

MARGINALIZED PERSPECTIVE: THE VOICES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN
CURRICULUM STUDIES

by

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If I stand tall it's because I stand on the backs of my ancestors. –African Proverb

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Introduction

“Neglecting the experiences of African American [and others] people in our curriculum is not only detrimental to African American children, it is also a great source of the miseducation of other children who continue to be poorly prepared for a multicultural world” (quoted in Slattery 2006, p. 182).

During my semesters as a graduate student in curriculum studies, I had always experienced a level of discomfort. It was a brand new, uncharted territory for me. I didn't know what to expect or what it even meant to be a graduate student. The only thing that I was certain of was that I wanted to pursue a degree beyond my undergraduate studies. My academic professors and advisors were all quite supportive and sincerely caring. They always showed concern about their students and dedicated themselves to the intellectual growth and scholarship of their students. For this reason –I am forever grateful.

Mentally, I wasn't prepared. I was perplexed by the readings and some of the subject matter because I did not feel that I comprehended it as well as some of my peers. Some of the ideas, concepts and language may as well have been in German because I was having a hard time grasping it. There were times when I felt completely out of my element and that I had made a huge mistake. Briefly, I entertained the idea of switching to counseling or administration, however I stuck to it even though I lacked confidence and what I felt was intellectual prowess. Needless to say, there were feelings of unpreparedness on my end and I felt as though I was meandering my way through the program. I recall a time earlier on in my studies when we were learning about William F. Pinar's (2004) concept of “currere” from his book *What is Curriculum Theory?* Currere seeks to understand the contribution academic studies makes to ones' understanding of

his or her life (p.36). Through this concept of currere, I was forced to reflect on my past educational experiences – which for me further illuminated my educational shortcomings.

From elementary school and on, my public schools were primarily African American. It was junior high and high school that I began to notice a small population of Caucasian and Asian students. The city in which I grew up was very racially polarized and economically segregated. Those that could afford to send their children to private Catholic schools did just that. In hindsight, I did not compare my public education to private school education. In my mind, the only difference was that kids had to wear plaid uniforms and you were wealthy enough to go there. My school, I'm sure had its issues, but I wasn't exposed to anything else to know the difference. Later in life I discovered that there were huge differences in the quality of education. History classes would usually consist of the teacher talking about all the great white people in history that discovered and built America. "What were black people doing during this time?" "Where were we in this American history?" Blacks were enslaved people and did not possess the right to vote. That was the extent of my Black history. M. Christopher Brown II in his book *The Politics of Curricular Change* asks, "In whose interest are students of color being educated? To whose culture are they being indoctrinated? And, most importantly, are they being schooled into "miseducation"?" (2005, p.3).

My great-grandfather had this book; it was called ¹*The Black Book*. It was a rather large book, filled with all sorts of images of black people in America from different periods in history. I couldn't have been more than ten years of age when I first turned its pages. There were images of Mammy, blackface minstrel, Jesse Owens, Buckwheat, Josephine Baker and various caricatures representing all sorts of black stereotypes such as the pickaninny eating watermelon. There were also other very disturbing images in this book, images of jubilant lynch mobs posing around hanging black bodies, the Ku Klux Klan and enslaved men, women and children bearing the physical scars of slavery. But there is one image in my head, an image that haunted me days later. It was an image of what appeared to be a black man lying face up on the ground, wrist bound to boards, his clothes disintegrated from the flames, his body charred and burned, exposing his entrails and a group of white men and children around him with smiles and the look of excitement on their faces. At that age, I never read the caption, but as an adult, I learned of the 1911 Coatesville, Pennsylvania burning of Zachariah Walker. There would be others - haunting images that stayed with me through my childhood and into my adult years. My grandmother had an issue of ²Jet Magazine that featured the story and photos of a badly decomposed and unrecognizable Emmett Till. The 1955 murder of Emmett Till was a spark in the upsurge of activism and resistance that became known as the Civil Rights Movement (<http://www.pbs.org>).

“Who was this kid and what did he do to deserve this?” I thought to myself. I recall these images, as horrific as they are because I never learned of these people in any classroom. There was a different kind of curriculum at home than there was in any

¹ The Black Book, published January 12, 1974, by Middleton A. Harris is a collection of African American history, archival documents, photographs, commercial images all chronicling the black experience.

² Jet Magazine, a weekly periodical focusing on African American culture, politics, entertainment and art.

school I attended. I accidentally came across their stories at home, being a curious child, but never really having anyone to explain what was happening in the world and why these things occurred. I listened to my mother, aunt and uncles' talk about their experiences integrating Humboldt Middle School on Saint Louis's south side, and how they never told their parents (my grandparents) how awful each day was. They just suffered the humiliation, the racial slurs, and the constant harassment by white students, the fist fights and verbal degradation by their white teachers, amongst themselves in silence. And yet, as they each retold a different story or blurted out "Hey do y'all remember when?" tag line, they spoke with a certain sense of resilience and disbelief that they endured those encounters. Sometimes there would be laughter at other times they would question of themselves, "Why didn't we ever say anything to Mama or Daddy? That mess was crazy." We weren't taught to be rebellious or confrontational. Since desegregation was at times highly volatile it may have been in their best interest to acquiesce, besides that, in my grandparent's home, children were to be seen and not heard.

They learned how to survive within racist structures and inevitably through those experiences – they formed their own opinions. For my family, although they never advocated prejudice or taught my sister and I to dislike someone based on their skin color, white people were rarely ever presented in a positive manner. There always seemed to be some sort of worry or concern, an instinctive distrust of Caucasians at the onset, one that would take time and new experiences to reverse.

