Dr. Mariposa and her students acting out a street harassment scene.

Dr. Mariposa describes the scene for her students, “I am a woman walking on the sidewalk and here’s this construction site. What am I hearing, what is being yelled at me?” she asks the class. As she strolls across the front of the room the students, although somewhat bashful, make quiet catcalls at her. They have all said that they have heard and experienced this situation, but were reluctant to voice these phrases. She then changes the tone. “Now I am one of the construction guys, what am I thinking?” The students puzzle over this for a moment as they gather into groups to act out different scenarios related to harassment.

During the group exercise I overheard the discussion of the group sitting near me. The male students discussed the ways in which masculinity is enforced through this type of harassment. One noted that he would be called a “fag” if he did not participate in the cat calling. The female students in the group had a hard time cat calling their male counterparts when acting in their assigned roles. One mustered a “hey baby,” and the others said that it was uncomfortable for them to participate in the exercise with the male students and that they didn’t know what to say. Although the groups did not have much time to report their experiences to the class on that day, I shared this with Dr. Mariposa, who thought it was interesting to hear these student perspectives.

I frequently observed Dr. Mariposa role-playing or “acting out” concepts from the text in her larger class (SCG). I noted how she used shifts in perspective to get the students to consider multiple points of view. In the example above, she performs both the woman experiencing harassment and the construction workers making cat calls.

During the previously mentioned lesson on gender and advertising, she took the opportunity to perform the text through her body.

On the large projection screen at the front of the room, a power point slide shows a collection of magazine images. Scantly clad women are twisted, splayed, displayed only as partial body parts, or are teetering on one leg. Dr. Mariposa walks up to the front of the room and stands right in front of the screen. She begins to perform these poses with her masculine body as she talks. She places her hands behind her head and makes her body into a pinup pose, then, she teeters on one leg and skips a few steps; finally, she mimics a fainting motion as her students break out into laughter.

Significantly, the students' laughter was not *at* Dr. Mariposa, who was intentionally being humorous, but *with* her as her performance critiqued the ridiculous poses. Her role-play as an advertisement model, performed through her masculine body, highlighted the lesson's central arguments. After class, I asked Dr. Mariposa to describe her intention in this performance:

So, I had slides on the board, but then there's one slide about how women are posed in these ridiculous ways in order to have them off kilter and make them seem less powerful, and the images already showing that, but then, I kind of tried to do it! And I think the um . . . the pose is ridiculous, but then just having me in my masculine rounded sort of guise trying to do that too . . . I think might have made it even more visible. [Speaking as student] "Like gosh! No one could actually achieve that . . . be comfortable, and Dr. Mariposa looks

ridiculous!” [Laughs] So I do, I do perform stuff, when I think it will be effective. I think because my gender embodiment is masculine, when I perform femininity it gets underlined in a certain way, so when I did the up speak [ending statements with a high note as if they were questions] I think it was really noticeable, and I don’t use my hips, I use my shoulders, like all of those things that I was talking about — because I’m making it visible — hopefully that kind of pulls away the veil some. But who knows if it does.

This example, “performing as a model in an advertisement,” is also indicative of Dr. Mariposa’s use of humor. She confirms that humor to highlight important issues makes the classroom feel “inviting.” Although naturally reserved, Dr. Mariposa has a comedic gift:

Yeah, I have to be much more open in the classroom than I am naturally . . . I’m a reserved person, in fact when I first started teaching, I didn’t gesture as much, I don’t really smile now but I didn’t make jokes as much and I was much more shut down because I was feeling out a lot of things; how would this all go across for the students. As I became more comfortable with teaching, more assured about what I’m teaching, I realized, it helps to open up the space if I can be inviting in some way, and so, I don’t go out of my way to be funny but I don’t mind it when I’m funny, it opens up the space in the classroom, it makes it less intimidating. Yeah, so I actually try to put

myself out there some so that students can feel OK to ask questions,
feel OK to interact.

I observed Dr. Mariposa's intentions for using humor clearly translated to her class.

The energy in the room was, for the most part, respectful, and open, and students seemed to appreciate light humorous moments as they pushed through difficult topics.

Talk Someplace Close to Home

Dr. Mariposa and I discussed humor and the ways in which her personality and identities influenced the class. This led us to a discussion of things that were uncomfortable or even "off limits" in her classroom:

Yeah, sometimes I think about how I am reflected in the class.

Sometimes, more consciously than others, I talk a lot about gay men and effeminacy, but I don't talk at all about female masculinity, and that isn't exactly deliberate; but it's not — not deliberate. I mean I think it'd be harder to talk someplace that is so close to home.

Although Dr. Mariposa teaches through her masculine body as text in the classroom, she does not specifically discuss butch identity, or female masculinity. Although she is out as a lesbian, and "raise[s] lesbianism in the class and female masculinity, and how much we patrol that," she does not delve deeply into female masculinity as a gender identity and expression. She avoids this, in part, because it feels "too close" and discussing this openly with students is uncomfortable:

I definitely push more on homosexuality and ranges of male genders but I, um, [butch identity] it doesn't come up in the textbook . . . so it's not like I am avoiding it, going out of my way to avoid it. But I'm

much less comfortable dealing with stuff that was about lesbians or female masculinity. So, this is who you are right, yeah. I think I'm afraid to collapse into my identities.

Dr. Mariposa feels that if she were to directly engage material on her own identities, she wouldn't "have the language to deal with it in a way" and it would "feel uncomfortable because I don't have enough distance from it," she affirms. Talking about masculinity more generally, or about "different ways to be" is "not as dangerous, that's not as risky" for her. She also feels this more general approach makes it possible for the information "better able to be heard." Dr. Mariposa believes her students are thinking: "She isn't actually a man, so she can talk about masculinity and maybe open my eyes to some stuff." Speaking as a masculine identified woman, Dr. Mariposa sees herself as someone whose discussions about multiple dimensions of gender are received differently than a masculine identified man or a feminine identified woman. She concluded that teaching about gender through this particular embodiment "might have the side benefit of making more space for people like me."

Case Two: Professor Deborah

I live my identity and I hope they get it, especially the ones that might need me . . . to be one of those identities with them or to them or for them.

[The chance] they will find me in the middle of this [lesson] I think is high . . . I think they will, for those that are paying attention.

—Professor Deborah

Portrait

Professor Deborah is a petite, stunning African woman whose subtle intensity ignites everyone in the room. She is calm, still, and centered, speaking slowly and deliberately with measured gestures. She is at once intimidating and warm, her passionate approach to teaching deeply engaging. As she enters the classroom, her students all call out greetings; “Hi Professor! How are you!” and “Oh my gosh, Deborah, did you get my last email? I was looking for you over the weekend!” She chats with them casually as she sets up the computer and projector.

Professor Deborah identifies as an African feminist lesbian, also identifying as Black, often referring to herself as "this little Black woman." She notes that her African-ness “is completely ignored,” to the point that it is “nonexistent” for members of her campus community. “I don’t believe that I’m in an environment that complex, for anybody else I’m African American.” My asking Professor Deborah to specifically name her African identity was an unusual and significant occurrence, she indicated.²²⁸ In her estimation, there wasn’t “anybody else” who would have asked her about her nationality. “I don’t think they are that complicated; they do think I am odd, they do think I am a little bit different”; however, they often do not recognize or “complicate” her Blackness to include her African identity.

Professor Deborah comments that her age is also obscured; students have no idea how old she is. Her stature, openness, and casual style exude youthful adventure, although she says that she is not as young as they assume. She often wears jeans and

²²⁸ Professor Deborah’s African nationality is not named here to protect her anonymity.

the same outdoor clothing brands that are popular with the students on campus, at times set off with a scarf or shawl. To intentionally mark her age, she refers to events that occurred when she was in college or in her youth, twenty and thirty years ago; students react with shock and surprise.

Many students want to get to know Professor Deborah on a personal level; they are at once intimidated by her intensity and brilliance and drawn to her warmth and compassion. Diverse arrays of students are drawn to her and seek her out as a confidant and supporter. However, she notes that Black students rarely take her classes, seek her out, or choose to work with her. She finds this surprising, given the campus climate and lack of diversity at her small predominately white institution, located on the east coast.

In the classroom, Professor Deborah is demanding. Once class begins, she transforms, shedding the quiet, casual, and familiar demeanor for a rigorous examination of the texts and class assignments. She poses difficult questions and waits in the silence. She walks slowly around the room, placing the tip of her eyeglass arm in her mouth contemplatively. She leans in on the desks of students, peering at them, insisting they rise to the occasion with an answer, which they do. Professor Deborah leads the class through difficult subjects, often beginning with an eloquent formal lecture with powerfully delivered arguments; she then poses questions to students and opens the floor for questions and discussion. The students are triumphant once they gain a command of the material and express their desire to please and impress her.

Professor Deborah teaches at a small predominantly white institution. During this study, I visited two courses. The first, “Rights and Freedoms: A Transnational Perspective” (RFT) was an intermediate level survey course of 15-20 students. The second course, “Activism and Service in Urban Communities” (ASU), was an upper level course with both a classroom and service component with an enrollment of five to seven students.²²⁹ Professor Deborah has taught at her institution for many years. She is an experienced pedagogue and has taught each of the courses I observed many times.

Lived Identities

Professor Deborah describes herself as “an African feminist lesbian,” and she often labels herself that way, but only “in safe spaces.” She notes, “I don’t normally describe myself that way all over the place, but that’s how I describe myself, that’s how I’ve lived.” She also believes her institution to be “the safest environment for me,” noting that her identities are respected and that she is able to find community, particularly with the few Black faculty and lesbian and gay colleagues. She finds her choice of the word “safe” to be a significant description of her institution:

What do I mean by that? It’s very interesting that I should choose that word. This is the most spacious environment; I have a lot of space to be who I am. I meet a lot of quotas – a lot, so many, and it’s really good to knock off some of those quotas with one body, so I’m going to get you all those quotas, then I am going to get some space.

²²⁹ The course titles, Rights and Freedoms: A Transnational Perspective (RFT), and Activism and Service in Urban Communities (ASU), have been modified for the purposes of maintaining anonymity. Substituted titles reflect the subject matter, and the descriptions provided are representative of the course itself.

She finds this method of “getting space” to be one of the ways in which her “feminist principles come into the room.” Professor Deborah claims space for herself and for her identities; however, she acknowledges that meeting so many “quotas” at once is also alienating and fatiguing:

I don’t have language for it, it’s the appeal of the intersections. I think you know, there’s no place in which I am normal. Anywhere on the planet, and that I’ve thought about, right. There’s absolutely no place where some aspect of me or another aspect of me isn’t causing confusion. Sometimes, often it’s just tiring. I would just like to feel the questions, and not to feel the confusion and not to feel the judgments. Yeah, um, because it does take a toll, it takes a toll. Then other times I realize that, I could be another way, I have choices, I could be a little less rupturing of the spaces that I inhabit [sly grin], I’m sure. But that wouldn’t be me.

Professor Deborah recounted an example of her lesbian identity causing “confusion,” at a social hour directly following a faculty meeting. “I had a colleague, a nuisance guy, who wants very much to befriend me; and he befriends me by insulting me, right!” She posits that this colleague engaged her in “masculine bantering” and was interested in befriending her, in part, because he saw her as a “buddy” rather than a female colleague on the faculty:

One day he said to me . . . we got into a little tussle, and he is very senior . . . So he had one or two [beers]. You know I don’t drink with them, I’ll have a half a glass of wine, you know, gotta stay sane. He

said [something] to me, so we got into it, and he said, “well fuck you!”

It was astonishing! And I didn’t miss a beat. I said, “Fuck you back!”

People stopped talking. Because I am so beyond junior it’s not even funny, especially at the time, it’s probably [several years] ago. It went dead silent, and then he cracked up himself, he fell out, he fell *out*!

And then [the other faculty members] started laughing, “Oh you told him!” Because he was a nuisance, everybody was pissed off at him.

When the faculty in the room began to discuss the implications of baiting a junior, minority, female, faculty member, on Professor Deborah’s behalf, the “nuisance guy” responded by saying, “But that’s my bud!” She considered the implications of his rebuttal; “I thought, OK, he thinks I’m like a guy!” she concluded. She notes that her white male colleagues in particular seem to perceive her as more masculine than her own self-image. “That’s where they go, [my buddy],” she says, indicating that they relate to her through masculine bantering, hand shaking, and back slapping, “A lot of guys do that.”

Describing her own gender expression, Professor Deborah asserts that her “ideal is sort of a balance of the two,” mixing and expressing both the masculine and the feminine. When asked how she believes others read her, she responds:

OK, so I think they are reading me as masculine. Um, at best, I’m neutered. I can put some language to it now; I’ve been striving for a balance of the two consciously since I was six . . . Consciously saying, “You know I want to do what girls do and I want to do what boys do.”

That's pretty high-level consciousness I think. And so that's what I'm working on.

While I am shadowing Professor Deborah in her office I make note of her professional manicure and we lightly poked fun at the irony of having a mirror in the room. We shared a laugh, connecting the mirror to her conscious mixing of genders, as divergent from her colleagues' perceptions of her as "masculine" or "neuter."

When the door is open, as is her rule when meeting with students, the mirror is hidden. Even when the door is closed, the mirror hangs so close to the door hinge that it is almost completely obscured by Professor Deborah's jackets and scarves hanging on a hook the back of the door. As we prepare to leave for class, she pushes the door closed and walks over to the corner. She begins to primp in the mirror. Having just discussed her conscious mixing of masculine and feminine, we giggle, then laugh outright. "See, it kind of messes with my gender identity, to have a mirror in the room, can't let people know that!" she joked. We laughed all the way down the hallway to the classroom.

Professor Deborah also ruminates on the ways in which female colleagues relate to her. She is "out" among faculty and staff as a lesbian and recognizes the awkwardness with which some colleagues receive her. At times, she is not sure if this is solely based on sexual orientation, or if it is also about race and cultural differences in displays of affection. She shared a scenario elucidating an encounter between faculty members the day before one of my visits:

Women don't know if they should give me a hug when they see me and I am like that, I'm really, really [affectionate], I mean I have to be careful, because we always touch, you know, and they don't always touch. So this happened yesterday — two lesbians walking down the road, one Black one white, me and another member of staff. We just had lunch and we were walking back to wherever we were going, and a faculty member comes along and I saw her from a distance, and she said hello, and she was very excited and cheery and I hadn't seen her in a while, she had been on sabbatical. I thought, she's going to hug me, and she hesitated and she stopped and I thought well, OK, did I put a damper on that? And the weirdest thing happened, the two of them [the two white women] hugged and they were on the outsides of me! [Laughs] I don't know, I mean I don't know. This is my point, there's race, she didn't know if it was appropriate, she didn't know if I would [think or feel] it was appropriate, then there's gender, there's sexuality, and so, I don't know, but I know it was a loaded moment.

Professor Deborah interprets the complex readings of gender, race, and sexuality as she embodies them as potentially responsible for this awkward exchange. She feels that “these kinds of moments” happen with frequency as members of the campus community grapple with multiple dimensions of her identity.

Markers of Status

Professor Deborah also considers her degree as a marker of status and difference. She notes, “There's some fun stuff that happens with class too. I don't

have a PhD, so they are running around trying to find out what kind of terminal degree I have; OK, those people are trying to figure out my credentials, and I think credentials for academics are a huge part of class.” She used the term “class” to characterize status among academics, observing that in her institution, people of color are already “suspect,” and that some colleagues find it important to spend their time and energy attempting to verify credentials as a matter of status. She claims:

So that’s one piece of [my status]. This is what is very interesting, because, if I did not have a terminal degree, if I didn’t have *the* terminal degree that I have, I think it would place me sort of a little lower, a place that they can handle. But I have a terminal degree that commands quite a lot of respect. So that is confusing.²³⁰

Another marker of status within Professor Deborah’s institution is salary. The same colleagues made note of her salary and “went after her” in what she describes as a “passive aggressive way.” She says:

So, apparently someone — colleagues, because of the committees on which they served — have discovered some of this [terminal degree and salary] and, were hot, in relation to theirs. I was oblivious [laughs]. I didn’t have any idea that’s what they were pissed off about, and they went after me, it was very interesting. Finally, I figured it out, I am supposed to be somewhere else; they are affronted by it. Never mind my credentials.

²³⁰ Professor Deborah’s terminal degree remains unnamed to protect her anonymity.

