Storying Our Mourning and Resistance Through Teaching: Black Women Surviving (and Thriving In) White Spaces

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This critical nkwaethnography explores the experiences of two pre-tenured Black women faculty navigating their varied emotions teaching cultural awareness-building courses at predominantly White institutions during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and racial violence. The authors draw upon Dillard and Bell's (2011) autoethnography to share the stories of 'we' instead of the 'singular self' and present the data as two composite narratives. Authors use Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1989, 1990) to make-meaning of their experiences and they highlight two themes: (1) teaching and mourning at the margins and (2) calculated resistance. Implications for Black women faculty who teach cultural awareness-building courses and institutional leaders are provided.

Keywords: Black women faculty, nkwaethnography, Black Feminist Thought

Storytelling is an auspicious and liberating force Black women inherently connect with to explore themselves, their relationships with others, and experiences in the world. An intangible component of oral tradition, stories within Black communities across the diaspora serve as a conduit that provides space for meaning making and liberation (Byrd et al., 2021; Radin, 2015). Notably, hearing and telling stories remind Black women that regardless of the struggles they face, there is wisdom to be gleaned as part of their connectedness to others like them (Dowdy, 2008). This process, telling and collecting stories, is an important qualitative tradition and culturally natural for members of the Black community (Dowdy, 2008; Evans-Winters, 2019).

Historically, Black women have experienced many forms of violence in the academy as it relates to tenure acquisition, teaching, and researching (Patton & Njoku, 2019; Tuitt et al.,

2009). Now, we find ourselves again in a critical time in U.S. history (Porter et al., 2023a). From navigating the ongoing effects of a global pandemic to experiencing the exhausting, yet residual occurrences of racial injustices, these issues are added to the ongoing barriers often overlooked in the academy. Young and Hines (2018) shared, "Black women faculty at PWIs are more at risk of experiencing racism and racialized criminalization" (p.19), and "the spirit murdering of Black female faculty deserts them into spiritual dying where they will ultimately not have the strength and ethos to unchain themselves" (p.20).

Black women faculty collectively grieved with their communities during 2020 after the murders of several Black people (i.e., Ahmaud Arbery, Rayshard Brooks, George Floyd, Tony McDade, and Breonna Taylor) at the hands of vigilantes and police officers while observing Black death at a disproportionate rate to COVID-19 (Millett et al., 2020). While the ramifications of COVID-19 on the psychological and professional development of Black women faculty are still being explored, current research has noted disparities in the areas of mental health (Berheide et al., 2022; Walton et al., 2021), labor (Porter et al., 2023a), economic impact (Porter et al., 2023b), and teaching (Njoku & Evans, 2022). Historically, Black women have shared their individual and collective stories of trauma, grief, and triumph, while calling for political and social justice, testifying in nationally televised trials or senate hearings. Academic spaces are no different; Black women faculty and those working with students have created/found platforms to similarly narrate their stories (e.g., #BlackIntheIvory, #CiteASista, academic blogs, and public essays).

Recent news has shed light on some of the peculiar plights of Black women faculty. Notably, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (June & O'Leary, 2021), in response to the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill's initial denial of tenure to Nikole Hannah-Jones, shared 2019 data from the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). June and O'Leary (2021) stated,

> At public and private nonprofit four-year colleges in the fall of 2019 — the most recent year for which federal data are available — there were 251,921 tenured associate and full professors. Of those, 5,221, or 2.1 percent, were Black women. (para. 1)

Nikole Hannah-Jones was initially denied tenure despite receiving a Pulitzer Prize for the development of *The New York Times Magazine's* 1619 Project, a historical body of work commemorating the 400th anniversary of the arrival of enslaved Africans (Hannah-Jones, 2019). This data and cases like Hannah-Jones' tenure denial prompts us to wonder about the experiences of Black women, oftentimes one of few, navigating predominantly White spaces alone and potentially suffering in silence. Hannah-Jones' story, albeit primarily focused on tenure acquisition, illuminates the intricacies of our stories. Our study not only seeks to add to the growing stories, but to highlight the complexity of emotions that manifest out of being Black women teaching cultural awareness-building courses under the veil of racial violence, a pandemic, and navigating personal issues (i.e., loss of family/friends and job adjustments).

The purpose of our study is to extend previous research illuminating the experiences of Black women faculty and to share our personal accounts teaching cultural awareness-building courses in the academy during a global pandemic and continued racial violence. Most research exploring Black women faculty focus on their overall experiences or tenure-acquisition (McNeely et al., 2014; Kelly et al., 2017), but few examine their teaching experiences broadly (Haynes et al., 2020; Ferguson et al., 2021), teaching during various pandemics (i.e., COVID-19

and on-going racial violence) (Njoku & Evans, 2022), and the financial burdens (Porter et al., 2023b). However little scholarship explored the psychological ramifications of teaching cultural awareness-building courses during pandemics on Black women.