With this in mind, I am reminded of a powerful passage by James Baldwin, which conveys my own beliefs about curriculum. In his book, *Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era*, Patrick Slattery (2006) quotes,

If ... one managed to change the curriculum in all the schools so that [African Americans] learned more about themselves and their real contributions to this culture, you would be liberating not only [African Americans], you'd be liberating white people who know nothing about their own history. And the reason is that if you are compelled to lie about one aspect of anybody's history, you must lie about it all. If you have to lie about my real role here, if you have to pretend that I hoed all that cotton just because I loved you, then you have done something to yourself. You are mad. (as cited in Slattery, p.167)

Reflecting on the fragmented knowledge of my own history, I think about how my miseducation has affected my self - conception as an adult African American woman. Early in my collegiate career as an undergraduate, I remember feeling that the public education I received growing up in Saint Louis, Missouri was in a lot of ways inadequate. Education is supposed to prepare students to think critically, to challenge the status quo and to urge students to become active members of society. If someone were to ask if my high school prepared me for these things, my answer would be, "No." I was ill-prepared for the educational and social class barriers that I faced at the university level.

Initially, coming to Texas Christian University was not my first choice. Like college – TCU was an after-thought. It was not until the advisement of my caring high school counselor that I gave post secondary education any consideration. After an influential college tour during high school, I decided to attend an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges & Universities)

Grambling State in Louisiana. But after financial challenges impacted my family, I had to put college on the back burner. It was years later that I considered revisiting the idea of college.

After relocating from Saint Louis to Fort Worth, TX and after years of taking classes intermittently at local community colleges, I had made up my mind that I wanted to further and complete my educational endeavors once and for all.

My first year at Texas Christian University was difficult. Most of the time, I was one of maybe two African Americans in class and sometimes I was the only African American in class. In an introductory course to Medieval Literature, the professor engaged with the students about British Literature, Victorian Literature and Greek mythology on the first day of class. I remember this very well because in those moments I thought to myself, “Okay maybe there was a prerequisite to this course that I did not take.” Everyone seemed familiar with the sonnets of Shakespeare and the story of Hamlet. They discussed Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, *Dante’s Inferno*, *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey* and other classical pieces of literature. These conversations went on the entire class period and I had nothing to contribute. I had heard of William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* through other pop culture means – but that was all I knew. I had never read it for myself, nor had I even heard of any of the others. I sat near the rear of the class, the only African American female, inside the shell of myself – outside of the conversation. By the end of class, I had made up my mind to drop the Medieval Literature course because I had no prior knowledge of the things that were discussed the first day. The disconnect from the rest of the class showed on my face. I felt overwhelmingly unprepared and dejected. I felt invisible and cheated. I felt invisible in class and around campus – cheated because during the first year, it was apparent that my public education was sub-par to most of my TCU peers. I couldn’t wait to get out of that class, but something unexpected happened. I attempted to quickly

make my way out of the building, holding back the urge to break out in tears, my mind set on dropping the course; Dr. Havens called out to me. She said, “Kara, I noticed you were kind of scaling the walls in there. I promise it will be an interesting class if you stick with it.” At this point, behind the lenses of my sunglasses, I felt my eyes begin to well with tears. One slid down the side of my cheek and I quickly tried to wipe it away. A very observant Dr. Havens noticed and said, “Are you all right?” I replied, “Yes, the sun is just really bright out here.” She just nodded her head and proceeded to convince me to remain in the class. I did, but I struggled to keep a C average, which I believe she generously gave me. There were other moments throughout the course of that class that Dr. Havens would offer her assistance and even moments when she pointed out areas of deficiency with my writings. My first major academic paper on *Boethius: The Consolation of Philosophy* was a complete disaster. Aside from not knowing how to properly cite sources, there were technical and organizational errors with the paper. The experience was difficult and I was embarrassed about my shortcomings. I struggled to keep a decent grade point average that first year and at one point, I was placed on academic probation which resulted in my losing federal aid for a semester. I wish I could say this was all due to irresponsible partying – but it was not. It was a painful challenge - but I completed the courses.

I decided to attend graduate school and focus on curriculum studies. This decision came only one semester after having completed my undergraduate degree. I decided that I needed more, I wanted to know more about the very foundations of education and why certain types of knowledge was privileged over other types of knowledge. Why some schools had this sort of curriculum over that kind of curriculum? I desired to be in a position where I could closely examine these issues and hoped to be an agent of change within our educational systems. I believe this curiosity was born out of what I felt I lacked during my primary and secondary

school years and that was a more diverse and thoughtful educational experience. I am surely not implying that I am ungrateful in any way – I truly appreciate the efforts of those teachers who did the best they could with the tools given to teach. However, during my graduate studies, I find that my own personal philosophy of curriculum studies is best described in the following quote, “All students deserve a curriculum which mirrors their own experience back to them, upon occasion thus validating it in the public world of school” Emily Style (*Curriculum as Windows and Mirror*, 1988).

Exposure to various curriculum studies theorists and scholars such as John Dewey, Bill Pinar, and Patrick Slattery, William Doll, Bill Schubert and others ignited my inquiry into the voices that surround and define curriculum studies. All of these scholars are men, white men. I was disconcerted that I had not found ways to identify with these scholars in the field of curriculum. While these scholars offer multiple ways of knowing and knowing the “other” and the various ways of representing the “other” theories as to how this should be performed are currently being debated. I found myself questioning, where are the voices of African American women in this field? Where are the women who represent and look like me? This question challenged me and causes me to consider my own position and question if such a space existed for me. Too often, I have felt as though I struggle to find my own voice and voices that resembled my own. In her book, *Talking Back*, bell hooks (1989) writes, “coming to voice is an act of resistance. Speaking becomes both a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to being subject. Only as subjects can we speak” (p. 12).

Throughout my graduate studies, I tussled within myself to find my own niche, and my own voice in this field and in this world. How could I begin to engage in the world in ways

which I could be heard and have my concerns heard and taken seriously. I was cognizant of the fact that I had concerns over social justice issues, inequality and equity within education and various social settings. I just did not know how to articulate my interest with ease. “Awareness of the need to speak, to give voice to the varied dimensions of our lives, is one way women of color begin the process of education for critical consciousness” notes hooks (1989, p.13). I have always felt a deep sense of passion and obligation to bring awareness to issues of oppression, the invisible or those on the margins. My concerns for those that are on the margins, the oppressed and those that lack equitable educational opportunities are the impetus for this study and will continue to be a meaningful part of my life’s work. While it is still challenging to hone in on my own voice as a nascent scholar in the field and more importantly as an African American woman in the area of curriculum studies, I believe that it is important work and it is imperative to have more representation of marginalized voices.