These colleagues “went after” Professor Deborah in what she described as a “passive aggressive” manner, questioning, scrutinizing, and acting “pissed off,” without addressing or challenging her in person. I inquired as to why Professor Deborah believed her colleagues felt “affronted,” despite her credentials. “OK, so the *package* is the issue,” she asserts. She is quite sure that race, gender, sexuality have everything to do with the ways in which she is perceived to have overstepped her bounds or to be undeserving of her position and salary. She points out:

I’ve done my job right? So, where [and] when do I get my right to claim the space that I’m trying to claim. I don’t want kudos, I don’t want additional money, I don’t want a title, I just want you to recognize something has happened, and that it was a result of this little Black woman.

During her time at the institution, Professor Deborah’s department has become one of the largest and most popular of the interdisciplinary programs on campus, with numerous majors and minors, connections to student groups and organizations off campus, and strong support from the administration. The strength of the program is directly related to Professor Deborah’s hard work and dedication. Although she does not want to be rewarded in any way, she herself is affronted by the behavior of her colleagues, and their refusal to recognize that “this little Black woman” precipitated these successes.

Rapport and Power: What Would Professor Deborah Do?

In contrast to Professor Deborah’s questioning colleagues, her students hold her in the highest regard. She cultivates strong relationships with her students,

particularly the majors in her department, and acts as their mentor and confidant. She reports that her students frequently express admiration for her principles and integrity. She notes, “My principles, I think they are alive and well. I think they are constantly present, I’m not sort of self conscious about, and they don’t get turned off. They are just on all the time and they just have to deal with it.” The students “deal with” her principles and expectations in the classroom.

Professor Deborah performs a particular authority in the classroom.

Looking over her eyeglasses, she lectures formally at the podium. The students are hyper-attentive, soaking in every word, taking copious notes. One student whispers to his neighbor, “Wait, did you get arguments three and four?”, referring to the lecture structure. The other student waves him off until she finishes her sentence, then, nodding in his general direction, she continues to write. “Um hmm,” she replies in a low tone, you can have my notes after.” He smiles at her, relieved. She concludes her lecture with a series of questions on the screen to consider. She walks down the middle of the U-shaped conference tables, peering at her students one by one, awaiting the first response. The students look down at their articles and shuffle through their notebooks. Having passed each student, she returns to the podium. She waits another moment, expectantly. Finally, a few hands go up.

Professor Deborah describes herself as intimidating, in spite of her slight stature. She has heard this many times from her students. Indeed, I read her intensity and stillness as intimidating. However, she is not unapproachable; rather, her intimidating performance serves to inspire and intrigue:

I have a reputation for being a hard teacher. And I appreciate that, and I want that. You know, because the package is a little small and can be thrown around, and so I want them — a little bit — for them to be concerned. For all students . . . even though I also have a reputation for being a very good teacher.

Professor Deborah's reputation for being a very hard and very good teacher, as well as a mentor and role model, has yielded some interesting tributes. She shared a story about some of her majors and advisees who responded to a racist or homophobic incident (she could not recall which at the time of this interview) of student misconduct. The campus climate became "very tense," she said:

A bunch of my students got together and made really big signs, and they walked around campus, [the signs] said "*What would Deborah Do?*"²³¹ I asked them, "What do you mean by that?" They said, "But you are like a little Buddha! You have anger and you have passions and we understand that, but you don't take them out on other people and we think people should be like you! We are trying to be like you." [Laughs] OK, I thought, I can get behind that, but can you not put it on a sign! Yeah, so I thought, that's great, I don't mind my body being used for this purpose, but not a sign! That was nice, it's not just that I'm scary and mean and intimidating, and a lot of students say that, but that there might be a model here, if they're making signs!

²³¹ The signs made by the students were a parody of the phrase "What would Jesus do?"

We both laughed about this student action. “Yeah, I was tickled by that,” she admits. I inquired what happened following the protest staged by her students, and what they had done with the signs. I admitted I wanted to see them. She laughed again, “They said, ‘I could bring you one,’ and I said, ‘NO! Destroy them!’ What would Deborah do,” she chuckled. In this example, she asserts that her body was used as a “model” for how to deal with conflict. She notes that she doesn’t mind her “body being used for this purpose,” as a representation of how to deal with anger, passion and conflict.

Professor Deborah connects this student’s reading of her as “being like a little Buddha” to her feminist approach to holding power. “It’s complex because it’s not just that I’m feminist but I’m also nonviolent — as much as that’s also feminist — it’s also very much a part of this part of my world.” She notes that she “doesn’t come to it naturally” but that she “learned” this nonviolent approach:

I come to my feminism much more organically. It’s also very important for me in such a white environment for people to understand that a woman of color can hold and use power with confidence without constantly being reactive. In terms of my politics, I think it’s pretty evident that I have power. I do not think I’m abusive. I don’t think I’m flippant. I think I’m comfortable with it, and I think both my students and my colleagues understand that I inhabit this place of power, gently, but with full conviction that I have a right to it. So that probably is the most complicated way in which I advance a feminist agenda.

Being comfortable with power is a feminist stance for Professor Deborah. She makes connections between her “comfort” with power and her feminist pedagogical authority as well. She notes that she is “very aware” of her authority and is “comfortable with it. It’s not a thing, it’s a non-issue . . . it’s a non-thing,” she says.

We discussed feminist approaches to “controlling” the classroom. She contemplated, “Why *do* I need so much control of the classroom?” she asked herself aloud. She connected this need to her intersectional identities and her stature:

I think I feel that being Black, being female, being [petite] asks for problems in the classroom . . . and so I’m just not going to let that door open . . . and I know that my students are very, very aware of, sort of, my *largeness*. You know, I once met, last year, one of my advisee’s grandfathers. He looked at me and said “But my God, I thought you were ten feet tall!” I said, “I *am* 10 feet tall!” and he says, “OK!”

Establishing “largeness” is a mechanism for establishing authority in the classroom for Professor Deborah. She contends that performing authority and taking up the space of someone who is “ten feet tall” is an effective way to prevent the “problems” that she speculates might arise from being a “Black, female, and petite” professor.

Tricks of the Trade/Feminist Pedagogical Tools

Professor Deborah establishes her authority through a series of pedagogical actions. At the beginning of the semester, she initiates a course “by being extraordinarily demanding without rewarding; meaning, I will not give you an A, I will rarely give you an A, and they get it,” she says. She often references the high cost of the tuition at her institution and prompts students to think about the “value” of their

education rather than the amount of work being assigned. “You should be asking me for more work!” she says, only half jokingly. “They are like, ‘oh yeah . . .this is for me, oh OK.’” her students say.

Notably, Professor Deborah finds her feminist pedagogical approach to be “very formalistic” in terms of inclusion. She believes part of her pedagogical project is as simple as “privileging texts by women” and “getting students to read women thinkers.” She asserts:

I get women students reading women thinkers and I am very conscious about that, guest speakers, I tend to privilege women guest speakers and I bring in a lot of guest speakers. There are ways in which women dominate this field obviously, but there are ways in which they don’t show up in other areas, so in the places where they don’t show up I try to sort of highlight “Hey! This is someone who is working. . . . Like today, I gave an example on the board, almost always if I can think of someone who is doing this . . . I may sort of show two authors working in that area, but I will almost always privilege [women], though I will always say, look at their bibliographies, don’t just go with this one person, look at who this person is reading.

Professor Deborah also sees letting students explore “on their own” to be a feminist pedagogical practice. She notes that once she has students doing this high level of work, she can then “become sort of a collaborator and co-conspirator.” In this role, she directs students in finding their own interests and passions. Some students

find this difficult; many would rather be led to the “right” answer, or “most important” issue:

So students will always ask me, “What’s the answer to that, Professor?” I’ll say go look it up! Go look it up! “I was afraid you were going to say that, you’re going to tell me to look it up, aren’t you,” [they say]. So we have this kind of back and forth that goes on. They are a lot on their own, and so they have to take responsibility for finding out what turns them on, not just what I think is important. I’m going to choose the things that I think are important based on my authority, based on my knowledge. But what about what *you* think is important, right? That causes a lot of anxiety, right, freedom. They say, “Well, how do I know I’m choosing the right things?” Well, there are no right things; they *are* the right things if they turn you on, and I will guide you, you have to trust me to intervene.

This kind of “freedom” is difficult for students. They often come to her with anxieties about choosing a topic for their research.

Along with the freedom to choose their own topics, Professor Deborah uses group work as another remedy for exposing students to new ideas and expands their possibilities by pushing them into complex topics that they ordinarily “won’t touch.” In her class Rights and Freedoms: A Transnational Perspective (RTF), I observed her inviting her students to form groups based on their own immediate interests. She found their choices predictable, and was able to assume who would join which group when given the freedom to do so. She then blurred the line between the two topics,

asserting an intersectional approach. In this instance, students chose either a group focused on “discrimination and religion” or “discrimination and sexual orientation.” Students believed they would receive readings focused on discrimination *based on* religious identification, or discrimination *based on* sexual orientation. However, she had a trick up her sleeve.

Professor Deborah affirmed that the students who self-selected into the “discrimination and religion” group were students who “won’t touch” discrimination based on sexual orientation. This group was given a reading that discusses discrimination *against* LGBT individuals and communities *by* religious groups and organizations, not “religious discrimination,” as the students had first suspected. Using the article “Straight Man's Burden: The American Roots of Uganda's Anti-gay Persecutions,” by Jeff Sharlet,²³² she shifted the system of inquiry; she notes:

I assigned the topics, but they can go in whatever [group] topic they want, so the [sexual orientation] folks are going to be running around trying to get their hands on that article [Sharlet, given to the religious discrimination group], and I’m going to say, well, you all need to really talk to each other. So I’m trying to get them interested in this topic. I’ve been teaching this course for a number of years, and [students who have self-selected into the religious persecution group] won’t touch this [topic, persecution on the basis of sexual orientation].

In this way, she balances the power dynamic by offering students the opportunity to self-select into groups, then, asserts an intersectional analysis when

²³² Jeff Sharlet, “Straight Man's Burden: The American Roots of Uganda's Anti-gay Persecutions,” *Harper's Magazine* 321, no. 1924 (2010), 36.

they least expect it, in order to push a conversation about the varied locations and implications of discrimination. By giving the “discrimination and religion” group the most compelling article, she also hopes to inspire dialogue between this group and the students who self-selected into “discrimination and sexual orientation,” who are ready to “touch” the topic of discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Pushing students out of their comfort zone is central to Professor Deborah’s pedagogical project. However, this methodology is a challenge for students who feel lost or unsure of themselves. She describes her institution as “quite parochial.” Although students are encouraged to explore new modes of knowing and doing, they are often coddled when meeting with discomfort rather than pushed in the teachable moment. She is known as a faculty member who does not accept guilt, fear, or the easy way out from students. She has seen students drop her classes or even change their major rather than push through intellectual and personal challenges posed by the coursework. Professor Deborah insists on pushing students to achieve their greatest potential, even if it means almost “losing them.”

(Almost) Losing a Student: Using the Body to Combat Fear, Shame, and Guilt

Professor Deborah describes a difficult situation in which a young white woman, one of her advisees, was consumed by “fear,” and felt unable to undertake her required internship. Over the course of several weeks, she met with this student and attempted to uncover the source of her fears:

Recently I had a student who needed to do a service project and was having a very hard time. The assignment is the city, so let’s talk through why you are having this difficulty, and we danced around and

danced around, and I got tired and I said, “You’re afraid!” “Oh I’m afraid of crime.” “OK, you are afraid of crime, you can be in a part of the city that doesn’t have a high crime rate. What else are you afraid of?”

Professor Deborah continued to push this student, who insisted on dancing around the true source of her fear: “inner city Black people.” “Turns out the organization where she’d be working was predominantly Black; both service providers and clientele.” The “long and short of it – she is afraid of Black people,” she said. She called upon her own embodiment to transform the student’s perspective:

I posed the question, “What’s the difference between me and these people?” I said [this] over a series of weeks. This is one student, over a series of *weeks* that I have to do this! And I’m doing it because I am Black, and I’m also doing it because I’m not African American, and I’m not angry with her. I think the reaction of a lot of my African American colleagues would be to be angry with her. But at the same time, I bring it back — what is the difference? Sitting here, benefiting from my counsel, my time.

Professor Deborah considers her reception of this student’s comments to be mediated by her status as someone who is Black, yet “not African American.” She contends that the student’s fear of “inner city Black people” would have angered many of her African American colleagues. She says that she was able to engage with the student differently, engaging what she describes as her “Black and international, foreign ethnicity,” rather than engaging with some of the baggage of racism in the

American context. The student also (almost) articulated seeing Professor Deborah's "different" Blackness:

She almost – she didn't say it, I've had this before, "Oh, you're not like them." She didn't say it, it's a good thing she didn't! She said, "Well, you know here at [this school people are different]," kind of thing. I said, "Actually, if you're not afraid of me, if you can sit in a room with me and benefit from me, then you have to understand that there's a possibility that you can have this with other people. And she sobbed and said, "Are you going to force me down there!" I said, "I will take you down there if I have to," and she did [go to the internship], and it worked out . . . but here's one example of having to sort of use my body and my person to do this.

When Professor Deborah uses her body, and her Blackness in particular, to push students' boundaries or to illuminate racist fears or assumptions, she is often met with shame or guilt. She addresses this with her students:

I want to talk about your shame. This is a learning environment; you are students, whether I'm Black or I'm white. So the fact that you didn't see something that I automatically see makes you nothing less than students. But the fact that you feel guilty about it makes you culpable.

Professor Deborah often talks about fear with her students, many of whom she describes as "extraordinarily privileged." She asserts, "If it's one thing I don't accept from my students, I don't accept fear, and I don't accept guilt either; those two I really

don't deal with and we talk about it all the time, particularly with young white men." She finds it "obscene to be privileged and terrified." She said this to a student whom she describes as "beginning everything from a place of fear." I observed her interactions with this student in the classroom over the course of the semester. We often discussed the in-class comments, and I was provided with updates on the student's motions to drop class and perhaps the major all together:

It's something that I almost cannot work with. It can be said if your options are cowardice and violence, choose violence. That's what I would tell her, and she won't – I can't work with her if she can't; if she can't choose agency, I can't. So those kinds of students I can't deal with.

Professor Deborah felt that this student's decision to drop the minor might be appropriate; she was convinced this student would not "choose agency" over privilege and fear. For her, this was somewhat of a relief. Given the intensity of using her own body and identities to push students through their fears, as exemplified above in the "she's afraid of Black people" internship situation, she was willing to let this student, who "would not choose agency," drop the major.

Whose Side Are You On?: Positions and Identities on Campus and in the Classroom

Professor Deborah discussed with me two other instances in which she might have to "let go of" students who were challenged by her articulated political positions. These were both white female students whom she felt close to and who were doing well in her classes and as majors or minors in the department. She found

it significant that the positions with which they took issue were positions on gay marriage and abortion, but never about race.

One of Professor Deborah's advisees, who was in a leadership position within the LGBTQ organization, invited her to speak to the group. She describes this student as "one of those ones who stalked me."²³³ She writes me letters, OK! She's so funny."

Professor Deborah responds:

As long as it's an intellectual conversation about these issues, I'd be happy to, and I'd be happy to talk about any other issues you want to talk about, but I don't want to come in there, and talk about myself, I'm not into that. She said, "Oh, OK." So she came back to me and I said, "OK, come up with a couple topics and come and present to me what you want," so she came and she wanted me to talk about gay marriage.

Professor Deborah grimaced; the student reported that another queer faculty of color came and gave a very impassioned talk about marriage. She explained to the student, "I'm on the opposite side of that faculty member." The student was appalled.

Professor Deborah described their exchange:

She said "[gasps]! You don't believe in marriage!" and I said, "Do I have to?" We had this conversation. I said, "Do all gay people have to be behind it? Have you thought about the race/class issues and this

²³³ Professor Deborah half-jokingly described some of her students as "stalkers." I observed some of the behaviors she described, including students following her around campus, requesting to meet with her very frequently, and waiting for her before and after class. Professor Deborah shared with me more unnerving "stalking" behaviors, including calling other students and faculty on weekends in an attempt get her unpublished phone number, reporting to her that they had "stalked" her online to learn more about her, and mailing long letters to her. However, when I asked her about this, she said that no one had ever done anything "inappropriate."

particular agenda?” She was my advisee and she never came back to me. She *never* came back!