Black women faculty are disproportionately represented among instructors in the academy with high teaching loads and their marginalization is exacerbated at the intersections of race, gender, and academic appointment (Porter et al., 2020). Despite rank or appointment (i.e., contingent, tenure-track, tenured, or full professor), Black women's access to social and cultural capital, expectations of hidden labor, and opportunities for advancement vary and are often rooted in gendered racism (Boss et al., 2021b; Croom, 2017). In addition to high teaching loads and teaching-load disparities, Black faculty face a myriad of challenges when teaching including students challenging their credibility, exhibiting hostility on teaching evaluations, ascribing racialized tropes (i.e., Mammy, Sapphire), and resisting critical pedagogical frameworks (Collins, 1990; Haynes et al., 2020; Patton & Catching, 2009).

We examined the personal and collective stories of two Black full-time tenure-track faculty who embody a critical political standpoint (Prilleltensky, 1994; Williams et al., 2021) while teaching cultural awareness-building courses at predominantly White institutions. Although the concept of critical political standpoint is uniquely addressed in counseling-related scholarship (Prilleltensky, 1994; Williams et al., 2021), it describes a scholar who is committed to straying away from a banking education model (Freire, 1990) but instead encouraging students to critically scrutinize the underpinnings of their profession's practices (i.e., theories, models, research) and recognize the pervasiveness of oppression in all systems of society. The term 'cultural awareness-building courses' is used to describe courses with titles such as multicultural counseling; multiculturalism and diversity in higher education; college student development; and related campus-wide workshops. We drew upon Miles and colleague's (2014) process of deductive and inductive analytic process of interpreting stories as a guide, and we used Black Feminist Thought (BFT; Collins, 1990) as a lens to make-meaning of the data. Our guiding research question was how do tenure-track Black women faculty who hold a critical political standpoint, describe our experiences teaching and working with graduate students at a predominantly White institution? We present our stories (i.e., responses to guiding questions) in the form of composite narratives (Patton & Catching, 2009; Willis, 2019). Additionally, we discuss relevant literature throughout the article and after each composite, rather than within a separate review of the literature section to "set apart from the personal narrative itself" (Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 132).

Authors' Positionality

We are cisgender Black women faculty in counselor education and higher education administration programs respectively. In personal and professional spaces, we wear the crowns of daughter, sister, partner, mother, mentor, survivor, other-mother, and teacher. At the intersection of Black and woman, we have navigated educational spaces as first-generation college students at large predominantly White institutions, a historically Black university, and worked in various capacities in the academy. We teach courses and facilitate campus-wide workshops that seek to increase one's awareness of power, oppression, and privilege. Collectively, the foundation of our positionality is heavily informed by critical, intersectional,

and Black feminist epistemologies which guide our constant, reflexive, and methodological 'rooting out' of oppression wherever it is found, even within ourselves. Evans-Winters (2019b) stated,

> The Black feminist qualitative researcher begins with reflections on her own lived experiences and brings those insights into the research process. She does not claim to be an expert on a particular research topic or subject; however, she does view her observations of the social world just as significant to the research process as that of other researchers and other participants in the research process. (p. 20)

We acknowledge our understanding of oppression is ongoing. Reflective practices, such as the current study, will inform our lens in future work by ensuring we examine our own biases and lived experiences to deeply understand how it influences our interpretation of the data.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses Black Feminist Thought (BFT; Collins, 1989, 1990, 2009) to examine how we, Black women faculty, who engage in equity work and related teaching heal, survive, and thrive amid pandemics. BFT serves as a vehicle through which Black women in the United States may experience emancipation, or a freeing of the mind, by adopting a critical awareness of the oppression we encounter. This theory sheds light on the relationship between power and knowledge with regards to activism, resistance, and empowerment (Alinia, 2015; Collins, 2009).

To understand power, we must consider one's place and structural location within the systems we navigate. Waldron (2019) shared, "Black women's structural location has shaped our identities, resulting in a Black feminist consciousness that combines both a feminist and an ethnic or racial consciousness" (p. 22). Therefore theories, models, and concepts related to Black feminism, like BFT, are intellectual mechanisms of resistance. This makes BFT a culturally congruent perspective that genuinely accounts for the contextual and intersecting impact of culture, race, class, gender, and other forms of oppression on our everyday lives (Collins, 2009; Evans-Winters & Love, 2015; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). Additionally, BFT is a mindset that informs action for Black women to actively seek liberation (Evans-Winters & Love, 2015). Such liberation includes the ability to author our stories, engage in self-love, decenter the stereotypical perspectives imposed upon us, and encourages us to decenter the dominance of the White, cis-gender, and heteronormative gaze in our communities (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015; Williams et al., 2021).