Cause for Concern

As our society grows increasingly diverse, concerns for the underrepresented and marginalized voices in many facets of everyday life are frequent topics of public discourse, and especially in educational arenas. Since the 1960’s, historians, educators, political activists, and others have raised concerns about the seemingly invisible contributions of women, African Americans, and other groups to the historical, economical, and political development of the United States are invisible (Sheared, 1994 p. 271). Marginalized voices have been silenced or ignored. According to M. Christopher Brown II in his book *The Politics of Curricular Change*, the attempts to create a broad system of education that includes all persons have created visions of a culture in which many marginalized and oppressed groups are visible. Given the multiple dialogues from underrepresented groups, this requires curricular changes which can unite all

voices and that will move society closer to the reality of “justice for all” (2005, p.2). Brown further suggests, if education is to become the truly great liberating tool it is capable of being, all humans must be allowed to participate. We cannot allow one group to dictate the conversation by determining what is and is not acceptable for discussion (2005). The necessity to develop a new frame of reference that transcends the limits of existing concepts, theories and ideologies will continue to be a pertinent factor in restructuring curriculum studies. Reality has been conceptualized, by and large, in terms of a limited perspective from the dominant social forms (Brown, 2005, p.3). In other words, we must search for ways to bring multiple perspective and different voices that are on the margins of the mainstream into the discourse about curriculum if we are to ever have a truly democratic educational system.

The relegation of non-whites and women into the margins are a cause of concern. One must ask, what is being lost when there appears to be a lack of space to fully engage and include a variety of voices at the mainstream table. Women scholars, in particular, Black women scholars are often overlooked because of race and or gender. Although some would argue that Black women scholars are beyond the point of complete invisibility, Ruth Farmer states, “[...] African American women are not expected to speak [...] and it is particularly difficult to be heard, since despite the reality, the myth still prevails that African American women are making great professional strides” (1995, p.205). Black women must still insist upon being heard. Improving this condition for teacher – educators, women of color and scholars is a challenging process because it is difficult to change the status quo and deconstruct racial barriers that have existed for centuries. However, I am hopeful because it appears that the field of curriculum studies recognizes that voices of black women scholars and other people of color have been omitted or simply ignored from the history of curriculum and present day conversations.

Acknowledging this, some curriculum scholars might agree that there appears to be an invitation to elucidate and interpret those marginalized voices in postmodern curriculum studies. Marshall, Sears & Schubert assert, “Marginalized voices need to be excavated, studied and integrated fully into our discourse about curriculum” (2000, p.13). However, these scholars admit these voices remain invisible even in their book, *Turning Points in Curriculum*, “not because they are unimportant to the story but because theirs is an attempt to portray the intellectual and social history of what *has been* rather than what *might* or *should have been* a part of the background of contemporary curriculum studies” (2000, p.13). I feel there is room in the field of curriculum studies to recognize and assess the voices and experiences of Black women scholars. However, there are still challenges in the field and women of color contend with those obstacles regularly as they battle for space. In their book, *Teacher Lore: Learning from Our Own Experiences*, William Schubert & William Ayers assert,

We want to create spaces in which we might come together not only to analyze these situations and relationships but also to work together to change and transform that which we find to be oppressive or inequitable or silencing for any of us within our educational communities. (1999, p.21)

Purpose of Study

During my third semester as a nascent curriculum studies scholar, I have become increasingly concerned about the underrepresented and the voices on the margins. These concerns are frequent topics of public discourse and academic scholarship. In the educational arena, these subjects continue to re-emerge and are the basis for much reform and conversation, as our society grows increasingly diverse. Women scholars, in particular, Black women scholars are often overlooked because of race and or gender. Given my concerns, I began to frequently

question, where are the voices of African American women within curriculum studies? Are the voices of African American women in this field being ignored or silenced by the dominant voices that influence curriculum studies? Additionally, I question where and if there is a space for women of color in this field to express and engage in the multiple conversations taking place around curriculum. This study seeks to explore the experiences of Black women's professional lives within academia, and focuses on those educators who are concerned with marginalized voices of Black women within curriculum studies in U.S. colleges and universities. The study explores the ways in which the selected educators (1) see themselves and their experiences as valuable and how Black women educators can begin to generate theory about how their consciousness and understandings at the intersections of their race, class, gender and culture, (2) are able to contribute to the developing body of knowledge pertaining to curriculum studies (3) face limitations in developing more multi-voiced curriculum within and among their learning environments, (4) establish support within the academic community, and (5) and how they themselves have felt silenced. This study should add a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which concerns for marginalized voices impact educators' professional lives, the forms of influence they have, and the barriers they face.

Methodology

Deciding upon the best methodological practice for this project took a great deal of thought and revisiting. As I attempted to make meaning and establish a basis for this work multiple methodologies became apparent. Initially, an autoethnographic approach seemed apropos. An autoethnographic approach to this study allowed me to insert myself and my experiences in the field of curriculum with other women of color who may share or have similar experiences in their intellectual, academic and personal lives. Through this method of research, I

am able to search for meaning through the experiences these scholars represent –because my study seeks to illuminate the voices of women in their various academic settings, narrative Auto-ethnography as a form of qualitative research, “locates the researcher’s deeply personal and emotional experiences as topics in a context related to large social issues” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 335). Qualitative researchers are interested in gaining a better understanding of the world and of the subject matter through studying a variety of materials such as “case studies, personal experiences, introspection, life stories and interviews to name a few (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Qualitative research involves an “interpretation, naturalistic approach to the world,” attempting to make “sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.4).