She concludes that the student only wanted to hear a particular perspective in support of marriage, “I don’t know if she ever communicated with her group, so I don’t know how they saw me, what they wanted for me,” she reports. She tells me that the LGBTQ student group is constantly inviting one of her colleagues, a gay Black man, to come and speak to them. She is clear that they are more responsive to his non-confrontational style, “he will do whatever they want.” She asked him, “Aren’t you tired of National Coming Out Day [and speaking to this student group]?” She reports their conversation:

He said, “Yeah, but if it helps the kids.” That’s the place I won’t go, not on this issue, because it seems performative to me! I guess these are the ways in which I am unreasonable, that I don’t . . . feel like I don’t . . . need to do a gig about this [sexual orientation]. I live it! I’ve taken a lot of shit for it. I am marginalized in some amazing ways because of it. I’ve earned it. You know, so, no!

From Professor Deborah’s perspective, she has earned the right not to have to “perform” her sexual orientation in order to “help the kids,” as her colleague describes. She notes that identity development around sexual orientation in college is “never ending,” and that being performative around issues of sexuality, coming out, or investments in marriage is undesirable for her.

Professor Deborah acknowledges the freedom to make these types of choices at her institution; she is able to voice her positions about marriage and abortion, and

refuse to give talks from a certain perspective or “perform” for student groups, without fear of sanction. She explained, “I think we [faculty] are very opinionated. The level of freedom we have in this environment is extraordinary. So, we can say all kinds of things.” During a class meeting of RTF, I observed an encounter in which she openly stated her position on the “right to life” debate in the U.S. in the context of a discussion on international human rights violations. After class, we spoke at length about what had transpired.

The student sits straight up, her arm fully extended in the air and hand waving slightly, side to side at the wrist. Professor Deborah nods at her. “Well, what about the right to life?” she asks. Her tone is righteous; her inflection, part question and part challenge. Professor Deborah seems amused, “The right to life debate is cast as an abortion debate only in the U.S. because the U.S. is the one that has the abortion extravaganza,” Professor Deborah responds dismissively. The student winces in her chair, purses her lips tightly and looks down at the desk, fuming. She sits, arms folded, with a downward gaze for the rest of the class. Professor Deborah continues on with the class discussion, calling on others, occasionally looking directly at the student, who does not look up. The student leaves the classroom immediately when she signals dismissal.

Professor Deborah brought up this incident as we began our interview for that day. “Today I said something inappropriate in class,” she admits, “and I saw a student flinch, so I’m going to have to have a conversation with her.” I inquired as to what

exactly she felt was inappropriate, and if she felt taking a political position in the classroom was wrong. She responded:

Yes, I put my politics out there in a way that probably for me was inappropriate. I think faculty do that all the time. You know, for me it's abortion. For other faculty it's gay rights, or it's um, immigration that makes them bristle. I don't mind putting my politics out there, [but I was] judgmental of other people's politics. So, I saw that I judged her politics by what I said. I could have been a little less flippant and still engaged her and still held her interest. Now I may have lost an aspect of her head. That's all I'm talking about. I will always put my views out and I will answer students when they ask me my views, but it doesn't have to be in a way that depreciates what they believe.

Professor Deborah insists that sharing her political position is not wrong, but that being flippant in her response and being openly judgmental of the views of her student was an inappropriate act. She is afraid that she "may have lost an aspect of her head," but is sure that speaking with this student will re-engage her and gain back her confidence.

I inquired as to how safe Professor Deborah felt openly sharing her views and identities. I framed this discussion in terms of safe spaces and vulnerabilities based on her identities. Professor Deborah defined a safe space as "a feminist space, a space where I know there are people there who are feminists, who philosophically [and] ideologically are feminists, and think about those ideas." She notes that for her, a safe feminist space also includes men, asserting that a safe space does not have to be a

women-only or gay-only space, “but at the very least it has to be a relatively feminist space,” she explains. In regard to her institution, Professor Deborah notes:

A safe space would be spaces where I have um, support, there’s no sense that any sanction could ensue from my identification. Now I think [this institution] is a pretty safe space among my colleagues. Um, I don’t particularly care to divulge my identity to my students. I live my identity and I hope they get it, especially the ones that might need me to be one of those identities with them or to them or for them.

Although Professor Deborah is “out” to her colleagues and to her students in many ways that her students “get,” she does not clearly articulate her sexual orientation in the classroom. She described the ways in which she “sends up little signals,” in the classroom, in order to more subtly divulge her identities to her students: “I’ll tell them that I know people, that I know this [gay] person and I knew this other person. That’s going to be odd. That should, hopefully, send up little signals, right?” She and I discussed a lesson on LGBT rights; I inquired whether or not she thought her students “got it” or made assumptions about her identity during this lesson. She noted:

[The chance] they will find me in the middle of this [lesson] I think is high . . . I think they will. For those that are paying attention, I think they will. But you know, I’m equal opportunity indignant, and so I tend to be indignant about violations and betrayals of all kinds of people, and I bring it into the classroom and I’m fairly passionate when I’m concerned about these things. So they may not figure it out,

a good number of them may not figure it out. So, some of them may get that I'm particularly, um, *interested* in this and I'm thinking about this.

Regardless of whether the students make the connections within the classroom, Professor Deborah feels that the students who need her to "be one of those identities with, to, or for them" are "paying attention" and will "get it." She confirms that they do seek her out.

Being Innocent: The Intersection of Black and Gay

Professor Deborah and I explored the ways in which her colleagues "get" her. She articulates her positioning at the intersections of race, gender, and sexual orientation as a location for "being innocent." She believes she has room to behave in certain ways and say certain things from this position. She sees herself as differently situated than many of her other colleagues, given her "Black and international, foreign ethnicity."

In this context, Professor Deborah framed her "innocence" as stemming from a location outside of a White/African American power dynamic, framed by the history of slavery. She felt that asserting her Blackness, and speaking up on behalf of her Black colleagues and Black students, was interpreted as an innocent action by white faculty and administrators because it lacked a particular element of "anger" or reference to "racism" for them. Rather than see her as a Black woman who was irrationally angry and accusatory toward white people, her assertiveness around Black issues was framed as exotic or foreign. In short, she is seen as innocent because her exotic Blackness does not always already signal a racist accusation. She also pointed

the institution's tendency to hire Black gay faculty. Of the very few Black faculty on campus (and even staff of color, I learned over the course of the semester), the overwhelming majority of those faculty members also identify as gay, lesbian, and/or queer:

I think there are African American faculty that will be seen as innocent, and the way I think it manifests, [this] institution seems to hire people who are Black and gay. That's a safety space for [this school]. And I think that there's something that has percolated up for administration, that gay people are less antagonistic around race; they may be more antagonistic around sexuality, but white people can get behind that — they are much more comfortable with discussions around sexuality than race. So what they have done, they neuter the discussion around race. And I see what that does, seemingly shutting down any consternation around race, because there are these intersections.

At the heart of this discussion is the assertion that the administration tends to be more comfortable hiring Black gay faculty and queer staff of color based in “the assumption that [queer people of color] are not as vigilant about [race],” says Professor Deborah. She feels that her colleagues also see her as “innocent” and recognize the ways in which she can get away with more:

There's this kind of unspoken [rule that] Professor Deborah will raise that issue, or Professor Deborah will talk about that issue, because,

one, she takes risks; and two, she is non-threatening. She knows how to make ugly things acceptable so we will let her do these things.

Although she feels that there is an unspoken rule amongst her Black colleagues that she will speak out on issues of racism and homophobia in particular, at times these very colleagues feel embarrassed by her behavior:

I take a lot of space to the point where I embarrass some of my Black colleagues . . . do you know what I am saying? . . . And they think . . . who does she think she is sometimes . . . Like, “This uppity nigger, here she comes!” How do they talk about it, [they say] “Oh! *Here you go.*” They’re tenured, they are all tenured, why aren’t you hammering these people on this shit! I’m not African American, so I am not laboring under the same conditions around race, I’m laboring around other issues around race, which are similar [but] I also see my colleagues laboring under issues of race having to do with American history, in relation to me, but they are quickly persuaded that I am not dealing with their shit, white and Black.

She feels that white colleagues and administrators interpret critiques of racism as an attack and “stop listening,” Her Black colleagues are affronted by this and often rely on “innocent” Professor Deborah, who is not seen as accusatory by white colleagues, to speak up:

I want for them to understand *how* they are [obliterating people of color from the conversation], so that next time we don’t have this conversation, but if . . . [they] feel put upon, that I attack them, they

stop listening to me. So I find that I can say very difficult things, in a way that my more closed colleague can hear.

Professor Deborah believes she is able to make comments and critiques that are received by her white colleagues because they see her as innocent, and her manner of delivering these comments as non-threatening, given that they do not come from a place of “African American anger.”

Overload: “But You Are So Good at It!”

Professor Deborah is involved in many projects, organizations, and events, and advises many student groups on campus. She sees her “innocence,” as allowing her to “have her fingers in all kinds of pies.” She notes that her involvement in and directing campus programs and projects does draw suspicions from some, “Why is she doing all of this?” Others say, “Oh it’s just Professor Deborah, nonthreatening, she’s just interested in these things.” She discloses:

The more shrewd people realize I’m tampering with the institution.

Some do [object], they’ve never opened their objection to me outside of the one or two people I mentioned. In fact, the leadership of the institution doesn’t know why I’m not doing *more*! My faculty record; I was shocked by it! I did not think about it really until I was forced to do it. I thought, my God what’s happening, what am I, you know, how am I doing all of this? So then I backed [off] because of tenure and both of my bosses said, “Why aren’t you out there so much anymore?” Dude! I’m out there more than any other faculty member! You know,

it's the double consciousness in this institution, and probably every other institution; we get asked to do a lot more.

Advising is another area in which Professor Deborah sees herself as overloaded or “asked to do more,” than other faculty members. She explained that she and several other Black faculty got together to examine their advising rosters (which at this institution include first and second year students who have not yet declared a major, and who may not work directly with the faculty advisor). She notes that it is “very challenging” to take care of both teaching and research, and the mental and emotional health of students; “we do it de-facto, but we don't actually accept that we are doing it, so there are no resources, training, no discussion with us about how we might incorporate these students better, you know.”

Professor Deborah and her Black colleagues noted that they had an overwhelming number of “problem” students on their advising rosters. At such a small institution, everyone knew who these difficult students were, and Professor Deborah pointed out the high numbers of those with documented learning disabilities or mental health documentation, “and I'm only going on [the] medication [documentation],” she noted as she discussed this with the other Black faculty members. She reports:

There is some kind of underground chatter about who can handle these students *better*. [Under a particular administrator], Black faculty overwhelmingly got difficult students, both in their classes and as advisees. And it was so noticeable that we (three of black faculty)

finally sat down and talked [about] the numbers, and we said wow!

And so I was basically elected to go deal with [the administrator].

Professor Deborah met with the administrator and describes the meeting as “absolutely the most useless conversation I’ve ever had at the school.” She reports that she discussed the racial component to this problem for Black faculty and asked why the administrator would put difficult students with Black faculty. “She didn’t deny it!” She said, “But you know you are so good at it,” she said. “This was said without any consciousness whatsoever, like I’m here to take care of her white children.” She reported that she “left it,” and eventually the administrator moved into another position.

I asked her how she would describe student advising. “Very often it looks like therapy,” she chuckled, noting that she was a bit overwhelmed by requests and had to cut back her office hours because of her popularity as an advisor. “I have a reputation for listening to students and being very directive, because I don’t see the point of listening to people talk about their problems unless you are going to give them a solution.” The students respond strongly to this advising style. “I’m interventionist, I offer tools, I offer strategies, I offer something you can try right now, something you can try a little longer term and something little further out there, and I do it that way because that’s my nature.” Professor Deborah reports that students come to her about everything: sexuality, relationships, and conflicts around religion, to name a few issues. “I get gay students and straight students,” she reports, but very rarely do Black students seek her advice. “Black students are terrified of me . . . that’s my feeling,” she said.

Professor Deborah asserts that as someone who “fills a lot of quotas” in regard to race, gender, sexual orientation, and nationality, she is asked to do a lot more than most other faculty members. “The thing that annoys me is the assumption that I will continue cranking out at this level.” She says that the stress of these expectations has also harmed her well-being. The most important thing for her is “the impact it has on [her] program.” She notes that she is very pleased that her involvement has strengthened the program and raised its profile. “I want the program to be central to this college, because otherwise it’s not going to survive; that’s what I am into,” she says. She also shares the ways in which the expectations of her as a faculty member of color, the expectation to do *more*, has affected her health:

I am sick. I didn’t come in here sick, and the kind of sick that I got has to do with stress, I’m not doing 100 projects a year [anymore]. So why is it that you can’t see that this is really quite extraordinary, and in seeing that it’s quite extraordinary. . . . Yeah, it has taken a terrific toll on my health . . . it’s taken a toll on my intimate relationships.

At the end of the semester I was worried about Professor Deborah’s health. She explained that she has several good doctors, and was exercising and enjoying stress-releasing activities. Still, I continue to check in with her and inquire as to how she is feeling.

Case Three: Mel Michelle

Portrait

I am a young Black woman in my early thirties; as a graduate student, I have been an instructor for six years, alternating my time between three predominantly

white institutions (PWI); a large state Research One university, a state honors university, and at a small private liberal arts college. I identify as a queer feminist femme lesbian southern belle from Alabama. I am petite and quite frenetic, moving about the classroom as if it were a stage. Students, without knowing my background in classical dance, often comment that I “dance” around the room. Indeed, I rarely sit down in the classroom and recognize that I am somewhat uncomfortable with the difference in the subdued energy of the classroom and tenor of student engagement when I do. At times creating calm in the classroom is necessary; however, students and faculty observing my teaching style most frequently comment on how “energetic” and passionate I am about the course material and the ways in which that excitement is transmitted from my body to the students.

Often “dressed up to the nines” in full suits on teaching days, and slacks, blouses, skirts, and dresses for other campus engagements, I receive complements from faculty and students alike on my fancy shoes with ribbons and pointy ornate cowboy boots. Dressing up is a part of my professional performance. For me, well-tailored clothing, fancy shoes, and a fashionable short haircut signal my playfulness as well as the seriousness with which I wish to be received. I invest in this performance and believe that it has the potential to trouble some of the assumptions presented by my precarious positioning as an out Black queer young woman in the academy.

I am “a sista’ friend professor” to my students. I hold high standards for their assignments and push them to work through difficult material, while also acting as a confidant and advisor about academic, professional, and personal issues; most often I

am sought out as a counselor on applying to graduate school, “coming out” for LGBT students, pregnancy for female students, and isolation for Black students at predominantly white institutions (PWI).

An Uncanny Resemblance

This research project was precipitated in part by experiences in the classroom in which I perceived my body and identity to be a canvas for teaching and learning. I intentionally highlight my identities and connect them to the texts and materials; I consider the concept of embodied text in the classroom as central to how I understand my own pedagogical project. My first indicators of the influence of my own textual body came in the form of student comments made in passing and seemingly without much contemplation on their part. I began to note the contexts of these comments: their frequency in different classes by different students over time intrigued me. I concluded that these recurring statements indicated that students were influenced by the ways in which my body and identities were aligned with the texts. This sense of alignment was heightened when those texts articulated a Black feminist and/or Black lesbian perspective, and when I explicitly expressed a connection by sharing a personal experience, or affinity for the text based on my identities.

The comments aligning my textual body with course materials take on two forms, which I call, “sorry, no offense,” and “you are the author.” The first form necessitates that a student’s affinity for, or more often, criticism of a text must include a statement that indicates the student is not criticizing me, although I bear an uncanny resemblance to the text. These statements take the form of, “Sorry, I don’t mean you,” or “No offense.” For example, I often teach the Combahee River Collective’s “A

Black Feminist Statement”²³⁴ as an introductory piece articulating the concept of intersectionality and coalition. I always preface the classroom discussion with a story about my own first women’s studies course.

I sit on the table at the front of the room peering at my students. “As an undergraduate student in a women’s studies survey course in feminist theory, I was introduced to the Combahee River Collective, as one of the only representations of Black lesbian feminist theory and history,” I say. I explain how this led me to the claim for my first women’s studies term paper, which asserted: “An intersectional framework that does not clearly articulate sexuality, specifically lesbian sexualities, is lacking in a full analysis of identity and oppression.” I laugh with them at how seriously I took this information, and how I can still quote almost to the letter what I thought must be the smartest sentence ever written. Sitting in that classroom as a student then, I tell them I wished I had been there as a member of the collective in 1977, wearing a dashiki and a matching head wrap! I joke. “I spent a lot of time imagining what I would wear.” They laugh at me, as I pose like Angela Davis, my fist in the air for dramatic flair. “At the time, I was sure I had missed the era of Black lesbian feminism by a decade or two, and I believed there surely was no contemporary community articulating these ideas.” I proceed with my lecture, feeling that I have illustrated the personal, political,

²³⁴ See Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement,” 232-240.