Through BFT, Collins (1990) interrogates and provides language to describe the intricate oppression and suppression experienced by Black women, notably our intellectual contributions. Such language within BFT includes *The Matrix of Oppression* which names and, 'makes real,' the nuances and complexities introduced by intersectionality which expands our focus beyond the social location of the oppressed. It is as if intersectionality is the template and *The Matrix of Oppression* provides the crayons for us as Black women to illustrate in detail the strife, joy, and liberation we face. This process of finding and freeing oneself is poetically akin to Ntozake Shange's (1974, p. 62) notion of "a laying on of hands." Five core themes, or crayons, of BFT guide us in our exploration of understanding the oppressed spaces we navigate: (a) subjugation and confinement caused by controlling images; (b) barriers to self-defining; (c) self-

driven activism; (d) familial and work-related relationships; and (e) dictations on our sexual freedom and relationships.

BFT, within the context of this study, is a co-construction of our stories related to shared experiences as Black women faculty and aligns remarkably well for at least two reasons. Firstly, BFT provided us the mechanism to interrogate our own circumstances and experience a "laying on of hands" (Shange, 1974, p. 62) or catharsis throughout the research process. Secondly, BFT as a methodological lens provided us a structure that inherently resists the White heteronormative ways of researching (and being) which are ever-present in the settler colonial academic institutions we navigate (Collins, 2009; Dancy et al., 2018; Evans-Winters, 2019b; Wilder, 2013). BFT gives researchers permission to divorce from the value of objectivity (i.e., they, them) and acknowledges who we are shapes our analysis especially where we see ourselves in the data (i.e., use of us and we) (Collins, 2002; Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). Collins calls out the erasure of our experiences and intellectual contributions when she stated, "As a result, Black women's experiences with work, family, motherhood, political activism, and sexual politics have been routinely distorted in or excluded from traditional academic discourse" (p. 201). Additionally, BFT as a theoretical lens aligns well with our methodological approach, autoethnography (Ngunjiri et al., 2010; Spry, 2001), which reflects the values in African oral tradition (Dillard & Bell, 2011). BFT supports the collectivistic nature oftentimes valued by Black women across the diaspora and the use of stories to make-meaning of life circumstances (Dowdy, 2008).

Methodology

Within the present study, we use nkwaethnography to answer the following research question: How do tenure-track Black women faculty who hold a critical political standpoint, describe our experiences teaching and working with graduate students at a predominantly White institution?

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that utilizes data about an individual's experience within a social context to critically understand the nuances of the phenomenon (Ngunjiri et al., 2010). Dillard and Bell (2011) delineate a variation of this ethnography approach we used called 'nkwaethnography,' that embraces a Twi word, 'nkwa,' which means sacred or life-affirming. Nkwaethnography amplifies the voices of Black women and acknowledges we are not stories of a 'singular self' but are stories of 'we', collective stories deeply embedded in African women's wisdom and Indigenous knowledge (Dillard & Bell, 2011). Rooted in ethnography, autoethnography is different from other qualitative approaches in that it takes a self-focused approach (Ngunjiri et al., 2010; Spry, 2001). Autoethnography serves as both a critique and resistance to the phenomena the individual is experiencing (Ngunjiri et al., 2010; Spry, 2001). Spry (2001) highlighted the power of autoethnography for historically marginalized individuals:

> autoethnography contributes to the burgeoning methodological possibilities of representing human action. It is one tool among many designed to work in the fields, unseating the privileged scholar from the desk in the master's house and de-exoticizing the non-White male objective scholar from the realms of the academically othered. And it is a method that calls upon the body as a site of scholarly awareness and corporeal literacy. (p. 727)

In this article, we engage in Dillard and Bell's (2011) culturally responsive version of a nkwaethnography. This process involved two or more researchers coming together to co-construct their common and differing experiences in a dialogic format (Ngunjiri et al., 2010). As two Black women who have shared and differing experiences across various dimensions of life within and outside of the academy, co-constructing our stories through writing and in conversation provided a reflective task that was cathartic and emancipatory. Our nkwaethnography process was multifaceted. First, we decided on the reflective questions about which we would both answer prior to our discussions. The questions were: (1) *Tell me about your experiences teaching cultural awareness-building courses as a tenure-track Black woman at a predominately White institution in the wake of the murders and racial injustices and a global pandemic;* (2) *Describe your feelings, thoughts, and ways of self-care during these times (include, if applicable, how being in community with others influenced this).*

The goal of individually engaging in writing one's story was to provide each with time and space, without imposing thoughts, to reflect and capture individual feelings prior to sharing. We were each given a month to complete our stories prior to meeting to discuss. We met and read the other person's narrative and then discussed emotions, thoughts, or insight manifested during the process. These conversations elicited emotional responses and cathartic feelings related to universality, feeling one is not alone but a part of a larger group having similar experiences (Patterson, 1996). We captured these thoughts to consider during data analysis and the remainder of the research process.

We each independently coded all data through multiple rounds of deductive and inductive coding (Miles et al., 2014). When completing deductive coding we looked for common themes related to shared realizations and 'epiphanies' (Marx et al., 2017) related to our experiences teaching courses that manifested within/outside of the academy or during the course. After independent coding, we came together to identify central themes and relationships across those themes. Once we completed coding the stories independently, Janice read through the raw data two times to inform the construction of the composite narrative for each theme by interweaving portions of the quotes.