During the research process, the concept of bricolage emerged. While I hesitate to consider myself an advanced bricoleur, I must give credit to this form of qualitative research as it pertains to this work. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln note, the French word *bricoleur* describes a handyman or handywoman who makes use of the tools available to complete a task – a maker of quilts (2008, 2011, p. 167). According to Denzin & Lincoln, “there are many kinds of *bricoleurs* – interpretative, narrative, theoretical, political methodological. The interpretative *bricoleur* produces a bricolage – that is, a pieced – together set of representations that is fitted to the specifics of a complex situation” (2008, p.5). For this work I will claim the position of an interpretative bricoleur, though not intentional. Bricoleurs understand that this method is an “emergent construction” meaning the decision to utilize this method was not necessarily made in advance. The interpretive *bricoleur* also understands that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her own personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and by those of the people in the setting (Denzin & Lincoln,

2008, p. 8). Bricolage, in a contemporary sense, is understood to involve the process of employing these methodological processes as they are needed in the unfolding context of the research situation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 168). This work explores various historical moments in education juxtaposed to create a montage or a quilt. I give a historical description of curriculum studies and the reconceptualization of the field as well as a historical perspective on late 18th early 19th century African American women educators. In efforts to examine the field of present day curriculum studies, the voices that are mainly represented and the voices that are seemingly missing, in a bricolage, or a “set of fluid, interconnected images”, this study connects those representations to show their relation to the whole (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 8).

I employed a ³thematic analysis, in collecting, sorting and constantly comparing the data units to determine the emerging themes. My study focuses on the voices of African American women in curriculum studies. Through their experiences and my own, I am able to gain a better understanding of what it means to have a voice in a location where women of color are infrequently represented and hopefully to fill a void in the literature that exists surrounding African American women within curriculum studies. Due to the reality that there are very few studies that have focused on the marginalized voices of African American women in curriculum studies, this work highlights these particular scholars in various positions in higher education, thus adding another piece to the bricolage. Their personal stories of struggle, obstacles and determination to survive in the academy are unfortunately common among women of color in the academy. Their experiences and their life journeys vary but intersect when it relates to being professional woman of color in higher education. The ways in which they engage in the world,

³ For more information on “thematic analysis” refer to Denzin & Lincoln’s 3rd Edition of *The Landscape of Qualitative Research* or Schwandt’s *Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry* 3rd Edition.

negotiate their positions, manage their scholarly pursuits and how they negotiate and transform space in predominantly white educational institutions is a common theme among them.

Of the three women I interviewed for this research, two of them are tenured professors and the other is on the tenure track at her university. Each professor is involved in curriculum studies, curriculum instruction or development or history of education. Two of them have some administrative backgrounds. All of the women hold doctoral degrees in their respective fields. These women are advocates for social justice and are concerned about the voices of women of color as it relates to race, class, gender, sexual identity, academic scholarship, underserved communities and equitable education opportunities within their communities. I have given the participants pseudonyms that best describe their personalities or rather my perception of their personalities. Professor IDK stands for “I don’t know.” During our interview, Professor IDK seemed a bit disconnected or apprehensive to divulge any personal experiences or if she didn’t want to think about answering a question, she would simply reply, “I don’t know.” She seemed somewhat dismissive and I later attributed that dismissive demeanor to her being on a tenure track at her university. Professor IDK would say things such as, “I haven’t had time to think about that.” She was less willing to disclose certain stories while being audio recorded –but mentioned there were some things that she would share with me while the recorder was off. The tenure paradigm itself could possibly infringe a different type of silencing that might need more exploration. Professor Y, questions the world, she questions her existence and relationship to others in the world. Professor Y searches for ways to better engage and interact with the people she forms relationships around. She is thoughtful, an activist in her own right and scholarly. Professor Y questions why and makes efforts to instruct her classes in such a way that they too would learn to question. Her scholarship is rooted in equity and equality in education and

society. My final participant, I immediately name Professor X. Reminiscent of one who is rebellious but does so subversively, Professor X is provocative and concerned with uplifting the oppressed and marginalized people. Professor X is unafraid of “speaking her truth” and asserts that her research sometimes makes her the “pink elephant in the room”. She is the youngest to ever receive a doctoral degree at her university and for many years afterward would be the only faculty member of color.

To locate these voices, I relied upon professional connections within my university and word of mouth referrals. In an effort to illuminate and create a safe space for these voices to express their concerns and lived experiences, I conducted audio recorded interviews with each participant, lasting approximately thirty to ninety minutes. I wanted to find and strengthen my own voice within curriculum studies. Feeling like a marginalized person, I believe there is a place for the voices of African American women and many other people of color within curriculum studies. In doing this research, I am discovering that there were a few women of color throughout history that had established their own schools and curriculum. This find is interesting because of what it may reveal about Black women and a lack of voice within mainstream curriculum studies. Perhaps these women found it easier to establish their own schools and develop their own curriculum, allowing them to be empowered and to empower others. This work intends to locate the voices of African American women within curriculum studies or related fields in an effort to illuminate and create a safe space for these voices to express and elucidate their concerns and lived experiences as a marginalized person. I want to explore the possibilities of a more diverse perspective in curriculum studies. During the interview process, the participants were asked to reflect upon their individual experiences with being silenced or ignored in terms of their voices in their present positions in the academy.

Additionally, the participants were asked if they felt like a marginalized person and to describe those settings in which they did feel marginalized.

Homage to my Foremothers in Education

*As I become acquainted with your extraordinary histories, the sacrifices you made, your journey through time, one that is filled with turbulence and hardships
pure hate and love - I am moved.*

How did you make it over?

*You realized and understood with a fervent desire that you must teach, we must learn, you must uplift the race; you must make giant strides, You kept going.
What a weight you carried, your legacy gives me strength*

Christopher M. Span (2005) states that, “For nearly four centuries, learning in spite of opposition has been a recurring theme in the educational history of African Americans” (p.26).