*and pedagogical significance of this text. I also hope I have not made myself too vulnerable.*²³⁵

After a short lecture and a few comments from the class, a student says, “You know, I thought the Black lesbian feminist manifesto about ending all forms of oppression at the same time was kind of taking on too much at once. Sorry, no offense to you.” In having shared a particular fondness for this reading with my class, I had intentionally personalized it; however, my intention was not to impede commentary or critique. The “no offense to you” comment is one of many heard over the years that seem to indicate that when engaging with texts by and about Black women/Black lesbian women, students feel the need to assure me that they are talking about the text and not about me. To reassure them, I confirm that I understand their comments to be about the text and that I do not take their critiques personally, although the comments do relate to my identities and embodiment. I also use those opportunities to encourage them to find elements of themselves in everything that we read.

I find it significant that texts by and about white women, men, or readings that seem more general or impersonal to students (the law, income statistics, voting trends, etc.) do not require a “no offense” statement. This indicates to me that students analyze readings that directly refer to identities and align them with my own articulated race, gender, and sexual orientation in the classroom, reading them alongside my own embodied text in ways that implicate me as the instructor.

²³⁵ Narrative and discussion adapted from Lewis, Mel Michelle Lewis, “Body of Knowledge: Black Queer Feminist Pedagogy, Praxis, and Embodied Text,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 15, no. 1 (2011), 49–57.

The second manifestation of statements indicating the influence of embodied text is what I call “you are the author” statements, in which students “slip up,” calling a text “yours” or in some way attributing the work to me rather than its true author. For instance, I have heard “your book,” in reference to *Still Brave: The Evolution of Black Women’s Studies*²³⁶ and *Femme: Feminists, Lesbians and Bad Girls*,²³⁷ but never in reference to *The Power of Feminist Art*²³⁸, or *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text-Reader*.²³⁹ In email form I have received: “I wrote my journal entry about *your* poem, “A Woman Speaks!” In this instance, Lorde’s poem becomes “mine.” To ensure that students recognize that the voice of the author is not mine, I often provide short biographies at the beginning of a lecture or at the end of class when introducing the reading assignments to be completed for the following class period.

These comments point first to my own alignment with texts and materials. In pursuit of this inquiry, I deliberately say, “Black women/we/I,” “As a woman/I,” or “as a queer identified person/lesbian/femme/I” during classroom discussions. This intensifies the ways in which my students relate the class materials to my own identities and embodied performances. This alignment is indicative of how my body functions as a text in the classroom, performing in such a way that I cannot always be removed or distinguished from the topical or textual material itself. In these instances, my identity and embodiment have an impact on meaning-making in the

²³⁶ Foster, Guy-Sheftall, and James, *Still Brave*.

²³⁷ Laura Harris and Elizabeth Crocker, *Femme: Feminists, Lesbians and Bad Girls* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

²³⁸ Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, *The Power of Feminist Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996).

²³⁹ Gail Dines and Jean McMahon Humez, *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text-Reader* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003).

classroom, heightened when the material is about the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality and less obvious when the subject is more generally about art and media. In truth, I both allow and discourage this sense of alignment, consciously walking a difficult line between mobilizing my Black queer body as a text and drawing students back to the theoretical readings produced by Black women's intellectual labor.

Now You Know

As I made note of my uses of “I” and “we” in reference to race, gender, and sexual orientation, I also honed in on moments of “coming out” or explicitly enunciating my identities in the classroom. In regard to sexual orientation, on the first day of class, I share my research areas, work experience, and organizational affiliations, as a part of introductions. All of these areas indicate my involvement with queer communities. Although I do not state, “I am a lesbian” on the first day, I feel that I am providing fodder for and leaving room for assumptions and speculation. Students who meet me for advising in my office encounter a “safe zone” sign on my door, as well.

None of these revelations is explicit, but certainly indicate that I am queer-friendly, at the very least. A week or two into the semester, I usually assign an intersectionality reading like “A Black Feminist Statement,” which allows me to more clearly articulate my identity. The following narrative illustrates a moment of “coming out” more explicitly in the classroom during a visit from a group of LGBT peer educators:

The class applauds as the three students situate themselves at a table at the front of the room. One student provocatively invites the class to “ask anything you want,” indicating that the group has never been asked anything they didn’t want to answer. My heart races; what if my students make inappropriate comments or are insulting to the speakers, or to one another? I consider how wounded I would be if all of the attention given to intersectional approaches to race, gender, sexuality failed at this moment. I plan strategies to intervene if needed. I am confident that I have, in some way, alluded to my own sexuality in the context of class discussion or personal asides and am sure my students, at the very least, would not want to insult or betray me. At the end of the discussion period, the last student to comment thanks the panel, noting, “I didn’t even know any gay people until today, and now I know three.” Standing at the table with the panel, I smile and playfully declare to the class, “Ah, no, now you know four!” placing my hands on my chest to indicate I was referring to myself. The class erupts into laughter as they thank the panel and file out of the door. I am pleased at the success of the session.

Immediately following this class period, a student met with me to discuss coming out to her family, one thanked me via e-mail for “creating a safe space” in the classroom, and another “came out” as a lesbian in class and began to openly discuss perspectives informed by her identity. Examining this moment allows me to assess how text, body, and identity intersect in order to formulate a more effective pedagogical praxis in the classroom and beyond.²⁴⁰ For me, coming out explicitly in a

²⁴⁰ Narrative and discussion adapted from Lewis, 2011.

light moment becomes an example of the ways in which we can simultaneously engage with the course material and our own identities and experiences. I feel that when I make myself known, by enunciating my identities, I encourage this feminist formation of knowledge production, which centers the personal-as-political nexus. I also feel that I create a safe space for students to engage with their less visible identities. Students seem to feel more comfortable enunciating their sexual orientation, religious identity, or class background during class discussion.

Another opportunity to more clearly enunciate my identities and utilize my textual body to initiate a conversation about race was initiated by a student's public misreading of my Blackness in a course on Women, Art, and Culture. In this instance, I used, "as a Black woman, I" statement in reference to my affinity for *The Color Purple*.²⁴¹

The conversation is somewhat casual as I walk among the rows. I hear a long, skeptical "what?" in the back of the room, a sassy, songlike, "what?" that rises in pitch before fading out on a high note accompanied by a raised eyebrow. I turn to address the student with my reply. "What?" I say, not at all sure what this inquiry was in reference to. "You're Black? Like African American?" she asks; the class shuffles papers, feet, chairs, a few women giggle. "Yeah, girl," I say to the student, also a Black woman, "I'm Black!" Surprised and amused (tickled to death as my grandmother would say), I try to tease out how one of my students several weeks into the semester could harbor the assumption that I am not a Black woman!

²⁴¹ Alice Walker, *The Color Purple: A Novel* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982).

This exchange inspired a fruitful conversation with the class regarding assumptions made about Black women, particularly within an academic context. The conversation identified assumptions about Black women's femininity, ways of speaking, presence in higher education, and an examination of what a Black feminist "looks like." It is possible that most of my students have never had a Black female instructor at the college level, or possibly at all. In the context of our university, the students communicated that in their estimation, many of the faculty who share some of my physical and aesthetic characteristics indeed do not identify as Black or African American, but perhaps as South Asian, Latina, or African.²⁴² This exchange early in the semester led to an ongoing joke. "Um hmm, remember when ya'll thought I wasn't Black!" I would tease whenever I caught myself identifying as Black with an "I" or "we" statement.

The Difficult Ones

In this self-study, I also recorded the ways in which I addressed or avoided confrontation in the classroom. I now recognize myself to be much more passive and non-confrontational than I imagined, particularly around race. In a course on Black History, with a majority of white students enrolled, I walk the line between allowing for an open respectful dialogue and becoming "an angry Black woman," in the eyes of the class. Over the years, and as is my nature generally, I tend to re-interpret racist, classist, homophobic, and sexist statements for students. I often use "what I hear you saying is" as a helpful reframing phrase. For example, if a student complains that "welfare mothers keep having babies," I might reframe the statement, saying, "What I

²⁴² Narrative and discussion adapted from Lewis, "Body of Knowledge," 49–57.

hear you saying is that you are concerned for women entrenched in systems of poverty who may choose to expand their families, even though the government systems they depend upon are flawed and many of their communities have disparate resources.” Of course, in the moment, this reframing is not always eloquent; however, it has the potential to turn a racist complaint based on a welfare queen narrative into a discussion, which at the very least, includes components of structural oppressions. I also make use of phrases like, “we might think about that idea using different language,” and “yes, there are multiple perspectives on this, we should position some of them now.” This helps when students inadvertently use the term “coloreds,” or “illegals,” to name people of color or immigrant groups, and to point out political stances on abortion and the right to marry from left, right, and center so that no one feels her or his viewpoint has not been acknowledged.

These phrases give students the benefit of the doubt, while illustrating that some comments are unacceptable in their original form. This tends to work well, so long as the student recognizes his or her blunder. Often a student will respond, “yes, that’s what I meant,” or will apologize, or even ask, “so, I can/should say Black/gay, not colored or homosexuals?” In most cases the student simply does not know any better. However, I can be pushed to my limit with students who are hindered by a “liberal color blind” stance.

In teaching this course, I realized that quite smart well-meaning students can still offend almost *everyone* in the class, every class meeting. Comments like, “My best friend is Black,” “I have Black people’s hair/skin,” were obnoxious but benign. Eventually, students began to come to my office hours to complain. “Can you do

something,” they would ask. “Please!” I wrote a letter to the class and sent it out through online course space, outlining new rules for discussion, encouraging students to yield the floor if they had already spoken, laying down rules of engagement for handling disagreements, and encouraging them to come to my office hours to discuss further anything left unsaid in class.

These parameters worked for a while in this class, until a “liberal” white student used the word “nigger” — in context, but in a very unconscious and uncritical way that almost everyone in the class found offensive. Before I could address the offending student, the few Black students in the class began to speak out, expressing their displeasure. The Black women in particular added that they felt maligned by a pattern of disrespect and unchecked white privilege. I chimed in that I thought it was time to lay aside the assignments for the day and to have a conversation about just that. I stated that I was willing to lead the conversation or would act as a mediator, whichever the class agreed upon. The Black women in the class requested that I mediate, and they felt it important that they lead the conversation; the other students agreed. I told them I trusted everyone in the room to abide by the rules of engagement and was pleased that they wanted to take the initiative. Although I believe some of the students were still ignorant concerning the nature of their insults, I do believe this episode was a fruitful exchange. Turning the floor over to the Black women in the class also strengthened our bond. They came to my office hours more frequently, and engaged me with things beyond the class we had together.

The Candy Penalty: Punitive Reinvention, Positive Reinforcement

Cell phone use in the classroom deeply bothers me. Students' ability to sit through an entire class period without engaging with their cell phones has diminished drastically over time. As a smart phone user, I understand being compelled to check for messages and to immediately respond to any form of communication. However, I consider ringing phones, texting, instant messaging, or playing games instead of participating during class time to be unacceptable. My dilemma is that, as a young Black queer feminist teacher, I worry about the proper expression of anger in the classroom. Since my classroom performance emphasizes an embodiment of accessibility, support, and friendliness, how do I impose discipline?

I banned computers in my first year of teaching, with exceptions for students with documented disabilities. I subsequently outlawed cell phones and tablet devices as they became more popular. I am hyper aware in the classroom and I have very sensitive hearing; I notice even discreet vibrations and am annoyed by quiet clicking sounds. After my first two semesters of strictly prohibiting the use of cell phones, I became frustrated. It was quite obvious that my students weren't taking my instructions to silence and put away their phones very seriously. A few minutes into the class period someone would inevitably rummage in his or her backpack for a phone, read a message, react, and respond, typing under the desk. If the student immediately put the phone away in response to my stern look, I would continue with my lecture or the class discussion. On some occasions I would publically ask the student to put away their phone and direct them to see me after class. In other

instances I emailed the student after the class period to notify them that I had deducted participation points.

Eventually, I realized that this was not a successful approach. The deducted participation points never really affected anyone's final grade. I admit I wasn't really intimidating or consistent enough to convincingly enforce the rule without a lot of emotional effort on my part and disruption of the classroom. I also feel vulnerable about readings of Black women's anger. I am very sensitive when it comes to misinterpretations of mild reproach, disagreement, or my taking offense, particularly from white people. I see myself as a friendly, accommodating, compromising person, who is very slow to anger. However, my minor frustration has been interpreted as anger. Strangers stereotypically mimicking a neck rolling and finger snapping angry Black woman with attitude have offended and wounded me. I did not want this kind of misreading to enter my classroom.

I needed another strategy to deal with the use of cell phones in the classroom. During a class period that took place the day after Halloween, I got an idea. I had plenty of extra candy and brought it to class to share with my students. I don't have much of a sweet tooth and thought it best to give the candy away. Over the next few class periods my students also brought in their extra treats to share. This turned out to be a positive and community building gesture that also seemed to make the students more attentive in class, and the discussions were more energetic and cordial. I decided to make a new "penalty" for texting and ringing phones in class. My syllabus now includes directions for students to "apologize" by bringing candy to the next class period.

With this new approach, I am able to playfully invoke the rule when a student's phone accidentally rings or I catch them texting in class. Rather than police them sternly (I am utterly unconvincing), I am able to tease "Ah ha! We can look forward to some treats from Jane next class!" or "What do we want Tom to bring us on Monday class, chocolate or fruit flavors?" I then let the class vote and make a request of the offending student. This is a bit embarrassing for the student and also requires effort on their part; they must go get the candy and bring it to class. Often, I bring along alternative treats for those who can't have or don't care for the day's selection, such as nuts or miniature raisin boxes.

The candy penalty requires students to be more accountable to their peers; I frame the offering of candy as an "apology" for rude behavior on their part. Although providing candy for the class is a punishment of sorts, there is an element of lightheartedness that better suits the energy of my classroom than a stringent punishment. The community accountability component also results in making students hyper aware of their responsibility to turn their phones off and to delay their next text message until the end of class. I rarely have repeat offenders using this form of reprimand. However, if they make a mistake, we will gladly accept their apology.

A Question of Quizzes: Cultivating Investments in Women's Studies

I often have students on my roster who resist placing women's studies classes on par with their science and math classes. I recognize my young Black queer female embodiment make it even easier for the students to dismiss the rigor of the course. Each semester, I receive requests from students who want permission to arrive late or leave early from my class, in order to attend the entirety of the math or science class

that precedes or follows my class period. They insist that these classes use smart classroom technology and require them to take quizzes within the first or last five minutes using a multiple choice “clicker.” These quizzes “affected their grade” and they simply could not make it all the way across campus from or to my classroom without missing this weighty automated quiz.

I met with these students, maintaining that their women’s studies course was worth three credits, the same as their other classes. I noted that any time missed could not be made up and that they would no doubt miss important information, which might affect their final grade. Several students often dropped my class following this counseling. Those that remained enrolled brushed off my warnings and were chronically tardy or left early each period; these students frequently missed essential directions, important deadlines, and other announcements, significantly impacting their grades.

I realized that multiple choice, quantitative, “clicker quizzes” legitimated other courses and fields of study in the minds of many of my students. I decided to give women’s studies quizzes a try. Although I was never assigned a classroom with the technology to utilize the multiple choice clickers, I devised basic quizzes to be given at the beginning or end of class that included one or two multiple choice questions, one fill in the blank, and one short answer question that could be answered in a sentence or two. These participation point quizzes mimicked the math and science course clicker quizzes. I saw a significant increase in engagement with the material, as well as prompt and complete attendance.

Although these quizzes were usually half-sheets of paper with three or four questions, and were worth only a few participation points each, they did require additional preparation and grading time on my part. I do emphasize qualitative materials and methods in my classroom. However, for the purposes of this assignment, I engaged things that could be easily quoted, defined, or quantified from the day's lesson, such as: "Name two of the 'controlling images' discussed by Patricia Hill Collins," or "Define four components of the domestic violence power and control wheel." The impact on engagement and attendance was worth it. Over the course of the semester, I was able to limit the frequency of quizzes to once every two or three class periods without much of a change in the positive results it produced.

Setting the Mood: Pedagogies of Activity

Establishing the mood in the classroom is imperative; I employ music, visual art, or movement to set a tone or theme for the day's lesson. I recognize that everyone comes into the classroom with a unique energy. One student may be flustered by a frustrating commute, another is exhausted from writing all night; another may have been walked to class amorously by a new love, while others are still affected by an intense or monotonous class period just prior to our meeting. Welcoming everyone into the classroom with an activity or experience allows us all to share a happening, and the opportunity to be on the same page.