Composite narratives are a combination of abbreviated raw data from each participant interwoven together to create a single voice. When describing composite narratives within the scope of counternarratives, Solorzano and Yosso (2002) shared, "Composite stories or narratives draw on various forms of 'data' to recount the racialized, sexualized, and classed experiences of people of color" (p. 33). The use of composite narratives also aligns well with the methodology, theoretical framework, and our shared cultural communication values (i.e., oral tradition). Oral tradition within African and Indigenous communities, has been infused within qualitative methodological approaches in different ways to include narrative inquiry (Trahar & Stephens, 2012), storytelling (Archibald, 2008; Banks-Wallace, 2002; Tuwe, 2016), and nkwaethnography (Dilliard & Bell, 2011). While the creation of composite narratives as a methodological approach was to anonymize the data and avoid imposing judgment on the participant's experience (Willis, 2018), the process also lends itself to support presenting data in a manner that aligns with oral tradition and highlights a singular voice. For example, Tuwe (2016) shared:

>Oral African storytelling is essentially a communal participatory experience and phenomena (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986). It is a shared communal event where people

congregate together, listening, and participating in accounts and stories of past deeds,
beliefs, wisdom, counsel, morals, taboos, and myths. (p. 4)

Therefore, the nature of composite narratives reflects modern-day oral tradition because the
participants' responses to a similar phenomenon are shared as a cohesive story and reflective
of 'Ubuntu' which means "I am what I am because of you" (Mandela, 1994). Additionally,
composite narratives shed light on our collective experiences and provide an avenue to better
understand the psychological strain Black women endure while navigating spaces that center
Whiteness (Corbin et al., 2018). Once the composite narratives were drafted, Christa read
them to ensure the raw data was accurately represented. When editing the composites, the
original text was not altered. However, to better align with Black Feminist Thought as our
theoretical framework, we discussed the context of the composites and made collective
decisions around omissions, adjustments for clarity, and genuineness of voice.

Trustworthiness

Esposito and Evans-Winters (2021) described credibility, or trustworthiness, as
employing a structure to assess if you have "gotten it right" (p. 152). To increase the credibility
of our findings, we employed several checkpoints throughout the process. First, we discussed
each of the steps prior to beginning analysis, posed questions throughout to increase
credibility, and reviewed to achieve consensus about the final composite narratives. Then, our
data analysis process infused Ravitch and Carl's (2016) questions to ponder to increase
credibility which includes: (1) have we subjected our data to methodological, theoretical, and
researcher triangulation; (2) how our data diverges or converge; and (3) how we need to revisit
and challenge our interpretations based on what is evolving from the data. We employed
investigator triangulation which involves two or more researchers providing multiple
observations and conclusions from the data within the same study (Carter et al., 2014). Prior to
analysis, we met with a senior scholar who used storytelling and autoethnography
methodologies with Black women faculty to glean insight on how to ensure the credibility of
our work. They provided feedback on the narrative prompts, data analysis procedure, and
suggestions on the use of composite narratives as a dissemination approach for
autoethnography.

Findings and Analysis

We present two composite narratives in alignment with the five core themes of BFT
(Collins, 1990). The first composite, 'teaching and mourning at the margins,' connects with
BFT's core themes 'subjugation and confinement caused by controlling images' and 'barriers to
self-defining.' The second composite narrative, 'calculated resistance,' connects with 'self-
driven activism' and 'familial and work-related relationships.' Across the discussion section, we
highlight relevant literature after each composite (Nash & Bradley, 2011). Titles of composites
align with language used in the composite, BFT, or relevant literature.

Teaching and Mourning at the Margins

*I sat for a while pondering about my experiences teaching cultural awareness-building
courses as a Black woman, in predominantly White academic spaces while the world has
conveniently remembered it is on fire (despite the fire being ever present within me and the*

Black community). I describe my personal and collective positionality as a Black woman faculty member while experiencing a global pandemic and racial injustices as simultaneously hyper-visible and invisible. The invisibility and erasure of Black women, the inability to see 'us' as worthy of medical care or experts in our respective fields, yet we are hyper-visible. A hyper-visibility that permits (or should I say, assigns) our bodies as recipients of collective and ongoing trauma - as if there is an expectation that our bodies and spirits should be able to take it … because we have for so long. This year, I, along with so many others, routinely watched Black women and Black girls endure the pain of their loved ones; arrested, humiliated, and made to lay on the ground during unauthorized stops; be the family spokesperson at the press conferences; be subjected to racist-gendered discrimination in the name of politics. Having to show up and be expert, strong, and patient in the classroom while contending with my own pain created an emotional duality. Sometimes I felt I was stepping outside of my body to perform. Within, I felt rage but outside I presented calm and calculated composure – I could not show up as the angry Black woman, but constantly expected to only emote passion coupled with care. The ongoing news of murder after death after murder created a hole of depression, I constantly had to dig myself out of as I sat in my house attempting to write and be present for my Black students who were also suffering. I was strong for the Black women in my program and created an affinity space. We met bi-monthly and shared our tales of constant erasure in our academic spaces. Many of them were alone or away from home and like me navigating the rage of observing their peers and my students awaken to the racial violence our people have continued to endure for the past 400 plus years.