“from its earliest beginnings, the educational history of African Americans was characterized by struggle and strife and at times sheer terrorism (p. 27). For approximately the first couple of hundred years of the African American experience in this country, it was illegal to teach enslaved African Americans to read or write. Span goes on to say,

[...] free and enslaved African Americans’ efforts to acquire the rudiments of learning during this time period [pre Civil War era] were ingenious [...] given the insurmountable odds and conditions - they were heroic. Despite the societal conditions or restrictions imposed upon them, free and enslaved African Americans’ sheer determination in acquiring an education illustrated the historic fortitude, ability, and appreciation of learning, freedom, and universal self-improvement. (p. 26)

If caught teaching, or if caught attempting to learn the very rudimentary skills of reading or writing could put teacher and student at risk of suffering legal action or very harsh physical punishment. Sometimes this punishment resulted in brutal disfigurement. In both the free Black and slave communities’ education was valued for a myriad of reasons. Education was the chief means to challenging societal status, slavery, segregation and inferiority theories (Span, 2005,

p.35). Among free Blacks, education was perceived as a primary vehicle to combat racism and second - class citizenship (as cited by Span, 2005, p.35). Secondly, it was perceived as a way of obtaining freedom. African Americans realized the importance of education and “demonstrated a profound respect for literacy irrespective of the legal restraints or severe repercussions they confronted daily” (p. 39). Throughout the antebellum era a small minority of enslaved African Americans ingeniously acquired some degree of literacy, and free Blacks built schools for themselves despite the opposition (Span, 2005, p. 39). The tradition of fighting for justice, education and social activism continued for years to come.

Teaching was one of the first professional roles to be adopted by African American women in the early 19th and 20th centuries. Additionally, teacher-centered training became the primary focus of many African American women. Dr. LaVerne Gyant notes that, many of these women attended ⁴Oberlin College and “spent their careers in creating a well-educated teacher corps” (1996, p. 14). During this time, African American women “established schools (public and private), developed curriculum, advanced the Lyceum movement, organized literary clubs and established graduate programs” (Gyant, 1996, p.11). “The schoolhouse became the first public place from which [African American women] could form a vanguard, leading the way toward equal opportunity” (Gyant, 1996, p.10). Some of these early educators started teaching in their homes – the first form of home-schooling. Fanny Jackson Coppin, Anna Julia Cooper, Mary McLeod Bethune, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Lucy Ann Stanton, Mary Jane Patterson, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, and former enslaved woman, Lucy Laney all remarkable educators – dedicated themselves to educating and focusing on what black women could do. They used their voices. These extraordinary women, received encouragement from their communities, churches,

⁴ Oberlin College was founded in 1833 by Presbyterian minister Rev. John J. Shipherd and missionary Philo P. Stewart. Oberlin was a coeducational college that regularly admitted students of color beginning in 1835.

students and others as they made large strides in uplifting the race “through the establishment of educational institutions” (Gyant, 1996, p.11). These accomplished women, teachers, activists and intellectuals helped to shape and transform the educational landscape for many African Americans leaving behind a rich teaching tradition, scholarship and perseverance even in the face of hardship and racism.

This brings me to question, what have we lost in the 21st century, what did these phenomenal women have that we are missing today? “Where are the contributions of African American women situated in curriculum studies canon today? Patricia Hill Collins asks the question, “If such a rich intellectual tradition exists, why has it remained virtually invisible until now? Why are African American women and our ideas not known and not believed in?” (1991, p.5). Collins offers the following insight,

The shadow obscuring the Black women’s intellectual tradition is neither accidental nor benign. Suppressing the knowledge produced by any oppressed group makes it easier for dominant groups to rule because the seeming absence of an independent consciousness in the oppressed can be taken to mean the subordinate groups willingly collaborate in their own victimization (Fanon 1963; Friere 1970; Scott 1985). Maintaining the invisibility of Black women and our ideas is critical in structuring patterned relations of race, gender, and class inequality that pervade the entire social structure. (1991, p.5)

Through this journey, I have come to comprehend and recognize the importance and power of voice. Voice and speaking is one means of expression, a vehicle for which one can

maintain and assert identity. Our voices can center our thoughts and ways of knowing. bell hooks (1989) postulates,

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of “talking back,” that is no mere gesture of empty words that is the expression of our movement from object to subject - the liberated voice. (p. 9)

A Brief History of Curriculum Studies

Historically, education was largely dominated and influenced by white male, European thought. Education was reserved for the elite in preparation for higher education. Therefore, marginalized voices and oppressed people remain widely invisible. Franklin Bobbitt, W.W. Charters, Clarence Kingsley and David Snedden were all key curriculum reformers at the turn of the twentieth century. However, as Herbert M. Kliebard asserts, “no single reformer of the period exemplifies the dominant ideology of the Progressive Era in the curriculum field than Thomas Jesse Jones” (2002, p. 24). Jones is an important figure in the history of curriculum studies because he created educational policies for African Americans and what would later become the basis for all educational policies. “He advocated for the education of African Americans from the turn of the twentieth century onward” (2002, p.25). Jones’s influence transcended the bounds of not just African Americans, but for American education in general. To the dismay of W. E. B. Du Bois, the curriculum created by Thomas Jesse Jones [a white male], was “designed for future servants and laborers and *not* educated men and women” (Kliebard, 2002, p.25). Dubois felt the curriculum spearheaded by Jones “featured practical activities and vocational education to the detriment of courses designed to develop the intellect” (Kliebard, 2002, p.24). This form of

education focused on industrial and manual training. This type of education was more aligned with Booker T. Washington's preferred form of education. Dubois also objected to the fact that such a position of leadership in important African American affairs was occupied by Jones (Kliebard, 2002, p.24). Du Bois was more concerned with college education and the more classical forms of education that were intellectually rigorous.

Representation of African American educators were present, however –they had very little – if any influence on the curricula of public schools. The most noted and vocal voices that represented concerns for the education of African Americans were the voices of W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. Du Bois wrote on a host of curricular topics, yet his work is rarely cited in curriculum literature (Marshall, Sears & Schubert, 2000). There are other African American voices such as Carter G. Woodson, Benjamin Mays and Horace Bond whose voices are missing from the early landscape of curriculum. Although these men possessed opposing views in terms of the type of educational pursuit's best suiting African Americans, they all agreed that, education was the catalyst to uplifting the race and education was paramount in producing moral and productive citizens.