I most frequently play music in the first few minutes to engage students as they enter the room. My Black feminism leads me to privilege Black female performers across genres; this becomes a moment when the sound of their voices gestures cumulatively towards a Black women's musical tradition. On some days I

charm with jazz greats, such as Billie Holiday or Bessie Smith. On other days I energize with hip hop standards by Queen Latifah, pop anthems by Beyoncé, or a rock track by Res. When students ask, I post the name and artist of songs that they have enjoyed on our online class site, they can also post songs and we get to know each other's taste in music. Sometimes I play songs that are related to the lesson; I might pair Bessie Smith's "Sugar in My Bowl," with readings on female sexual agency. In other instances, I am simply trying to counteract the weather on a cold gloomy day, or energize lethargic students just after lunchtime. This practice is also personal. I get excited and feel prepared for class when I choose a song to play; this is the last step in my preparation process. I enjoy listening to songs by my favorite artists as students file in, ask questions about assignments, hand in papers, and settle in for the day's lesson.

I have also used visual art to set the tone for the day's class. Instead of a quiz, I ask students to describe a work such as Lorna Simpson's *Waterbearer* or Frida Kahlo's *Two Fridas*. As students file in, they are met quietly with instructions to describe what they see, what is most striking, and what feelings the image elicits. After the first few minutes of class, I call on volunteers to share and we have a brief discussion together as a class before moving to the readings for the day. I most frequently use this type of media literacy exercise in courses that center women's art and culture; however, I have found that it works as a centering exercise in any classroom setting.

Although I use movement exercises less frequently than music or visual art, they are also an effective way to engage students at the beginning of class. I usually

tie the exercise to discussions of gender performance. More often than not, I have many “theatrical” students who are more than happy to perform in front of the class. As other students become comfortable, even the more reserved members of the class begin to volunteer to perform or speak up at the front of the classroom. I never require a student to participate, however. Once, I was deeply affected by a brilliant student who privately expressed her terror that I would make her perform or speak publically when she was not prepared. She was so nervous she considered dropping the class. Although she eventually became more comfortable speaking in class, and with much encouragement was able to complete a group presentation at the front of the room, I decided never to require performance of anyone.

During a period of Women and Sexuality, a mid level class with many first and second year students, I used performance to explore very basic concepts from Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*.²⁴³ As students entered the room, I provided them with markers; they then went to the whiteboard to list elements of gender performance. I then had students volunteer to perform for the class some of the items listed while their classmate commented, using Butler’s chapter as a guide. This performance activity captured students immediately upon entering the room, and allowed them to personalize the challenging read.

Flexible Pedagogies: Addressing Urgent Campus Happenings

Campus communities must often deal with hate crimes and bias incidents. I find that each year, I must put the course schedule aside in order to address a pressing

²⁴³ Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (New York: Routledge, 1990).

matter; these have included high profile sexual assaults and hazing incidents, as well as homophobic or racist graffiti and attacks. One of the most significant incidents for me as a teacher was an incident that took place in 2007, in which someone hung a noose from a tree outside the campus Black student union and cultural center. This event made national news and inspired a “speak out,” as well as various town hall style meetings, and conversations. Some of my students were enraged and politicized while others seemed completely unconcerned.

As students entered the classroom the day following the incident, some of them wanted to discuss their feelings in class, as well as the response of their peers, professors, and the university. I realized that this was a big deal to many of them, particularly for the students of color. We would need to cancel the syllabus and address the issue until further notice. We arranged the desks in a circle so that we could see and speak with one another as a classroom community. In order to ease the students into what I assumed would be an emotional conversation, I started the class by asking if they had discussed the incident in any of their other classes. Only one or two students said it was even mentioned by their professors, and several of them were frustrated that many of their classes were proceeding as if nothing was happening. I then asked them about their peers, and what was being said. Some of them noted that their friends, roommates, team members, fraternity brothers, and sorority sisters were planning various events in response.

Then I asked the students themselves what they thought had happened. Six or seven in the class of twenty-five believed the noose was symbolic of a racist and hostile environment on campus; they believed that it sent a message of terrorism. This

group included all of the students of color and a few white students. However, the vast majority of the class described the noose as a prank or a sick joke, but characterized it as harmless at best and simply an offensive symbol at worst. I somehow mediated this heated debate. I realized that even the students who affiliated the noose with a symbol of a hostile racial climate were not clear on the historical significance and symbolism. At the end of class I told them we would continue to discuss this incident next class. I planned for the following period using images from the online supplement to James Allen's book *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*.²⁴⁴

The lights are off as students enter the room. An online slideshow of images displays on the screen. Billie Holiday sings her rendition of Strange Fruit through the computer speakers. The song plays twice, accompanying the slides as they display ever more gruesome and violent images on the screen. Saying nothing, I stand at the door with my finger over my lips, instructing the students to take their seats silently and to immerse themselves in the presentation. When I bring up the lights, several of the students are crying. I feel nauseated myself. I realize that I might have pushed them too far.

Although I realized after the fact that as a Black woman from Alabama, I was indeed upset with the students who believed the noose to be a harmless prank, I had not meant to harm them. I did intentionally aim to stir their senses in order to get at the emotion inherent in the noose's symbolism. This worked, perhaps too well; some of the students I had been trying to reach shut down in the wake of such powerful

²⁴⁴ James Allen, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Twin Palms, 2000).

images and did not join the subsequent conversation. I realize now that they simply had not known what to think of the public outcry and likely had never seen images of lynching. The class consensus shifted, however, after deeply considering the historical weight of the noose as a symbol. I was able to instruct them to pick up where we left off on the syllabus for the upcoming class period. At that point I think we were all relieved to move to another subject. Walking the line between acknowledging or invoking the Black body as a site of learning and the necessity to avoid sensationalism is an ongoing challenge in my pedagogy.

Dilemmas to Consider when Teaching Desire

During a semester course on Women and Sexuality, I was surprised by the reaction my students had to the text *Dilemmas of Desire*.²⁴⁵ As freshmen and sophomores, in a class of twenty women and one male student, most of the students in the class had only recently graduated from high school and still saw themselves as teenage girls suffering under the double standards presented by Tolman's qualitative study. When discussing the book, the students often used "we" and aligned themselves with the girls that Tolman interviewed about their attitudes toward sexuality. My classroom became an extension of Tolman's study; my students answered the same questions posed in the book about sexual activity, parents, health concerns, and pregnancy. Rather than engaging their frustrations with this system of oppression, they attacked Tolman's text. At first I thought one or two of "the popular girls" in my class were showing their smarts. Rather than simply analyzing the

²⁴⁵ Deborah L. Tolman, *Dilemmas of Desire: Teenage Girls Talk About Sexuality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

content, they thought it clever to critique Tolman's line of questioning, language, and assumptions. However, as I read through the journals and listened intently to class discussions, I recognized they were ultimately concerned with two topics: getting boys' attention, and fearing pregnancy. Tolman's study became an unfortunate target of their deep personal frustrations.

As a lesbian woman who has been "out" to myself and others since the age of fourteen, my main concern during those years was trying to find another lesbian somewhere on the planet. I was not at all concerned with boys or pregnancy in high school or college; it took me quite a while to interpret my students' anxieties. Of course, I had ideas based in feminist scholarship, but was unprepared and under-informed as to what my students had experienced. "What are some of the central arguments of this text?" I would push, trying to at the very least engage with some of Tolman's ideas. "She did it all wrong," they would say. "She is putting words in their mouths," "she's asking all the wrong questions," they would retort. Apparently, so was I.

In a breakthrough moment, a student began to cry, which was not unusual for this class, or for this particular student. "All they want to do is scare us," she sniffled. "Everyone knows if you have sex, you get pregnant and die," she whined. Her classmates agreed. "That's what they say," the students said. They went on to explain that in their high school experiences, the double standard was and continues to be too much to handle. I admitted to them that although sexuality was my area of study, I really needed their help in understanding their perspectives. Who is "they?" Who is

“everyone?” I asked. “What do they say and how do you feel about it?” “Start from the beginning,” I said. “Explain it to someone who has not thought about this before.”

I realized that my own experience and my research on queer identity development and sexual expression had left me with a blind spot. I had taken their critiques of Tolman’s research at face value; I had not realized the level of shame and frustration heterosexual female students harbored. Most students openly described various versions of “abstinence only education” and abstinence-centered familial expectations. They placed these expectations in conversation with the desire for intimacy in some cases, frustration with young men who wanted both a “sexy” girlfriend and someone who was not a “slut.” One student revealed her asexual identity and objected to Tolman’s inattention to the possibility of lack of desire. I was deeply challenged by these class conversations and gained new insights far beyond my own experience.

As a teacher, I place myself in conversation with students, sharing my own examples and viewpoints while making clear that my perspective is exactly that—my own. I strategically share the personal, then refer back to assigned texts for additional standpoints or theoretical grounding and ask that my students model this practice. This exchange encourages open dialogue within the classroom and produces a shared knowledge, from which students later draw as they articulate their newfound awareness and insights. Ultimately, my Black queer feminist pedagogy produces a framework that acknowledges and appreciates the intersections of race, gender, and

sexuality as a part of the performance of pedagogy.²⁴⁶ In the following chapter, “On Common Ground: Cross Case Analysis,” I place these two case studies and my self-study in dialogue with one another, in order to explore their commonalities and differences.

²⁴⁶ Narrative and discussion adapted from Mel Michelle Lewis, “Pedagogy and the Sista’ Professor’: Teaching Black Queer Feminist Studies,” in *Sexualities in Education: A Reader*, eds. Erica Meiners and Therese Quinn (New York: Peter Lang 2012), 33-40.

Chapter 4 — On Common Ground: Cross Case Analysis

This chapter presents a cross-case analysis that explores the connections, common themes, and differences in teaching and experience among the two case studies and the self-study. While interviewing, observing, and shadowing the case participants and reviewing my own self-study, several themes emerged related to pedagogy and relationships with students and faculty. Placing the cases in conversation with one another in this chapter allows me to share the depths and nuances of each case by making comparative connections among and to pointing to the distinctions between cases.

Developing as a Teacher

Central to all three case studies were narratives about becoming a teacher. Sharing our stories about how we became teachers and developed our pedagogies laid the foundation for our relationships and later for our conversations about our teaching experiences. Beginning with Dr. Mariposa, moving to Professor Deborah, then concluding with my own self-assessment, I explore the theme of “developing as a teacher.”

Dr. Mariposa began with a testimony about anxieties rooted in the intersections of her identities. “I was just starting off teaching, so I wasn’t very sure of myself, period,” she said. Dr. Mariposa felt “self conscious” about the ways in which her students would receive her. She revealed that she spent a lot of time and energy worrying about race and gender presentation, “trying to figure out how that’s going to play out in the classroom. Because the students I’ve taught have always been predominantly white.”

[Speaking as student] “Geez, you don’t look like the average professor,” whoever the average professor is. [Speaking as student] “You’re not white, you’re not male, you’re Black and female, you don’t have a tweed coat.” Well, I *could*, [laughs] but that would be sending one kind of message. So I was aware I read as masculine, and that would be read as lesbian. And both of those things are true, but you know, how’s that going to be received?

These worries limited Dr. Mariposa’s range of expression in ways that were both uncomfortable for her, and awkward for students, who, she believes, may have been made more uneasy with a professor who herself was uncomfortable in her own skin. Dr. Mariposa notes:

The thing that I think was true about me when I first started off teaching was I definitely did not play off my identities as much. I think I tried to hide it in some way. I can’t hide the way I look . . . but I didn’t make as much use of my own personal experience, and I didn’t include my — I didn’t make as many jokes, I didn’t show my humor as much. Um, cause’ I thought — I just felt unsteady with like how this person was gonna’ be received in the class and I wanted to be taken seriously. I wanted them to engage in the work. I didn’t want myself to be a barrier, and I wasn’t sure how it was gonna’ go, so I think I tried to make it more generic or something when I started off.

I inquired as to how Dr. Mariposa overcame this challenge. She revealed that a friend and colleague advised her “about problems I was having teaching,” Dr.

Mariposa notes that this friend insisted that she “smile more, be yourself,” she said.

Dr. Mariposa marks that as a turning point. Although she had doubts:

Be myself? Is that gonna work? You know, have you looked at me?

This is not what they are looking for at these Research One institutions. But um, but you know I think I just felt my way into being more myself, you know adding topics that are interesting to me, and just couching it in a way that is provocative to me, hopefully provocative to them. Just chewing over stuff that I’m chewing over, doing it with the students and hoping that there will be enough common language through the readings that we’ve done. . . .That’s what’s up, this is what’s interesting to me, this is my take on it and I think it’s valid, so let’s just go from there . . . but it had to be, you know, trial and error.

Dr. Mariposa asserts that this method works much better than when she is trying not to be funny or off the wall. “This is who I am, let’s go with it!” she said.

Unlike Dr. Mariposa and I, who went to graduate school with the intention of becoming scholars and educators, Deborah’s journey into academia was “completely accidental,” she says. She was working in an organization, which was “exhausting,” when a colleague invited her to join the women’s studies department at a nearby institution as a sabbatical replacement:

Probably the only reason I agreed was because she was teaching at [this institution] and I was very into the idea of being in an all women’s environment, all female environment; I was already mostly

working with women, with the exception of the occasional man here and there, the occasional policy maker here and there, almost everybody I worked with in my [organizational work] were women, and I was very, very, very comfortable. And also, I thought that the level of commitment to women and women's issues that I was reared in, in my [organizational work] I would find at [the institution] – that was not correct.

Professor Deborah spent several years teaching at this institution. “It was sort of, in terms of my growth, it was very important, it was a turning point, because I did a lot of training in my previous work but I didn't think of myself as a teacher, as a pedagogue,” she said. Professor Deborah says that she is an “autodidact,” to the chagrin of many members of her immediate family.²⁴⁷ Thus, teaching was perfect for her, as long as she is “teaching in the classroom;” she says she is not autodidactic in her “personal/intimate life.” Professor Deborah was unsatisfied and disappointed with her experience at this institution. “When I left I made a calculated decision that it wasn't the feminist environment that I thought it was going to be [although] it was an environment full of women,” she said. The challenge for Professor Deborah was to find an institution and department in line with her feminist principles. She describes her current institution as “the safest environment for me,” both around her identities and her politics.

Unlike Professor Deborah, I was quite sure that I would be a scholar and teacher. Although I initially believed my lifelong training as a classical dancer would

²⁴⁷ Professor Deborah is an avid reader and enjoys learning about a diverse array of topics. Teaching, then, gives her the opportunity to discuss ideas and share her knowledge with students and within the academic community rather than in isolation.

factor into the equation, higher education and teaching has always been a part of my life plan. When I first began teaching, I thought of it as a performance. Having a background in classical dance and theater transferred to my performance in the classroom; in the beginning I drew upon all of the wonderful teachers I had, particularly the only two Black female professors I had had, one in undergraduate school, and one in my MS program. Both were very theatrical; one had the style of a powerful preacher, and the other was an expressive griot with a deep sense of humor. Both were sharp thinkers and grand storytellers within the context of the feminist classroom. I modeled them, channeled them, and at times acted them out on my own classroom's stage until I became comfortable with my own pedagogical performance.

Like Mariposa, I trod lightly at first, unsure about how my body and identities would be received, particularly at a PWI Research One University. Also, as a "teaching assistant of record (TA)," I feared that students would not take me seriously. I realized that teaching about race, class, gender, and sexuality from a feminist perspective required me to engage the personal. I also deeply value the evidence of experience in the classroom, and encourage students to connect their personal knowledge to theoretical explorations. I also realized that most students had become used to having TA instructors; I learned that in many areas of study, they rarely encountered a professor. As I began teaching as a full time instructor at other institutions, I became more confident in expressing my own identities in the classroom and performing an embodied text in the classroom.

Creating Excitement With Unstable Identities

Both case participants commented on the ways in which creating “curiosity,” around their identities, defying “stereotypes,” and keeping students doing “guess work” about the identity of the professor is a useful pedagogical tool. Dr. Mariposa comments, “I’ve had students who’ve taken repeated classes with me because they’ve said they enjoyed my class, and I think some of it has to do with the excitement that I try to create about making my identity unstable in certain ways.” She believes the students think she is “off-the-wall,” and are interested in her as a person; this curiosity allows Dr. Mariposa to entice the students into difficult conversations, noting “they never know what I am going to say next.” This creates openness in the classroom, Dr. Mariposa comments:

Different kinds of things can be brought up. I think it’s not explicit, but I think that’s part of what they enjoy about the class, that they are not getting [me], that it’s not as straightforward as they expected.