The academy is no different than society - our invisibility and hyper-visibility have always been pervasive and persistent. With increased discussion of anti-Black racism, I've watched the academy broadly, and those within it more specifically, attempt to check a box in hopes to quickly (re)solve their historical legacies of oppression. White folx' actions remain (in)consistent and racist - profiting off concepts Black folx been asserting for years, purposefully pretending to be Black, using Black women's likeness as props, creating inequitable institutional policies that fail to account for and represent our intersectional experiences. Soon after the murder of George Floyd, I attended a faculty book group exploring Isabel Wilkerson's "Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents" and I was one of two Black members of the group and recall the rage I felt listening to my white co-workers reckon with learning about the atrocities Black people have faced historically. It was as if the pain my people have and continue to endure was never a thought until now. I decided to not join the group anymore but as a pre-tenured faculty member I had to grapple with the potential repercussions of being viewed as 'not a team player' or too sensitive.

Working in academia, a settler colonial institution, can ignorantly create a false reality where one may equate increased access to capitalism and being regarded as an intellectual (privilege role in society) with freedom. I can be tricked to believe that I am operating autonomously, but much of what I do, if not careful, contributes to maintaining oppression, notably anti-Blackness. This awareness comes from an ongoing practice of critically examining the social conditions I navigate, largely influenced by writers and scholars like Patricia Hill Collins, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, Frantz Fanon, bell hooks, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and many more.

Notably as I think about my teaching experiences, I simultaneously feel a sense of rage, hope, and pessimism. Rage, because I know intimately the history of violence perpetuated against Black people did not just begin with the murder of those previously mentioned. I recalled similar violence in my hometown as a child, violence when relying on the doctor's care while facing illness, and violence observed in classrooms across my educational experience. Most of my students hold most markers of privilege (white, middle-class, cis-gender, heterosexual). I taught cultural awareness-building courses before and during the height of racial violence after the murders of so many. Before, I faced ongoing microaggressions, invalidation of my expertise while in the classroom, and their resistance to me (and content) was more overt (i.e., openly challenging me in class, 'reporting' me to a colleague). Comments on evaluations would accuse me of having an 'agenda'. However, after the murder of George Floyd and so many others, students shifted towards a more covert resistance. Students would miss class, turn cameras off (when online), and tell stories to convince others they are not racist. Many who were leaning into increasing their knowledge and awareness would openly cry or express their ignorance about the histories of many who are marginalized. Unpacking my own feelings related to my students' responses became a must. I often engaged in conversations about my gender/racialized experiences with other Black women in the academy to situate these occurrences in the broader social-political context we navigate because only there did I feel safe. This helped me center my feelings, think more clearly when teaching, and provided examples to share with students as case examples.

I noted many of my students are just now awakening to the presence of this violence and it makes me angry and feel erased. But I also feel hope when I hear them actively work to understand themselves and find solutions; my conscience is cynical and pessimistic. Even though teaching this course creates a sense of influence (albeit cosmetic) over my students' awareness of these issues, I am astutely aware that privilege affords them the ability to visit these oppressions but return to their way of life after the course is over. But for me, it will never be a reality I merely visit; it is a reality in my DNA and I presently live.

Black women faculty across rank and title, have survived numerous challenges despite underrepresentation (i.e., erasure, hypervisibility, lack of social capital, and isolation) (Porter et al., 2023c). Researchers highlighted the many and nuanced ways Black women experience gendered racism via institutional and departmental practices and policies such as colleagues' perpetual (mis)understandings of race and gender (Sulé, 2009); racism and sexism during tenure and promotion processes (Croom, 2017; Henry & Glenn, 2009); and exploitation of labor and work (Boss et al., 2021b; Harley, 2008). However, this scholarship continues to note the invisible labor experienced by Black women, but little attention is given to the emotional labor (Miller et al., 2019). Black faculty women, like Black women globally, often experience psychological trauma that affects their mental and physical health across their lifetime (Jones et al., 2007). This trauma load is exacerbated when adding a global pandemic, racial violence, changes in caregiving responsibilities, and workplace discrimination, while contending with ongoing feelings of 'otherness' in predominantly White spaces like the classroom (Njoku & Evans, 2022).