Defining Curriculum Studies

What is Curriculum Studies? As I searched for a general, text book definition of curriculum studies –it proved to be as challenging and complex task as the field itself. Because curriculum studies is very multidimensional, there is no simplified, easy way to define curriculum studies. Even amongst its historians and scholars, there are varying perceptions of curriculum studies and how it should be defined. As society changes and the concerns of teachers, students, politicians and educators, are altered, it seems that curriculum means different

things at different moments in the field. William F. Pinar, William M. Reynolds, Patrick Slattery and Peter M. Taubman (2008) assert,

The general field of curriculum, the field interested in the relationships among the school subjects as well as issues within the individual school subject themselves and with the relationships between the curriculum and the world, the field is no longer preoccupied with [curriculum] development. [...] the field is preoccupied with *understanding*. (p.6)

Lisa Cary (2006) suggests that to study curriculum one needs to understand “at all times that curriculum is more than a textbook, more than a classroom and more than teachers and students. It is all the social influences, populist crises, military campaigns, and historical moments that shape our lives - when we are in schools and in our lives beyond the classroom” (p. xi). So then, curriculum studies can be found anywhere and additionally, looks at issues of power and equity, it can be very interdisciplinary. Curriculum studies can look at schooling as a site for study, but not the only place. It can be non-schooling sites or unintentional sites of learning within school settings that are not part of the official school settings. Originally, curriculum questions tended to deal with “what should be taught and learned” and how to “develop and package” it. (Marshall, Sears & Schubert, 2000, p. 13). Curriculum studies and scholars of it, think about questions such as “What is knowledge?” “Who gets to decide what knowledge is important?” “What knowledge is worth knowing and experiencing?” “Who benefits from it?” Curriculum studies, moreover, examines how best to “inquire” about such questions, “Where are moments of education even moments that are miseducative happening and how might we examine those moments and pay attention to the ways which they function as a

curriculum. For example, one might ask, how do we know, what we know? Lisa Cary (2006) in her book *Curriculum Spaces: Discourse, Postmodern Theory and Educational Research* proposes that , we benefit from curriculum studies, in that it allows us to study the ways “we are epistemologically situated as subjects by historical, social and cultural discourses” and permits us to “focus on the experiences and social constructions of individuals” (p.136). In other words, how does that “knowing” aid us in knowing ourselves, others, and society. People who study and embody those notions are a part of curriculum studies. In their book, *Turning Points in Curriculum: A contemporary American Memoir*, Marshall, Sears & Schubert (2000) assert there is another very important element in the history of curriculum. Elliot Eisner calls it the “null - curriculum” or that which is not taught.

Relative to curriculum history, this notion refers to that which has not been part of the debate or that which has been omitted from the field. Here we refer to the many voices that have been suppressed, repressed, oppressed, and ignored. Where, we must ask, are voices at the grassroots, voices of African descent, voices of Latina/Latino origin, voices of Native or first nation people? Where are the voices of women educators of mothers who are profound educators, of singers and storytellers who create the curriculum of popular culture, of children and youths, of those ignored or cast aside or devalued because of illness, disability, sexual identity, religious views, place of origin, ethnicity, appearance, custom or belief? The brief history that follows calls for inclusion but is beset with ignorance, a tunnel vision our field has not yet overcome. (Marshall, Sears & Schubert, p.4)

William Pinar, a leading curriculum scholar states, “by the summer of 1978, there will have been six conferences and five books that functioned to reconceptualize the field of curriculum studies (2009, p. 168). Pinar asserts, the “boundary of the field are fuzzy” (2009, p. 169). This is why it is sometimes challenging to describe the field of curriculum studies – what it is and what it is not. In *The Politics of Curriculum Decision Making*, M. Frances Klein states, the question of who makes curriculum decisions is a fundamental and timeless one which has been the subject of discussion and debate throughout the history of the curriculum field (1991, p.1). Who is influencing curricular change? The array of participants who are officially designated or who function through default to make curriculum decisions is complex [...] and multifaceted, but the complexity is not often recognized when debates about curriculum are held in public and educational forums (Klein, 1991, p.1).

I. 1970’s Reconceptualization of the Field

The field of curriculum studies was undergoing what Pinar et al. (2008), termed a “paradigm shift” to emphasize the changes and trends within the field at that time. The field was shifting from “a primary and practical interest in the *development* of curriculum to a theoretical and practical interest in *understanding* curriculum” (p.187). During this shift, “a critical dilemma developed within the reconceptualized field of curriculum and instruction itself. In the 1970’s and early 1980’s, curriculum scholars who were writing specifically about race, gender, ethics, politics, autobiography, and phenomenology were relatively few. “Their voices were usually excluded from mainstream discourses, professional journals, and curriculum textbooks and were nearly absent in the curriculum development programs of elementary and secondary education” (Slattery, 2006, p.11). Additionally during this shift, varying perspectives vied for “recognition

and influence in curriculum debates during the early years” (Marshall, Sears & Schubert, 2000, p.13).

Findings

II. Conflicting Feelings of Marginalization

In this section, I explore feelings of marginalization. I refer to the word “conflicting” because through the course of the interviews, Professor Y spoke about a sense of privilege while Professor X easily claimed feelings of marginality. Professor IDK had not “thought about it.” However, Professor Y explains,

We use big words a lot. We use it when we speak; we use it when we write and we write about marginalized experiences and question privileges - but we do it in a very privileged language. I think for people who are new to curriculum studies that can sometimes be a barrier. For people who are concerned about communities of color [...] curriculum studies can be a disconnect from the marginalized communities.