Dr. Mariposa asserts that keeping students “off balance” about “who she is” gives her space pedagogically to push the envelope and take students in new directions. When she shares her favorite rock band or makes “white middle class cultural references,” Dr. Mariposa feels that she is able to disarm students who more readily accept her critiques of power and privilege, because they can’t as easily write her off as “militant.” By both destabilizing her identity and disarming students, Dr. Mariposa both transgresses students’ expectations about identity and enables them to see her as more impartial and to accept her more readily as an authoritative voice.

Similarly, Professor Deborah notes that having students do “guess work” around her identities can prove exciting and pedagogically advantageous. “I don’t want to divulge everything; I want a little bit of the guess work,” she acknowledges. The guesswork becomes a part of the learning process for students as well. They must practice and learn the art of negotiating conversation around difficult issues. About her students, Professor Deborah says: “I want a little bit of the ‘What’s going on? Who is she, what is she? What does she think about this? How far will she go, how far will she not go?’ That’s always interesting for me in the classroom,” she says. Thus, keeping students doing “guess work,” is also a way of keeping the class interesting for her as well. However, she points out that keeping students interested in her is not always beneficial:

Sometimes keeping them interested in me becomes problematic because they become more interested in the material because I’m interesting — and I’m not always — that’s not always pedagogically valuable to me. But then, there’s also the piece that says you can do this. That’s really important, I’ve done this, I know, you can do this [feminist activism]. That piece is really crucial and it’s pedagogically very important to me to do that empowering work.

Deborah feels student “interest” in her can impede the learning process. I observed Deborah to be very popular with her students, who fawned over her and vied for her attention in the classroom and beyond. Deborah revealed that several students “stalked” her, writing her long letters, calling everyone she knew on weekends trying to get hold of her, and inviting her to off campus events not related

to school. She notes that student interest in her does not always keep them interested in the material; rather they become more interested in her personally, which pushes Deborah's boundaries of privacy and may not advance their intellectual growth. However, Deborah is very adamant about sharing her activist and professional experiences, communicating to the class the importance of her work in the field. She feels that empowering students by saying, "I have done this/you can do this," is a central element of her pedagogy.

In much the same way, I find sharing my experiences as a student to be very important, particularly for students of color. I also enjoy dancing around identities in ways that allow me maximum space to discuss issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality in the classroom. For me, positioning myself "publicly" in the classroom is advantageous; first, because it allows students to assess and understand the depth of my relationship to the material, and second, because it can be directive regarding the practice of reflexivity.

I have also found that using my own identity and experience to destabilize assumptions about identity, race, gender, and sexuality, can be pedagogically advantageous. During a class period on domestic labor, I recognized that students were making assumptions about my relationship to the material, based on their knowledge that I was from Alabama. Students made references to Black domestic workers in the south and inquired, "If things were like in the movies," in Alabama. I then shared with them that I had, in fact, been cared for as a small child by live-in Black nannies and maids and that my parents employed a Filipino domestic worker as a live-in "housekeeper" throughout my childhood, until I graduated high school. I

noted that my family still regularly employs domestic workers. The students were shocked; one student was openly appalled. As with Mariposa, this made my identity “unstable,” and led to an interesting conversation about racialized assumptions about class.

Students’ interest in me, in this instance, also allowed them to explore feminist reflexivity. I often ask my students to think deeply about the ways in which they are implicated in the material as a matter of feminist practice. During a class period reviewing the text *Femme: Feminists, Lesbians and Bad Girls*,²⁴⁸ a student made a generalization about butch/femme identities as polarities, which in many ways was contested by the text itself. In an attempt to reorder the discussion I playfully took issue with the student’s stereotype-laden description of “butch lesbians on motorcycles” by displaying a photo of myself on my own (“very feminine but still kind of lesbian,” according to the class) turquoise Harley Davidson Sportster. Although this reasserted a discussion about spectrums of gender identity and performance, even within the context of femme identity, I questioned whether or not I had pushed sharing my personal identity too far, and questioned how relevant my personal insights are in relation to my students’ understandings of race, gender, and sexuality.²⁴⁹ This constant questioning of the timing and extent of disclosure seems a common dilemma and resource for Black queer feminist pedagogues.

National Coming Out Day: A Continuum of Disclosure and Performance

National Coming Out Day (NCOD) provides an iconic moment for contrasting the varied experiences and positions on being “out” for each case

²⁴⁸ See Harris and Crocker, “*Femme*.”

²⁴⁹ Discussion adapted from Lewis, “Pedagogy and the Sista’ Professor.”

participant. On October 11th of each year, LGBTQ students on all of our campuses put together a program for NCOD. Significantly, both case participants made reference to this day, and found it to be meaningful in discussions about sexual identity. Deborah mentioned NCOD multiple times in our interviews; I have also noted my own campus involvement on NCOD with my students. In Mariposa's case, I visited her campus on this day and experienced a significant moment while shadowing. The following is a narrative illustrating a moment from NCOD with Mariposa:

Arriving on campus early in the morning, I note that students on Mariposa's campus are preparing for NCOD by decorating the courtyard and setting up tables. Later in the day, Dr. Mariposa and I take a path through this main courtyard returning to her office after doing some errands across campus. As we approach the student union, we encounter the table set up for students from the LGBT group on campus; they have lined the union square sidewalk with rainbow flags so that everyone taking the most direct path must do a "pride walk" on their way through the courtyard. As we enter the rainbow flag corridor, we encounter a Black male colleague from another department at the far end of the sidewalk. He and Dr. Mariposa both pause, looking at each other, then look down at the flags, and over at the table, then back at each other. They repeat this in what seems to me to be slow motion. As we continue to walk toward each other, Dr. Mariposa's colleague waves and says hello, then takes a detour from the main sidewalk in another direction.

Dr. Mariposa responds with a greeting and waves and makes an awkward beeline to her office.

Later, I asked Dr. Mariposa about this interaction, which I read as awkward and significant in some way. “Um, that’s interesting,” she said somewhat self-consciously. “I do not know who he is,” she said, then explained that although she had met the Black male professor before, she did not “know him.” In the context of my question about NCOD, Mariposa’s reference seemed to me to insinuate that she did not *know* him to be an ally or safe person; perhaps she did not know *how* he is, or how he would react, making the moment that they greeted a bit awkward.

I don’t know if you noticed as we were walking over here, a Black professor walking by gave me a little heads up, I’ve met him somewhere at some event. I don’t really know who he is, so I’ve seen him and we’ve introduced, I don’t know who he is. But yeah we will definitely say what’s up when we are walking by.

Although I was deeply curious about Mariposa’s reading of their encounter, she continued on about her involvement with LGBTQ organizations on campus, noting that she is a member of the faculty group, but does not at all participate with the LGBTQ student group.

I am nominally a part of the gay faculty group on campus. There was a presence when I first got here. It was fallow for several years and then it got resurgent in past two three years. And I went to a couple of their organizational meetings.

In regard to students, Dr. Mariposa notes that she has “given talks about stuff having to do with hip hop and gender” and feels “students probably know me as a feminist pop culture person, less as the person to talk to about queer stuff.” I find Mariposa’s involvement to be in line with her comments about focused comments in the classroom. Although she is “out” on campus, and talks openly about gay men, masculinity, and effeminacy, she feels that openness about lesbian identity and female masculinity is “talking too close to home.”

In regard to her department, Dr. Mariposa comments, “it’s a hetero-normative department for sure, I mean everybody knows [I am a lesbian and] that I have a partner. They don’t see her much, she doesn’t come to campus, and we’re not exactly a department that asks about spouses.” It then occurs to her that perhaps her colleagues are not asking her about her spouse *because* she is a lesbian. She also considers that African American studies colleagues *do* ask about her partner.

I don’t know, because my partner is a woman so they, maybe they really *do* ask each other about “How’s your partner?” and I’m not getting asked because my partner’s a woman! [Laughs] You know, there could be some sample bias there, that we’re not picking up on, I don’t know. Yeah, I mean I don’t think my sexual orientation is something that’s salient for most people. Um, in [African American studies] I think they do a little bit more about “How’s your partner?” but [we] used to go to the dinners they used to have, or lunches over the summer; she’s been to at least two or three of those. They’ve probably met her equally in this department. It’s a smaller department in [African American

studies], and you know how Black folks askin' bout' how your family is.

That's what Black people do.

Dr. Mariposa also considers the way in which her lesbian identity and other identity intersections position her within the department. "Well, there are two other Black women in the Department, and also two other lesbians in the department; we're just full of everybody! Diversity!" she jokes. Dr. Mariposa reveals that, "everybody knows I'm a lesbian, and everybody knows they are lesbians too, so we are all out." However, she notes that a white lesbian faculty member is "the lesbian" of the department. I inquire as to what this means and how Dr. Mariposa's role is different from this other faculty member's role. She responds:

[She is] like the *branded* lesbian of the department. So I don't play that role. I don't know. I mean, she will make jokes about the attractiveness of a woman, who is a job candidate. Not kind of loudly, but a stage whisper. I wouldn't do that anyway, but I, you know sort of, I mean there's more than one way to be a lesbian, but if you want to be marked as a lesbian, someone actively doing female desire for another woman, she's doing that. I don't know if she identifies as butch, but she reads in more masculine. We're closer on the masculine spectrum [and] she's white.

Mariposa, who describes herself as "naturally more reserved," would not want to take on this role as the branded lesbian of the department. Significantly, Deborah's comments regarding NCOD also have to do with a faculty member who fits the description of a branded lesbian in her department.

Deborah notes that she and the branded lesbian, a white faculty member as in Mariposa's case, used to "get into it" over Deborah's lack of participation in NCOD events. "I don't! I don't go to "coming out day" or any of those things, you know. I don't go to those kinds of those events unless I'm specifically invited." She describes her confrontation with the lesbian:

[She] and I used to get into it! She wanted me to go to NCOD. So here is an instance where I wasn't interested in using my body for student learning or anything like that. It's a very good question [why not] and a question I think about a lot, because around sexuality there's a novelty that makes us a little bit circus performers, that I don't like. I, you know, at the risk of sounding like an assimilationist, I view my sexuality as integral to my person. There wasn't a moment when I realized, "I am gay"; it came along with me as I grew, and so I want – I don't want to come out and say, "Oh this is what happened and I was treated in this way." I am not into coming out stories.

Professor Deborah affirms that she wants to create safe spaces for students around her in regard to sexuality, "but I don't want to be asked to perform my sexuality as a model for students — because I think I do it." Professor Deborah sees her body as always already representing a model for integrated identities; she does not want to be asked to perform a particular element of that identity on demand. Thus, she tends to opt out of what she interprets as forced performances, particularly when it comes to sexual orientation. Dr. Mariposa and I tend to consciously perform identity, or allow our bodies to speak, whereas Professor Deborah returns to her

assertion that she “lives” her identities and hopes that students get it: “I think I do it, I mean look at me!” She notes that indeed, some people are clueless, “but the kids in need are not.”

In my own experience, I find NCOD to be quite cathartic for students at best, and at the very least, I see NCOD as a teachable moment. I usually build a lesson around sexual orientation during the week of NCOD in the fall and Pride Week in the spring semester. I remember how significant these days were when I was student, and I tend to take the opportunity to explore these issues in depth and through an intersectional lens during this time.

Walking across campus I made note of a group of students building what I assumed to be a gigantic “closet door” with wood and cardboard. They stood in front of the student union with music, flags, and flyers, and danced, announcing to passers by that they were the LGBTQ student group. In class, students ask me to come by and “come out” if I had time after class. I thought the invitation was quite cute, I follow them over to the union after class. Just as I climb up the steps to walk through the cardboard door, a photographer/ reporter, from the student paper I assume, asks the students a few questions and takes my picture. I am pretty sure he captured my dance through the doorway. I’ll have to look to see if I made the paper.

Unlike Dr. Mariposa and Professor Deborah, I tend to be very involved when it comes to programs and events for LGBTQ students. I am also an active member of the faculty LGBTQ group on campus. I do see myself as a role model, particularly for LGBTQ students of color and want my support to be highly visible. My stance differs

from that of Dr. Mariposa, who is more guarded about her visibility. I am also more deliberate in my support than Professor Deborah, who feels that her very presence projects a model for integrated identity and visibility. What is common to all of us is the process of negotiating these choices.

Relationships With Black Students

I found that Dr. Mariposa and Deborah often highlighted their difficult relationships with Black students in particular. I find my experience to be notably different from that of Dr. Mariposa and Deborah; both note that Black students do not seek them out, or choose to work with them very often. In my case, Black students, even those who are not in my classes, build working and personal relationships with me.

Dr. Mariposa responds to my question about having close relationships with Black students. “No, not at all, I think it goes back to the idea that the stuff I do works best for White middle class students,” she asserts, “and then they have other outlets, so I’m kind of an interesting complement to other stuff that they doing, but they have support other places.” Dr. Mariposa points to Black student groups, casual networks of students, and African American studies as some of the places Black students go for academic interests and persona support at her institution.

I don’t get a lot of Black students trying to work with me at all; I do this hip-hop research project. A lot of students who wanted to work with me on it have been Black, but other than that, “can you work with me on an independent study?” or something like that, not really. Well, part of it is the way I deliver lectures, my presence works best with

White middle class students. Part of it is the stuff that I teach. A lot of [Black] students hadn't had me [as a professor] before. A lot of [Black] folks aren't tryin' to take [a class on sexuality], a lot of Black kids aren't trying to do a whole lot with some queer stuff. So they don't know me.

Dr. Mariposa believes that Black students are less interested in gender and sexuality, and attributes the lack of students working with her, in part, to her subject matter. Although this generalization seems to fit Dr. Mariposa's campus demographic, and I tend to have very few Black students in my own classes, I hesitate to make a sweeping assumption about the lack of desire of all Black students to engage with issues of gender and sexuality. She supposes, "I think the Black students like me well enough but they don't feel that connection; that intellectual connection that some other students do." She notes, "The Black students are happy to see me when they see me, 'cause they don't see me that much. I think they would rather that be otherwise; I think they would like it if they saw me more often." Dr. Mariposa explains that she does not go to a lot of social events, and since Black students rarely take her classes, they are not very familiar with her. "I'm not such a go out to do stuff sort of person," she admits. Although she believes Black students see her as "around our age" and as "an ally," Dr. Mariposa concludes, "I am an ally but from a distance." I find it significant that Dr. Mariposa positions herself as an "ally," rather than as a group member, given the "distance" between her and Black students.

Although she sees herself as an ally from a distance, Dr. Mariposa believes that Black students “like her well enough.” Deborah, however, perceives Black students as having “contempt” for her:

[Black students] avoid me as a pedagogue, as a teacher, even though I also have a reputation for being a very good teacher. So, I find that bizarre — you’re paying [high tuition bills] in student loans and you’re not going to the teacher who’s considered hard and good! OK! There’s something wrong! At least [take my class] once! It is possible to skip over me [as a major], which is good. But if I were a Black student and there’s one of [a few] Black faculty on campus that you have the opportunity to take and be in her class, I just know [I’d take it].

Deborah notes that she has had fewer than ten Black students in her many years at her institution. I inquired as to the root of Black student avoidance and how Deborah felt about students having “contempt.” She made connections between her sexual orientation and the trend of Black students at her institution to identify with Christian fundamentalism, with a high level of religiosity among the Black student groups on campus.

I think I’m a pretty intuitive person. From the Black women, I feel anxiety, a little nervousness. What do I tell myself it is? They know I’m gay, and they’re Christians, a lot of [the] women [are]. From the men I feel, I sense contempt. There is a looking that happens from them, and physically as well as sort of spiritually, and it’s spiritual, it really is. It’s nothing other than spiritual there. It’s not just dismissive,

they can't dismiss my knowledge, they can't dismiss my intellect, it's not that. I'm shunned. I feel a shunning from the men.

Deborah describes Black female students as having anxiety and shunning her, not greeting her or looking at her. Her reaction to male students shunning her is a desire to "take them on in that space when we meet eye to eye." Addressing Black male students in this way Deborah feels she is "constantly negotiating this mess." She describes being shunned by Black students, particularly on a PWI campus, as "very awkward, very hard." Deborah notes, "I don't have the usual markers of credibility," particularly for Black students who harbor traditional Christian values.

I'm not married, I don't have children, my hair is not straightened, I'm not wearing high heels, so whatever the things, the markers you need to make you understand that I can command [respect from] you [and ask you] to behave in a certain way, they're not being read so they are not there as far as I'm concerned. I insist on looking them in the eye. This I get in because I insist on recognizing our kinship. I don't have to look at them. I can just dismiss them and keep going, but I don't. I take every moment to make eye contact with Black students, and [I] deal with this in turn, and I continue to do it.