Additionally, Black women faculty face the ongoing expectation (i.e., controlling image) to be 'strong,' 'superhuman,' and the 'mammy' (Overstreet, 2021; Thomas et al., 2022; Wilson & Primus, 2021). The mammy trope has been documented in scholarship and these accounts

describe the expectation for Black women faculty to perpetually care for others (i.e., students and other faculty) irrespective of their own pain/circumstances (Ferdinand, 2016; Wilson & Primus, 2021). These controlling images (Collins, 1990) rob Black women faculty of the autonomy of describing themselves, creating their own path, and the ability to express naturally occurring emotions brought upon by the racial violence and perpetual loss because of COVID-19. The inability to grieve and express emotions properly impacts one's mental health and exacerbates ongoing conditions related to psychological trauma (Kinouani, 2020). Because Black women faculty cannot merely 'be' present in all their emotions without repercussions, they are constantly finding ways to manage or mask the 'rage' they feel. Brittany Cooper (2018) shared, "Learning to manage one's rage by daily tamping down that rage is a response to routine assaults on one's dignity in a world where rage might get you killed or cause you to lose your job" (p. 151).

Teaching cultural awareness-building courses from a critical epistemology can be professionally, physically, and emotionally dangerous. Cooper (2018) described in her book, E*loquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower*, being placed on a professor 'watch list' for a nonprofit organization devoted to removing 'liberal bias' and eliminating instructors with a 'racial agenda' from higher education spaces. Therefore, Black women navigate risk from many directions within and outside of the classroom.

Finally, in our first narrative, we glean insight into how we understand our positionalities within society as well as our academic context and how this reality influences our teaching. Teaching cultural awareness-building courses while Black can be empowering (i.e., feeling you are influencing change), but also emotionally corrosive (i.e., ongoing reminder of invisibility and the history of trauma) (Carter & Pieterse, 2020; hooks, 1994; Njoku & Evans, 2022). While scholars continue to name these experiences, little is done to explore the influence of teaching in these spaces on Black women faculty's psychological well-being.

Calculated Resistance

The past year has caused me to shift how I purposefully and intentionally show up for me, my family, my students, but more importantly, my daughter. At one point amidst the ongoing murders of Black people and grief of Black women, my daughter innocently and fearfully asked me, "Mommy, are you going to die?" I felt that moment, that question, that look on her face in the deepest part of my being - holding back tears, I responded, "No baby, Mommy is not going to die." That moment slapped me in the face - the socialization of/for/with our children is not only different, but it's a matter of life and death. I think about my son - he is cute now, but he will grow up one day. How will folx 'see' him? How often will I have to teach him and advocate on his behalf - and he is only two years old. I get overwhelmed sometimes with pessimism and can feel what I teach, do, or how I am won't change anything. I wonder if my students feel this sometimes.

Black women, resting at the margins of society, are in a peculiar place to deeply understand the nuances of oppression which is why there is a deeply rooted body of work exploring our unique positions. On evaluations, students often reflect on the depth of the course content and discussions. I attribute this to a personal relationship I have with the nuances of gendered racism, my ability to connect them to broader concepts, and ongoing overt acts of resistance to support other faculty and students. One can begin with as early as Sojourner Truth and Anna Julia Cooper to the Combahee River Collective and Kimberlé Crenshaw to recent

writings by Brittany Cooper and Morgan Jenkins. I carry within and share the insight of Black women and other women of Color to provide the language and examples needed to deeply examine the peculiarity of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), misogynoir (Bailey et al., 2018), anti-Blackness (Wilderson, 2020), and other concepts that help us understand the depth of oppression faced by Black people. These philosophical underpinnings along with many more inform my teaching philosophy, how I engage students, acts of resistance, and my subversion plan (e.g., how I create spaces of safety for myself in an unsafe world).

I engaged in an act of resistance, along with the three other Black women tenure-track faculty (total of four in the college). We sent a letter to administration voicing our disappointment because of a lack of response after the murder of George Floyd to students, staff, and faculty. In addition to George Floyd's death, the racial climate on campus was contentious because of a series of anti-Black sentiments written in public places. We needed to say something; we needed to do something; we needed to be seen. We needed to speak-up even though we knew things would remain the same for us.

I have also taken account of what Maxine Waters said when she called for us to 'reclaim our time.' We are in the academy but not of the academy; folx will take advantage of our time, space, voice, and contributions. So, I have learned and am still learning to enact self-love/self-care through my ability to say 'no.' White students have asked me to take up class time so they could process their feelings in ways they needed to be affirmed by me and their classmates. At times, I allowed some space, but at others I said 'no' and explained 'what we're going to do' as part of our class time. I deconstructed what they were really asking us (folx of color and particularly Black folx) to do, during class time, and despite our (in)ability to engage with them or process our own feelings, at that time. Protecting my peace and walking in it became necessary as a Black woman. The academy is not going anywhere, students and colleagues will always need and want our time and labor, but I was only given one life to live. I have figured out - by talking to folx I trust and observing everything and everybody - my voice, my scholarship, my courses and how I manage them, and what I want my trajectory to be in the academy. At the same time, I have figured out what I don't want my process/journey to be. I carry this ever-growing understanding with me in the classroom and it influences how I am, what I value, and what I convey. These experiences deepen my sense of purpose when teaching cultural awareness-building courses. Purpose is driven by my spiritual connection with something bigger than me. Who I am and what I bring to the course is my act of resistance; I get to choose when, where, and how I enter, and I will continue to do so.