When we think of marginalization, we usually tend to think of being on the outside of something – not possessing any influence or power. However, the conflict of marginalization complicates things in that – it is possible to be on the margins but have a voice and be an influential voice. People can be marginalized but speak profoundly. Through the narratives of these participants, I hope to highlight the tensions of claiming marginalization. Gloria D. Thomas and Carol Hollenshead (2001) maintain, “Despite being located on the margins - an unsafe and risky position for any member of an oppressed group - Black women and other women of color need not consider their place in the academy as one of deprivation solely” (p. 167). They cited bell hooks who maintained that “it should instead be viewed and used as a site for developing a “community of resistance” (p. 167). hooks continues,

[M]arginality [is] more than a site of deprivation; in fact... it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance. It was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. As such, I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose - to give up or surrender as part of moving into the center - but rather of a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds. (hooks as cited in Thomas and Hollenshead, 2001, p.167)

During the course of the interviews with the participants, I asked each of them if they felt like a marginalized person in the context of where they were professionally and additionally if they have ever felt silenced. By silencing, I'm referring to not having their research recognized, feeling shut out or excluded from certain conversations of importance. Here are the responses from each, Professor X, *"If your only acceptance comes from people who look like you, then that's marginalization. We're marginalized on our campus and in our departments, [and] at AERA (American Educational Research Association)."* Professor Y,

I don't want to conceptualize myself that way. I think if I conceptualize myself that way, it might affect how I choose to interact in the world and I don't want that to be a factor. Do I feel comfortable saying what I feel I need to say? Not always. But I don't want to conceptualize myself that way because I think that would set me up for finding excuses for not engaging in ways that I could get what I needed or wanted or what I might want for people who are more like me than not like me. Now do I find

myself in situations where I think it should be easier to get my opinion across and for there to be changes because of that? Sure I have that experience.

Professor IDK, *“It’s not something I think about a lot because I’m going up for tenure soon, so I really haven’t had time to think about it because I find that pretty much; we are survivors in spite of whatever the problem may be.”* So then, the participants experienced marginality quite differently if they acknowledged it.

In their article, *Resisting from the Margins: The Coping Strategies of Black Women and other Women of Color Faculty Members at a Research University*, Gloria D. Thomas and Carol Hollenshead assert (2001), “numerous academic women of color have documented their individual experiences of living and working on the margins in their professional careers” (p. 166). hooks describes this marginalization experience as being “part of the whole but outside the main body” (2001, p. 166). Professor Y rethinks her position on marginalization and points at the following, *“When I look outside of the field in general like AERA it’s really hard to be a woman and a woman of color and if I were in some of those places I might feel more marginalized.”*

Summary

Throughout this section, I have discussed with the participants their feelings on marginalization. In so doing, the participants respond differently - reflecting upon past experiences in the academy, at various educational conferences and within their own professional environments. Through these conversations, there are conflicting feelings of marginalization. While Professor Y chooses not to claim marginality because of how it may cause her to engage or not engage in the world, Professor X absolutely feels like a marginalized person and claims that there are limited spaces for which she has a platform.

III. At the Kitchen Table: a Metaphorical forum, a Space for Exchange

“Yes, I feel like a marginalized voice. The only home I have are those kitchen tables. That’s all we [African American women] have right now.” Professor X

The “academic plantation” and the “big house” are metaphors used to describe predominantly White institutions of higher learning and the position of Black academics within them. Ladson- Billings (2005) uses the “⁵Big House” metaphor to describe the barriers African American teacher educators experience in predominantly White institutions in which they work (p. xi). The “Big House” metaphor also describes “how departments, schools, and colleges of education reflect institutional values that support the status quo” (p. xi). In this section I will employ the metaphor of the “kitchen legacy” and interrogate the cultural space of the kitchen. Olga Idriss Davis (1999) explains,

During the antebellum period, black women invented the cultural space of the kitchen to recover their dignity and the power of tradition. As they emerged from the kitchen of black-dominated space into the dining room of white-dominated space, they brought intellectual notions of collective experience and struggles with which to express to their social, political, and cultural contributions to American history. (p. 365)

When I think about some of the most important conversations and even some of the most jovial interactions I’ve encountered with friends and or family – they’ve most always been at home; either in the living-room – which my family refers to as the “front room” or in the kitchen at the kitchen table. It is in that space where things are explicated, laughed at, whispered about, cried over and sometimes resolved. I learned as a young girl child – you dared not interrupt or

⁵ The Big House was the mansion on large plantations in which the owner and his family lived. The enslaved people who worked in the Big House had a higher status than field workers.

attempt to participate in “grown folks” conversation. An intrusion like that was sure to be confronted with a piercing eye or a scornful “mind your business,” “go outside” or “go to bed.” hooks (1989) recalls this type of experience of learning the “everyday rules of how to live and how to act” and the strong desire to want to participate in these conversations as she was a participant observer in her household (p. 5). I was curious, “interested in grown - up things” (Walker, quoted in Phillips, 2006). I suppose you could say I was nosey. Those times when the women congregated in the kitchen brought about a bit of excitement for me as a child. I could always be sort of the fly on the wall (as long as I remained silent and unnoticed). I would sometimes see my mother; aunts and cousins erupt in cacophonous laughter with tears rolling as one of them told a story about something that happened to them or someone they knew. There were other times when there was a particularly explicit conversation taking place and one of them would always look around to see if I was paying attention and then they would change their tone to a gossipy whisper. At other times they shared their stories of struggle, distress and anguish – the kinds of things you wish you had not heard and lay in bed thinking about - but somehow, never did they ever seem defeated. They just carried on and survived despite varying situations and circumstances. As N. Lynne Westfield (2001) states, “I learned that resilience for black women has a great deal to do with laughter and the ability to “take what you got” and make something better. I learned that Black women “make-do”; they take a little and make a lot and still have some to spare” (p.424).