Deborah has discussed this phenomenon with another gay Black faculty member, "He experiences what I'm experiencing, and yet, he probably wouldn't articulate it in the same way, she concludes.

In contrast to both Professor Deborah and Dr. Mariposa, I feel that Black students seek me out and want to work with me. I note that my femme appearance

might make my lesbian identity less problematic for students who would otherwise feel uncomfortable about my sexual orientation. As noted by Dr. Mariposa, I believe that Black students on PWI campuses see me as “young,” closer to their age than Deborah perhaps. While this has created some issues in terms of discipline and authority, as discussed above, it has meant perhaps a greater generational rapport. Dr. Mariposa expressed that she believes that Black students are happy to see her in one of her interviews; I feel the same. Professor Deborah’s intimidating demeanor may make it difficult for Black students to see her as accessible. In juxtaposing my own experience against Professor Deborah’s, she is more popular with students who are not Black. She expressed that Black students rarely seek her out for support or take her classes, while in my case, Black students are as interested in me as I am in them. I feel a sense of kinship with Black students and I intentionally articulate that to them. This kinship was not expressed or exhibited by my case participants. I am a naturally social and affectionate person; exchanging greetings in Black vernacular, laughing and elbowing one another in the side, and occasionally grabbing an arm while whispering closely with a student is authentic to my person and uncensored in my pedagogy. I believe that Black students respond to my practice of “code switching” in private moments, which they also must practice in the university setting, and recognize that I am a safe person with whom they can momentarily shed the performance of respectability. Given the experiences of Dr. Mariposa and Professor Deborah, I don’t believe they have the same types of private or casual conversations with Black students.

Black students often seek me out to gossip, share a laugh with a sister friend in vernacular, and have a reprieve from performing respectability in a predominantly white campus climate. Students confide in me about romantic relationships, parents, and frequently, daily encounters with racism. At times I admit that I shy away from these conversations. When in the throes of my own experiences with racism, or overwhelmed by my workload, I sometimes “hide” in my office or avoid interruption by sitting in my car. Like Deborah, for students who need me to be one of them or to share multiple identities “with them, for them, or to them,” at times navigating my own difficulties and providing mentorship and support simultaneously can be too much.

What’s the Answer?: Authority and Authenticity as Feminist Practice

In relation to negotiations of identity and power with Black students in particular, Mariposa, Deborah, and I all explored authority and authenticity in the classroom as a common theme. Deborah says:

I mean I try to hold power lightly in a certain way in the classroom, I mean I don’t want them to think that they can push me around, but I don’t want to plug them over the head with I’m the teacher and you are the student, that’s intentional, you know, I think that’s a feminist practice.

When she “has her feminist hat on,” Dr. Mariposa is conscious that students may dismiss her arguments, “Well she’s just a feminist, she’s being all hardcore militant feminist right now and it’s not something I really need to deal with, she’s just that kind of person and it doesn’t have substance,” she imagines them saying.

However, she does not believe that happens often. Dr. Mariposa believes that students “are looking for the truth about the stuff,” and that when instructors don’t give them a definitive answer, they become resistant. Dr. Mariposa notes, “. . . They want to know the answer about hip hop, and I’m in a position to know, not just because I am a smart person, but because I’m Black and a woman and [they think], she’ll have the scoop about it.” Dr. Mariposa asserts that she does not want to do that kind of work or “be responsible for” an authoritative answer. “It gets in the way if you think that I’m going to be the authority about something, that’s not what we are [doing].”

Deborah affirms that students often ask her what she thinks in an attempt to get her to pin down “the answer.” She also believes this practice is a test, a way for students to gauge who she is and what she *really* knows.

I will tell them what I’ve experienced. And it’s interesting because sometimes it’s . . . they ask because they are interested really to know where the tire hits the road. Sometimes they ask because they want to know . . . they want my carte blanche . . . To sort of legitimate my position. This is who you are so let’s see what you’ve done.

Deborah noted, “There are some classes where I don’t worry [about authority].” In introductory courses she does not worry whether or not she is retaining authority; in these classes she worries “more about making sure they understand.”

She has discussed authority, particularly with faculty of color. She notes:

There’s a point at which I just say OK, I have the authority in this room, it’s my material, they don’t know what I know, they don’t know what I don’t know. Those are the times that I’m feeling most

vulnerable, and that typically happens in the courses where I let them go . . . they can choose their projects, they can choose a lot of things, so they are wondering . . . and they want to talk to me about it and they want my expert opinion on everything. And so in those cases I feel a little bit, OK, are they going to think I know what I am talking about, are they going to think of me, how much do I have to know about it, and I used to really worry about that a lot. I worry about it a little less now, because I think it has become much less about my authority and much more about theirs.

Transforming her own vulnerability of not knowing into a way to frame student authority over their own chosen topics of interest is a strong pedagogical coping mechanism for Deborah. She instructs her students: “You are supposed to be accomplishing your voice, you are supposed to find your voice,” she reports. “I have been increasingly more comfortable doing that, and it’s much less about my authority and much more about them.” Students find this transfer of authority, and Deborah’s positioning in it “threatening.” She asks, in response:

How am I threatening? I don’t know, I don’t find myself, particularly threatening, but I am threatening. I know I am. They [students] say it all the time. They are very intimidated. At the same time they feel affection, and once one student actually wrote in an evaluation that they felt like it was ‘a little bit of a mind fuck’ what I do, that there’s this ‘I’m going to kill you but I love you’ thing going on [chuckles].

Deborah indicates that her students give her a great deal of authority, even as she hands the reins over to them and instructs them to cultivate their own authority over their chosen area.

I think in fact they give me a great deal more authority than I have, they give me greater legitimacy when I talk about my material because I have been on the ground, so that's one of the sources of my authority. Often I don't even think about it. Except when I mention it in the class, like I did today — I was there I was on the ground, and that gives me authority for them.

Like Deborah, I believe my students ask for definitive answers, in part because they want to know and have been trained to think about “the right answer,” rather than multiple ways of thinking about an issue. However, the other component in asking for conclusive answers is to test my knowledge and gauge my legitimacy as an instructor. In an introductory class on women's art and culture, I taught a section on feminist poets. This lesson led to a challenging moment for me regarding definitive answers:

“Now that we have read, watched, and listened to several poems, and paired them with our ‘how to read a poem’ worksheet, let’s listen to the audio piece with Adrienne Rich,” I say, pressing ‘play’ on the computer at the front of the room. Rich’s own voice rises, reading “The Art of Translation.” The students are confused and ask to hear it over again, then once again. Although they have the printed poem in front of them, and have heard it read three times by Rich’s voice, they become increasingly agitated and obsessed

that they might not understand the meaning. “But what is it really about?” one student asks, after pulling out specific phrases, “What is she really talking about?” Although I have my ideas, I do not have a definitive answer for what it “really means.” I feel uncomfortable and nervous. “I can’t really say,” I answer . . . my shaky transparent substitute for “I don’t really know . . .” I then turn to a very unpopular refrain in my classroom . . . “There is no one answer, and really no right answer,” I say. Everyone groans.

I am often concerned that students always want to know *the* answer, even when the answer is that there is no definitive answer, and that this is interpreted at times as my not “knowing” the information.

Dr. Mariposa has a deep desire for students not to judge her; she feels she is someone whose knowledge is always already contested because of her identities. She notes:

I think a class should be a space for the professor to say “I don’t actually know,” that should be fine, and students can catch you out there not knowing. That’s fine, as long as they are not trying to come for my head. You know, that’s a different sort of thing, trying to come for [my] head. More in intro [classes], you know — what are your facts and the like? Well, here are the statistics from the book, I don’t know if you read *that*, but that’s in the book so you can go ahead with that if you think, you know. [Chuckles] Stuff in the book is “valid.”

For some of Mariposa’s students, testing her knowledge or contesting the information she shares is an exercise in power negotiation. Deborah interprets her

student's questions to be more inquisitive about her experiences and "how" she came to know what she knows. In my case, I believe students are challenged by my not having a definitive or singular "right" answer. At times, I worry that my not offering a concrete answer or stance is interpreted as incompetence rather than as a new way of engaging complex subject matter. Yet ultimately, I am less concerned about asserting my authority in the classroom than in engaging with the students in a quest for understanding of the issues we explore.

Cross Case Conclusions

Mariposa, Deborah, and I all struggled with the ways in which our identities influenced our pedagogical projects and shaped our relationships with students and faculty on campus. This struggle was revealed to be a central overarching theme for our three formations of Black queer feminist pedagogy.

Enunciating our identities, or choosing not to do so shaped our pedagogies. The NCOD example illustrates that there are varied approaches to the ways in which we enunciated or deflected attention away from elements of our identities. For me, NCOD is a day to celebrate my own identity with students; for Deborah and Mariposa, the act of "coming out," when presented in this manner, is uncomfortable or unnecessary.

For all of us, creating excitement by sharing our identities and experiences with students is central to our pedagogies. The importance of an articulated personal investment in the material was characteristic of all three pedagogical projects. Connecting with students was also a central theme. Professor Deborah and Mariposa, to varying degrees, dealt with separation and hostility respectively from Black

students, while I have strong relationships with this demographic on campus. However, we all made important connections with particular groups. Dr. Mariposa found her connections with her male students around masculinity to be a significant element of her pedagogy. Professor Deborah was skilled in using her body to challenge fear and racist assumptions of privileged white students.

A final central element of Black queer feminist pedagogies as explored in these case study chapters is that of authority. Professor Deborah was much more comfortable with topics with which she felt unfamiliar. Dr. Mariposa and I were much more concerned about what we don't know and the challenge that posed to our authority in the eyes of our students. The following chapter concludes by further exploring some common dimensions and dilemmas of Black queer feminist pedagogies, as I attempt to formulate a framework delineating key aspects of the Black queer feminist pedagogical project.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion: Toward a Black Queer Feminist Pedagogical Framework

The studies assembled here suggest that the body functions as a text in the classroom for some instructors who self-identify as Black queer feminist women. The performance of pedagogy as translated through their embodiment deliberately or inadvertently becomes central to their pedagogical project. The case studies illustrate the ways in which pedagogues become racialized, gendered, and sexualized subjects in the classroom, as attention is directly or indirectly drawn to or away from their own corporeal presence. This dissertation also illuminated how Black queer feminist pedagogues experience and negotiate their precarious positioning beyond the classroom, in the context of their campuses, as they navigate reactions to that which is Black, queer, and female.

Throughout the interview, observation, and shadowing process, I was moved by participants' need to situate both their person and their pedagogical intentions within the context of the broader academic environment. It is significant that my assumptions about and my focus on "pedagogy" in the classroom were repeatedly met with a broader response from the participants. Both Dr. Mariposa and Professor Deborah insisted that the classroom did not bind their pedagogical projects. Rather, the wholeness of their experience in the classroom, in the department, and on the campus, with students, colleagues, and administrators, shaped their approach to the performance of pedagogy.

In this chapter, I frame central elements of Black queer feminist pedagogies presented in the case chapters, and explore further the necessity of an approach that considers body, identity, and pedagogy both in and beyond the pedagogue's

classroom. I also present a framework for a wide-range of inquiries into identity, embodiment, and pedagogy, and examine how pedagogues exploring multiple identities and performances can apply this framework. I conclude with ruminations on new directions for future research.

Dimensions of Black Queer Feminist Pedagogies

Using my initial questions for this study as a guide, I have rearticulated the initial inquiries in order to present a framework for studying embodied texts at the intersection of creative pedagogy and subversive identity. I have considered the cases individually, placed them in conversation with one another, and offered three central dimensions for studying Black queer feminist pedagogies. First, I consider the equipment of the body and its potential as an instructive tool. Second, I discuss envisioning the performing body as a tool for teaching about race, gender, and sexuality. Third, I examine the tension between experiences of erasure and the advantages and pitfalls of enunciating or living the self as articulations of identity in the classroom.

Equipment: The Body as an Instructive Tool

The case studies and self-study presented in this project offered multiple examples of the ways in which the case participants and I used the body as “equipment”²⁵⁰ for teaching and learning. Indeed, K. B. Alexander notes that the Black gay body in the classroom always already signals a teachable moment.²⁵¹ Similarly, Henderson writes:

²⁵⁰ B. K. Alexander, “Embracing the Teachable Moment,” 254.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 262.

The effect of a black woman teacher in the classroom is invariably to point out the unspoken obvious: that a *woman*, a *black* woman, is standing in the role previously occupied by a *man*, a *white* man. From this disruption follows the possibility of discussing the significance of the status quo and change.²⁵²

For the Black queer feminist pedagogues in this study, occupying the role of instructor while simultaneously performing the intersections race, gender, gender expression, and sexual orientation, as an embodied text “signaled teachable moments.”²⁵³ An example of the body’s disruptive capacities being harnessed to produce a teachable moment comes from Dr. Mariposa’s case. She performed a lesson about gender representation in advertising as she mimicked the poses in magazines the students brought to class, and those posted on the screen behind her. I align Dr. Mariposa’s performances with bell hooks’ description of pedagogy:

Teaching is a performative act. And it is that aspect of our work that offers the space for chance, invention, spontaneous shifts, that can serve as a catalyst drawing out the unique elements of each classroom.²⁵⁴

Dr. Mariposa’s “masculine, rounded guise,” becomes equipment with which to critique hyper-feminine portrayals and naturalized misogynist images through performative acts.

²⁵² Henderson, “What It Means to Teach the Other,” 437. Author’s emphasis.

²⁵³ B. K. Alexander, “Embracing the Teachable Moment,” 249-265.

²⁵⁴ hooks, 11.

In Dr. Mariposa's reading, the students recognize that the way she walks, talks, stands, and moves as a butch woman are unlike the images of women she has caricatured. However, they *are* in many ways like the masculine images they have critiqued. I apply the work of Judith Halberstam to Dr. Mariposa's gender performance. Halberstam notes:

Female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing. But what we understand as heroic masculinity has been produced by and across both male and female bodies.²⁵⁵

I describe Dr. Mariposa's pedagogical performance as heroic masculinity, produced by a Black female body. In this exercise, the students come to recognize that neither the dominant masculinity and femininity presented by the advertisements, nor the masculinity or mimicked femininity presented by Dr. Mariposa, constitute a singular authentic version of gender. Rather, her performance simultaneously troubles representations of normative genders while making room for alternative genders. "It might click for them, it may not. "[Speaking as a student] 'Oh! Dr. Mariposa actually fits a lot of those things,' you know." She adds: "I am playing off my own gender presentation" in this lesson, making visible the possibilities of the spectrum of gender, female masculinity, and dominant constructions of gender through advertising.

Professor Deborah described the ways in which her body signaled a teachable moment for the student who was "afraid of Black people." Using her own body and identities, she pushed her student to begin her internship in the "inner city." I apply

²⁵⁵ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 2.

Collins's discussion of class-specific gender ideology and new racism to this student's fear of "crime," which in actuality was a fear of poor or working-class Black people. The student's refusal to complete this assignment was revealed to Professor Deborah as an issue of fear; however, this fear constructed Professor Deborah as separate and apart from the student's notion of "inner city" Blacks.

Professor Deborah asked, "What's the difference between me and these people?" and rejected the student's response that she was somehow "unlike" the Black women, with whom the student would be working and serving in the "inner city" community. Collins asserts that representations of criminals, bad Black mothers, and "untamed" poor Black people are contrasted with "sidekicks, sissies, and modern mammies" in the white imagination within the context of the new racism. These non-threatening Black people inhabit a space of respectability and acceptance.²⁵⁶ Professor Deborah disrupted the student's "color blind" ideology by inserting her own body to reveal the vulgarity of this construction.

In the interview, Professor Deborah explained, "Here's one example of having to sort of use my body and my person to do this." She insisted that the student consider the possibility of being able to learn and benefit from the Black people whom she was afraid of, given that she was not afraid of — and felt comfortable learning and benefiting from — Professor Deborah's counsel. Professor Deborah's use of her own Black female body as a tool of oppositional narrative, countering the fears of her student, exemplifies the ways in which the body can become "equipment" with which to teach.

²⁵⁶ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, (2005), 177-78.