Carter and Pieterse (2020) asserted an active coping response to race-based trauma can include "resistance, education, advocacy" (p. 59). For us, in our academic spaces (classrooms and campus-wide workshops), teaching individuals permits us to share knowledge and skills with students, staff, and other faculty who have/will have influence over policies that affect Black people or broadly contribute to multiple forms of oppression. As Black women, our teaching extends beyond the classroom; we educate our children, nieces and nephews, and are often socialized to be the forebears of cultural knowledge. Black women's individual and collective abilities to (re)negotiate, (re)prioritize, and ultimately (re)claim our/their time, energy, and space(s) are rooted in a historical legacy of having to survive and 'thrive' in ways most appropriate for our respective situations and with the understanding that we must 'save'

ourselves because history demonstrates we cannot wait for others. However, these seen and unseen burdens prove psychologically heavy over time.

Anthym and Tuitt (2019) articulated the cost of vicarious trauma and emotional labor for Black women in the academy engaging in race work at predominantly White institutions in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, a collectively traumatic event. They shared the silence of institutions about the racial trauma Black faculty face impacts their psychological health, feelings of belongingness, safety, and eventually retention (Anthym & Tuitt, 2019). Recently, Ward and colleagues (2023) described the nuanced ways Black women resisted or supported their emotional boundaries in their own way in the academy as a "silent subversion" (p. 15). Ward and colleagues further described silent subversion can manifest in many ways to include turning off one's Zoom camera to avoid White surveillance, preserve a sense of self, and to take an emotional break.

Discussions and Implications for Black Women Faculty and Institutional Leaders

This nkwaethnography has several implications across roles in the academy, but there are implicit considerations for Black women faculty and institutional leaders committed to understanding the psychological and professional ramifications faced by Black women facilitating cultural awareness-building courses.

Black Women Faculty

Many Black women faculty regardless of levels of success are surviving (not thriving) in the academy (Williams & Gibney, 2014). Regardless of the number of publications, acquisition of funding, administrative roles, or teaching awards, the academy can be cesspools that poison us spiritually each time we acquire (or not) a marker of success dictated solely by Whiteness. To maintain an inner antidote to prevent a spreading of the poison to our hearts, the narratives presented here provide some insight to support the resistance. Firstly, exploring oneself spiritually to acknowledge the wisdom that exists within and those shared across generations from your ancestors honors oral tradition (i.e., messages conveyed across generations to preserve and heal) and it aligns with Black feminist epistemological approaches like BFT (Collins, 2002).

The steps used in the current study, autoethnography (Dillard & Bell, 2011; Ngunjiri et al., 2010), is an example of how research can also be cathartic and provide a space for reflective storytelling. Chioneso and colleagues (2020) highlighted in their community healing framework, Community Healing and Resistance Through Storytelling (C-HeARTS), that storytelling is a culturally responsive trauma-informed approach wherein Black women can counternarrate the trauma experience and become active participants in their liberation. This also aligns with BFT as Collins (2002) shared,

> Rather than raising consciousness, Black feminist thought affirms, rearticulates, and provides a vehicle for expressing in public a consciousness that quite often already exists. More important, this rearticulated consciousness aims to empower African American women and stimulate resistance. (p. 32)

BFT, for Black women, provides the sharpening of a critical consciousness (i.e., crayons), a mirror to constantly assess one's congruence, and a tool to dissect, name, and create spaces of liberation (Collins, 2002; Evans-Winters, 2019b). This consciousness, an antidote of clarity, must be constantly replenished to support our effort to remain congruent in spaces that reward us for abandoning our inherent values (i.e., community, abundance, and liberation).

Secondly, develop or join a "homeplace," a healing community created by Black women for Black women purposed to be affirming and nurturing (hooks, 1990, p. 382). This concept also embodies the spirit of cultural practices evident across the diaspora. For centuries, Black women have created spaces for us to restore outside of the gaze of maleness and Whiteness (hooks, 1990). In academia, spaces like sister circles and writing collectives serve as a restorative and supportive community where we can validate each other's experiences and address ongoing trauma (Henry & Glenn, 2009; Porter et al, 2022; Scales et al., 2017). Additionally, members within your "homeplace" can be mirrors to hold you accountable, maintain congruence, and support health (e.g., mental and physical) (hooks, 1990, p. 382). This space is especially needed for those who teach cultural awareness building courses to support one's critical consciousness, analytical skills, self-reflexivity, and academic autonomy (Williams et al., 2021).

Finally, prioritizing your mental and spiritual health is crucial. Black women like Sojourner Truth and Anna Julia Cooper detailed the social and political erasure faced in the 1800s. Since then, gendered racism has and continues to be documented by Black women in and outside of the academy (Porter et al., 2023c). This begs us to be aware that this reality is not something we can readily fix, it is deeply rooted, and we must actively work to preserve ourselves. Angela Davis stated in an interview with Sarah Van Gelder (2016), "Self-care and healing and attention to the body and the spiritual dimension—all of this is now a part of radical social justice struggles" (p.nd) and individuals who seek to make change in the world must know how to care for themselves. Evans-Winters (2019a) recommended mindfulness; a form of healing historically practiced by Black people across the diaspora. Mindfulness is a state of being consciously aware of the present while accepting one's emotions and physiological responses. She stressed the importance of staying in the present moment and focusing on your purpose, refrain from being judgmental, and establish your own practice of restoration (Evans-Winters, 2019a). Additionally, Tricia Hersey's (2022) *Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto* reminds us that racism is a distraction and resting, dreaming, and imagining are acts of resistance. Hersey (2022) shared:

> I refuse to push my body to the brink of exhaustion and destruction. Let the chips fall where they may. I trust myself more than capitalism. Our refusal will make space for abundance. We will have to leap and trust rest. (p. nd)

Intentionality is essential for radical self-care and preservation for all Black women, but especially for those who teach cultural awareness-building courses. Committing oneself to this level of self-care pushes against how many Black women are socialized to be caretakers and self-sacrificial which we believe is synonymous with being a 'good' Black woman or a positive contributor to our community. This dilemma is especially true when caring for Black students. While feeling committed to one's community and our interconnected struggle is important and reflective of our collectivistic nature, Black women are invited to reimagine how to care for oneself while caring for others in ways that do not equate to exhaustion and self-destruction.

Institutional Leadership

Academic institutions are settler colonial institutions built to exclude Black women as beneficiaries and images of intellectual excellence. Evidence of these and related exclusions are

supported by the previous discussions of barriers faced when attempting to acquire tenure and within the stories of gendered racism shared by Black women faculty across research (Dancy et al., 2018; Dowdy, 2008; Wilder, 2013). Institutional leaders (i.e., chairs, directors, deans, and provosts) and colleagues must first recognize Black women are intellectually capable creators of and contributors to scholarly discourse (Patton & Haynes, 2018). Leaders are encouraged to first listen to and believe Black women concerning our experiences and stories. Leaders must then acknowledge Black women's situatedness within society and the historical legacy of gendered-racism Black women experience (Chambers, 2011). Specifically, this understanding must examine how and the extent to which controlling images have (mis)characterized and (mis)represented Black women (Collins, 1990).

These controlling images have been/are manifested through generalizations that influence how the academy (students, colleagues, and leaders) sees and treats Black women, and the expectations of/for Black women (i.e., Mammy, the help/maids, strong Black woman, and superwoman). For example, the mammification of Black women faculty - deeming Black women as caretakers, the help, nurturers of/for all - is perpetuated as Black women faculty continue to fill non-tenure track academic appointments, are paid less for our labor, yet inundated with service responsibilities (i.e., increased advising loads and committee service) (Harley, 2008; Patton & Haynes, 2018). Expectations of/for Black women to serve negatively impact reappointment, tenure, and promotion, yet positively affect student enrollment, retention, and visibility of our units and institutions. For example, leaders and administrators are invited to contextualize and respond equitably to the impact navigating gendered racism, COVID-19, and ongoing racial violence has on how Black women faculty emotionally and physically navigate classrooms (i.e., student evaluations), invisible labor (i.e., supporting Black students/peers), and discrimination from students/peers.

The global pandemics (i.e., COVID-19 and racial injustices) have exacerbated expectations of Black women's service (and labor) as college and institutional leadership are calling upon Black women's expertise to (re)solve anti-racism on and throughout campus (Boss et al., 2021a; Porter et al., 2023a). In addition to listening to, believing, and acknowledging Black women, institutional leaders must actively disrupt White centered metrics (i.e., Westernized ways of knowing and being, impact, and rigor) to equitably evaluate files for reappointment, tenure, and promotion (Gonzales & Griffin, 2020). Institutional leaders must (re)imagine what it means to holistically honor, credit, and remunerate Black women's scholarship, experiences, and stories.

Conclusion

Telling our stories and connecting them within the broader socio-political context of being Black women was validating, cathartic, and strengthened our connection with each other and Black women faculty. Little scholarship exploring Black women faculty discusses the psychological and physiological ramifications of the stress and trauma in classroom settings (Anthym & Tuitt, 2021; Butner et al., 2000; Chancellor, 2019). Methodologies like nkwaethnographies (Dillard & Bell, 2011) provide the vehicle for Black women to authentically share our/their stories, is a method that challenges Western ways of exploring lived experiences and is also cathartic. While our collective experience is wrought with ongoing mourning and pain, beauty and pride uniquely exist. During a reckoning with racial injustices, COVID-19, and navigating 'normally' occurring barriers faced by Black women, we resisted and

thrived. Thriving, not as an equation to Western-centered notions of vocational production, but thriving through surviving, helping one another, other Black folx, and our communities achieve success on our own terms.

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