Dr. Mariposa and I both envision our embodiments to represent the concept of intersectionality. She describes herself as “a genuine article of this thing,” in reference to intersectional analysis in the classroom. In my case, I addressed student “misrecognition” of my racial identity through an intersectional lens, as a Black woman inquired with disbelief, “What! You’re Black? Like African-American?” This incident necessitated a discussion about the legitimacy and possibility of my even “being” the embodiment of an instructive tool. “Being” the instructor, for this student, was itself incongruent with everything she knew about race, gender, embodiment, power, privilege, and higher education. In Dr. Mariposa’s case, she is challenged by students’ assignment of a “master status,” in regard to race. I apply Melissa Harris Perry’s use of “misrecognition” of Black women to my student’s inability to see me as Black, given the pervasive stereotypes of Black women. Upturning the idea of misrecognition, I claim that because the student could not “recognize” me as Sapphire, Mammy, or Jezebel, she was pushed to “misrecognize” me as not being Black, even as she herself was a Black woman and college student in my classroom.

Related to misrecognition, Dr. Mariposa asserts the concept of a “master status,” stating: “I think my master status for students is just Black most of the time.” Although she believes that lessons that center gender or sexuality cause her other intersections, such as gender, or sexual orientation, to “pop,” Dr. Mariposa is hyper-conscious about the ways in which her Blackness becomes central to the way students receive her. She uses strategies to “disarm” her students and keep them “off balance” in attempt to keep them from thinking they “know who I am,” she says. In this way,

Dr. Mariposa's pedagogical "equipment" becomes versatile when she throws out references and constantly shifts her students' perceptions of her identities.

The Performing Body

In each of these cases, actions and examples of what I designate as "teaching through embodied text," appeared as relevant to the pedagogical project. Using Bryant Keith Alexander's term, I highlight the importance of the body as text, both in the classroom and beyond.²⁵⁷ I now focus on the act of performance as it relates to the textual body, which provides a way of envisioning how Black queer feminist pedagogues approach teaching about race, gender, and sexuality when they themselves are racialized, gendered, and sexualized subjects in their own classrooms. Seymour Sarason ruminates on the "nature and complexity of the phenomenology of performing." He asserts that teaching as performing art

requires a teacher to think, feel, intuit, and flexibly adapt to students' individuality, and to do all of this for the purpose of engendering understanding and a sense of growth.²⁵⁸

Dr. Mariposa's performance of "street harassment" provided an example for identifying with one's embodied text, highlighting multiple intersections, in order to perform dimensions of an assignment. First Dr. Mariposa performed a female character, referencing her own gender, as someone experiencing street harassment. She asked the class to consider what kinds of catcalls were being made at this person and strode across the front of the room as if it were a sidewalk. The students bashfully

²⁵⁷ B. K. Alexander, "Embracing the Teachable Moment," 249-265.

²⁵⁸ Seymour Bernard Sarason, *Teaching As a Performing Art* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999), 48.

called out to her. Dr. Mariposa then transformed, asking the students to consider what the men in the group harassing the woman were thinking. In a way, Dr. Mariposa was instructing the class to read the action of street harassment through her body as she stood at the front of the room.

This exercise is complex; Dr. Mariposa's predominantly white students are being asked to identify with and consider the act of catcalling, through the experience of both a Black woman, and through the lens of Black masculinity, as represented by her gender expression. In the group role-play that followed, the students acted out various roles within their groups, calling out to each other, and thinking deeply about how masculinity is reified and enforced through this type of activity. They also considered the ways in which the women found it difficult to even pretend to catcall their male counterparts in the classroom. In this way, Dr. Mariposa's textual body provided multiple lenses for considering street harassment, and also was instructive in its capacity to act out and direct roles within the context of this activity, in order to unearth the significance of a common social act. This performance, then, meets Sarason's purposes of "engendering understanding" for students and "establishing a sense of growth" through both her own enactment as well as their own performances.²⁵⁹

In my case, embodied text signifies my uncanny resemblance to some course materials. I theorized the formations of, "sorry, no offense," and "you are the author"; both of which position my body and identity as having deep investment in and having

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

ownership over the text. I have cultivated this reaction by intentionally aligning myself with the subject matter. Alexander writes:

I am interested in constructing the *material fact* of the black gay body as subtext to the *material content* of the classroom. . . . I am interested in a situation in which the course content serves as the primary text and the gay identity of the teacher is the subtext through which the material, teaching, and classroom experiences are filtered.²⁶⁰

I evaluate the students' need to ensure that I am not offended by their comments as they note my resemblance to the text. These comments are most frequently made in reference to texts that center Black lesbian sexuality, and are attributed directly to me as an author/authority. I hypothesize that this has to do directly with their reading of my own identity intersections, and my body as a text in the classroom, which I highlight for them as a central part of my pedagogical project.

Professor Deborah's textual body considers both stature and identity, and then moves beyond the physical to a performance of a "political embodied text." Professor Deborah's case presents two remarkable incidents of the body as text. First, her "largeness" and her "intimidating" manner are purposefully used to obscure her identities and her stature. "I think I feel that being Black, being female, being [petite] asks for problems in the classroom," she says. She raises her hand to her forehead, as a gesture indicating her stature. However, she feels that as a Black lesbian woman, the confidence with which she holds power is itself instructive. "Both my students

²⁶⁰ B. K. Alexander, "Embracing the Teachable Moment," 250.

and my colleagues understand that I inhabit this place of power, gently, but with full conviction that I have a right to it,” she says.

The grandfather of one of Professor Deborah’s students confirmed her instructive “largeness,” and learned this lesson for himself through their interaction. He announced, “But my God! I thought you were ten feet tall!” in reference to his granddaughter’s descriptions of the class. When she retorted, “I *am* 10 feet tall!”, the grandfather’s reply, “OK!”, affirmed her authority. I interpret her example of being “this little Black woman” who is comfortable with her power as a text for learning about power in different and perhaps unexpected “packages.”

Professor Deborah’s students demonstrated that they not only learned from the ways in which she “held power gently,” but also read what I designate as her “politically embodied text” as a model. Her students described her feminist and non-violent political approach to teaching and learning as “being like a little Buddha.” The strengths and pitfalls of acting as a role model for students are cited in the literature, both with regard to the experiences of Black women in the academy and to the experiences of lesbians in the academy. For Black women, this role is described as often burdensome, related to the insistence that Black faculty act as “all things to all people.”²⁶¹ For lesbians, being pressured to be “out” as a role model is also arduous as they navigate the stigma attached to sexual minority status. I find this instance of Professor Deborah’s political embodiment representing a model for students to be an important contribution on her part, expanding the ways in which we think about identity-based models as performed by our identities. It is also significant that she

²⁶¹ Conway, 21-30.

“liked” and was “tickled,” by this reading and felt more comfortable with this type of modeling than she was with more forced performances like coming-out at a NCOD event. Professor Deborah was somewhat embarrassed by the “what would Deborah do” signs her students made for their protest against intolerance on campus. However, she was pleased that the students saw her as not just “scary and mean and intimidating,” although she admits, “a lot of students say that.” She was pleased that they considered her to be a model, an embodied text, for dealing with conflict and injustice.

Negotiating Identities: Choosing Between Enunciation and Erasure

One of the most complicated aspects of this study was considering the extent to which participants saw themselves as having enunciated their identities versus living through their identities without direct naming. Common to all cases was the dilemma of being “out” as a lesbian amongst one’s colleagues. Although gender expression is not an automatic indicator of sexual orientation, Dr. Mariposa was quite sure her students interpreted her masculine queer butch gender identity as a marker of lesbian sexual orientation. Professor Deborah asserts that she “lives her identities,” in ways that she hopes students “get.” She affirms that the students who “need her to be one of those identities with them” do have recognition for her lesbian identity and seek her out. I, on the other hand, make reference to my lesbian identity in the classroom and am also involved with student and faculty LGBTQ campus groups.

Both Dr. Mariposa and Professor Deborah belong to the LGBTQ faculty organization on their campus but are not affiliated with or participants in the LGBTQ student group activities. Dr. Mariposa cites a lack of time for these types of

commitments; Professor Deborah notes that she is not “interested in using my body for student learning,” in reference to student groups or events around sexuality. She does not feel the need to “come out” because sexuality is an “integral” part of “her person.” She feels that participating in these campus events makes her and her colleagues look like “circus performers,” and she doesn’t like that. That perception is supported by S. J. Ingebreetsen. He writes:

In the densely written social palimpsest of the classroom, the lesbian or gay teacher easily becomes entangled in a grammar of the pornographic. That is, the teacher performs a skin dance, a public baring of his or her emotional body that is generally not permitted under other conditions. The only problem, of course is that the dance is forced, indeed, framed as potentially scandalous, the public deviant presents a spectacle that is much in demand in eroticized popular culture . . . This fetishizes the visible body in an accustomed cultural manner, framing it with a libidinal discourse of violation, contamination, and seduction.²⁶²

I see the concept of “public baring” and “skin dance” as aligned with Professor Deborah’s perception of participation in LGBTQ-centered activities or coming out in the classroom as a “circus performance.” She is deeply committed to the idea that her body’s enunciations perform a model for integrated identities; thus,

²⁶² S. J. Ingebreetsen, "When the Cave is a Closet: Pedagogies of the (Re)pressed," in *Lesbian and Gay Studies and the Teaching of English: Positions, Pedagogies, and Cultural Politics*, ed. W. Spurlin (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2000), 17.

through “living her identities,” she feels no need to over-perform them in ways that separate or highlight or make a spectacle of one identity over another.

Erasure was another challenge for both Dr. Mariposa and Professor Deborah. In Dr. Mariposa’s case she was uncomfortable with the men in her department seeing her and referring to her as “young lady,” which is not at all how she identifies. Although Dr. Mariposa describes her butch identity and masculine expression as “key parts” of her identity, she does not know how to, and is “not invested in,” expressing this to her colleagues. Professor Deborah comments that her African-ness “is completely ignored” to the point that it is “nonexistent.” She notes that her colleagues are surprised if she mentions, “oh, yeah, I went home” or “I’m going home,” or “I met somebody from home.” They inquire, “Home?” She is clear that “to everyone else, I’m African American.” Professor Deborah reports that her colleagues are “surprised if I talk with any expertise around African issues, because that’s not what I do,” in terms of her area within the department, then “they remember.”

Professor Deborah sometimes experiences her colleagues “remembering” her already articulated African identity; in a similar way, I have found that clearly re-articulating my identity can also produce a teachable moment. An example of this occurred during the LGBTQ peer instruction lesson when a student indicated that she “did not know any gay people until today.” I clarified that in addition to the three panel members, she had known me to be a lesbian all semester. In the course of classroom conversation, both formal and more personal exchanges after or outside of class, I have found that any reference to my identity as a lesbian is misunderstood or ignored outright.

One of my openly queer students confirmed that in her assessment, “only the queer students read [me] as queer.” No matter how many times I mentioned it, she felt that students who did not identify as queer believed I was using myself as an example only to make a point. In this equation, “as a lesbian, I am concerned by X” = “If I were a lesbian, I would be concerned by X.” Interestingly, students who are openly queer have also told me they feel my “not looking like a lesbian”²⁶³ allows all students to feel “more comfortable” examining issues of sexuality in the classroom. I assert that my femme gender presentation is often met with what I affectionately call “dyke denial,” the refusal, after numerous articulations of this fact, to recognize that I am a femme lesbian. I also recognize that my femme presentation, on the one hand, requires me to consistently “out” my self. On the other hand, my femininity is seen as less transgressive generally and gives me a particular safety and privilege in enunciating my lesbian identity.²⁶⁴

Like Dr. Mariposa, I invest in my gender expression as an instructive articulation of the possibilities of genders and sexualities; and as a disruption of stereotypes, particularly around race. Dr. Mariposa believes that her male students are more open to her discussions about masculinity and feminism than they might be if her gender presentation was more traditionally feminine. “I’m a masculine person, and it’s OK to think women are equal to you as a masculine person, kind of jumping up and down silently doing that,” she says, stressing the influence her masculine expression has on her male students. However, Dr. Mariposa’s case also illustrates the emotional impact of enunciating the self, particularly when the “other” is the

²⁶³ I disagree with this point of course, but understand that many students often assume that lesbian women are obviously masculine.

²⁶⁴ See Lewis, “Body of Knowledge,” 49–57.

“self.” Having to correct a student’s deprecating statements, whether about using the term “ghetto” to refer to Black men, or about sarcastically calling Octavia St. Laurent “he or she or whatever,” causes Dr. Mariposa pain. As a masculine, gender non-conforming lesbian she comments that in many cases she has to “hold that in myself in order to have the class progress,.”

Body of Knowledge: A Framework for Pedagogical Inquiry

The three dimensions of Black queer feminist pedagogies illustrated above explore the body, identity, and the performance of pedagogy for Black queer feminist women. I present the following framework for pedagogical inquiry: 1) mobilizing the body as text and its potential as an instructive tool, 2) envisioning the act of performance as a method for teaching about race, gender, and sexuality, and 3) negotiating between enunciation and erasure of “lived” identities in the classroom and beyond. This framework can be applied to the investigation of any pedagogical project that seeks to explicate how body, identity, and performance function as “equipment” for teaching and learning in the college classroom. For me, identifying and understanding these dimensions has required a mixed methods qualitative approach. This dissertation utilized case study and self-study, used ethnography as an overarching model, and incorporated interviews, observation, shadowing, and portraiture. The depth and nuance offered only by a deep engagement with pedagogues and pedagogy required an intimate level of access to multiple sites in and beyond the literal classroom.

This dissertation has utilized the framework discussed above to construct in-depth narratives about the encounters taking place in these sites. These narratives give

voice to Black queer feminist pedagogues and speak to the ephemeral moments often rendered invisible in discussions of pedagogy that focus primarily on content and practice. In the classroom and in the broader campus community, pedagogues often have experiences that link body, identity, and performance; however, it is quite difficult to articulate how these experiences shape teaching and learning. There is, then, little scholarly work that breaks the silence around this element of the pedagogical project. This dissertation is an effort to address that silence.

This research project's case studies and self-study also illustrate how intersectionality plays out in the classroom and in the broader campus community, with particular attention to the negotiations of multiple identities. It was important to recognize the ways in which these intersections factored into interpreting events and happenings. Although I centered the interpretations of the pedagogues, in most instances, it was difficult, or perhaps impossible, to definitively assess what reactions or events were influenced by race, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, and/or their simultaneous expression. Indeed, intersectionality asks us to consider multiple identities as inseparable and as always experienced simultaneously. However, even as we assessed ourselves, all three Black queer feminist pedagogues in this study attempted to name or associate an identity with moments we saw as influenced by our race, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, as well as other factors having to do with personality and relationships to power. This hyper-awareness of our multiple identities and our bodies in the academic setting highlights how negotiating the continuum between the enunciation and the erasure of identity—

by others and by ourselves becomes a common characteristic of Black queer feminist pedagogies.

The work presented in this dissertation is an intervention into multiple fields of study, including scholarship on intersectionality, work on the lived experiences of women of color and queer women, the scholarly traditions of feminist and women's studies, Black studies, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) studies, as well as feminist and critical pedagogies. Pedagogy, knowledge production, and shared knowledges are central to the field of women's studies. I highlight this project's relationship with feminist pedagogical inquiries that seek to center issues of body and identity, while attending to the deployment of pedagogy through the lens of diversity. This project not only presents a framework for studying these elements of the pedagogical project, but also asserts a call for a heightened awareness within the field of women's studies of the significance of feminist and critical pedagogies, and for both further examine the intersections of body, identity, and performance in the feminist classroom.

Future Inquiries

Future inquiries for my own research include an expansion of inquiry into subversive identities in pedagogy. I am interested in applying this framework to other queer women of color, as well as men who identify as Black, queer, and feminist. In this study the participants, Dr. Mariposa, Professor Deborah, and myself, represented equidistant expressions on the gender spectrum: Dr. Mariposa as butch-identified; Professor Deborah as "consciously mixing masculine and feminine," and my femme identification. An inquiry into queer female embodied texts across this spectrum has

proved to be compelling, but I would like to explore more fully in what ways gender expression affects the pedagogical process in feminist classrooms that center an analysis of race, gender, and sexuality.

My hope is that this research project's intersectional approach to race, gender, and sexuality contributes to the literature on Black women in the academy, lesbians in the academy, and women in the academy as pedagogues. This project is representative of the connections between these separate and too often compartmentalized bodies of literature. Given that there are no other comparable studies that utilize in depth case studies and self-study to explore Black queer feminist pedagogies, I hope this project sheds new light on the negotiations of marginalized bodies as they enter the academy. I find that documentation of these experiences, challenges, and these women's reflections on them, using detailed portraits, is a major contribution to the field. Finally, I hope that pedagogues like Dr. Mariposa, Professor Deborah, and myself, who find themselves precariously placed within the academy, are able to find kinship on the page, and recognition for their own Black queer feminist pedagogical selves.

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