Survival, achieving against the odds and resilience are just a few of the beliefs in which the rich traditions of Womanists are situated. Layli Phillips (2006) in her introduction of *The Womanist Reader*, defines womanism as:

a social change perspective rooted in Black women's and other women of color's everyday experience and everyday methods of problem solving in everyday spaces, extended to the problem of ending all forms of oppression for all people, restoring the balance between people and the environment/nature, and reconciling human life with the spiritual dimension. (p. xx)

Womanists are those who are concerned with the lived experiences of Black women and other women of color. However a womanist perspective is open to all humanity (Phillips, 2006). They are poetic, they are storytellers and they are “committed to survival and wholeness of people, male and female; wanting to know more and in greater depth that is considered “good” for one. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health” (Paul, 2001). Phillips (2006) goes on to say, “womanism is not about creating lines of demarcation; rather, it is about building structures of inclusiveness and positive interrelationship”(p. xxv). Born out of the Feminist and Black Feminist Movements – there was a sense of needing a place to retreat that fully embodied the sentiments of womanism – a safe space where our voices and our concerns could be understood, interpreted and explicated. Vanessa Sheared (2006) asserts, “The womanist perspective is born of a direct response to the exclusion of the African American woman's voice from the discourse on race, gender, and class” (p. 271). The kitchen table is such a place where many women of color gather together and validate one another. I see the Womanist perspective and the kitchen table as being a parallel experience. The notion of safe spaces resonates with a womanist theoretical perspective which views the world (in this case, the academic world) as a dynamic place where the goal is not merely to survive, fit in or cope; but to feel ownership and accountability (Davis, 1999, p. 365). The kitchen table conversation opens a new but familiar paradigm, new to mainstream discourses but familiar to the cultural tradition of African

American women. The kitchen table is a “metaphorical place from which we communicate” (Davis, 1999, p. 365) a segregated sector outside of the mainstream. It is an unintended location, a space where African American women are openly accepted by one another and come together to discuss research and issues of concern when there is no apparent space at the main dining table. Professor X argues,

The only place where I can really find a home and support are among people who look like me or through the kinds of outlets[...] I feel like the only home I have are those special places – those little kitchen tables that I told you about. The only way I have a seat at any table is to go there.

However, for Professor X, at times feels this is problematic because the mainstream is still not lending its full attention to the concerns and scholarship of women of color. She states,

It's the same people here, us, African American women, preaching to the choir. We're having kitchen table conversations among ourselves, we're trying to bring them into the mainstream, but I still see us segregated into this kitchen table type of experience. For example when you're presenting research to special interest groups at AERA, when you look out at the audience, who's there?[...] other African American female academics largely. Every now and then, you might have some Latinas or Chicanas or White women – but mostly it's just us. So basically we've taken the kitchen table into a mainstream, academic environment, but we're still in the kitchen at our table.

In other words, the same issues are discussed but the message goes no further than the kitchen table - given who is present at those tables. In problematizing the kitchen table as Professor X does, on one hand, the kitchen is a confining place which signified the relational conflicts

between black and white women within the plantation household additionally; the “spatial” location was a symbolic act of demarcation. “The spatial gulf explicitly signified their *outsider* status” (Davis, 1999, p.367-368). Thus, further keeping women of color outside of the mainstream.

In continuing our discussion about space, Professor IDK describes her feelings about space at a different conference, “*I was at a conference recently and the area that I’m involved in, it just doesn’t feel like a comfortable place for people of color. I just felt so out of place and it’s not that I’m not used to being around whites, but in that particular group – I never feel comfortable.*” Professor IDK struggled to describe the discomfort she felt during the conference. She could not determine if her feelings of discomfort were associated with “not knowing the folks well enough” to “feeling out of place.” “*I was in a meeting for a little while and I just felt so out of place.* She further goes on to say, “*It’s not like anybody’s not being nice or anything. I’m sure if I got to know the folks, it would probably be all right.*”

Summary

Throughout this section, I introduced ideas about the academic plantation, the big house and the kitchen table legacy all as metaphors to explore different notions about space and the African American women scholars who occupy those spaces on predominantly white campuses. I reflect upon my experiences as a child with the kitchen table legacy and its purpose in my household and how the kitchen table transcends into academic spaces as a location for academes of color. As the participants come to voice, they describe their interactions in various places as either being the only place for which to find acceptance outside of the mainstream or as problematic sites that sometimes causes discomfort. Additionally I’ve described the tradition of the womanist perspective as a parallel experience to the kitchen table in that its origins were born

from the exclusion of the voices of African American women's voices from a variety of discourses.

IV. Validating the African American female's scholarship in the Academy

We can scream at the top of our lungs, This is our experience, it's not being validated. The way in which the world sees the African American experience is not right or the way in which the world sees the African American woman is not correct [...]but when you have people who have been indoctrinated into a culture that devalues and stereotypes the African American woman, you can't change that kind of thinking.

-Professor X

The above quote is an attestation that many scholars of color would agree. For many of the participants, pursuing the type of research that most suits their passion in some ways results in feelings of isolation and rejection. The African American female experience is perceived as “other” and irrelevant to the mainstream discourse. For a scholar whose cares are rooted in issues of race, social class, gender, equity and equality within education, they are usually met with opposition and risk promotion and tenure opportunities because of their scholarly endeavors. Christine A. Stanley (2006) writes, “Many faculty of color engage in research that benefits communities of color. Affirmative action, diversity and student outcomes, institutional climate culture and ethnicity benefit most higher education institutions, but research on these topics is not always rewarded in the academy. [...] such research is often viewed as “risky” and not mainstream wherein the most value is placed” (p. 705).

Professor X interjected, “there is not a respect or validity attributed to the African American female academic because the experience is seen as something other or something outside that only affects us as African Americans women.” In a similar idea, Patricia Hill-Collins states that, “oppressed groups are frequently placed in the situation of being listened to only if we frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant group”

(1991, p. xiii). For Black women and other women of color in the academic workplace, marginalization often translates into feelings of invisibility. Because their research is frequently viewed as insignificant, or dismissed as “not warranting serious thought” (Paul, 2001, p. 7) these women often receive little or no support for their intellectual pursuits especially when their work centers on racial, ethnic and/or gender issues (Cox & Nkomo, 1990; Park, 1996; Reyes & Halcon, 1988). Professor X states that in her experience she rarely received support or recognition for her type of research which often deals with oppressed populations, such as African American “at risk” students, inequality in education high school drop outs and teenage prostitution.

I've noticed that the kind of research that I do and I tend to focus on race, class, gender, social class – things like that. I've found that when I submit to AERA and it's gotten larger and larger, I've noticed that while the special interest groups grow, when I submit to larger divisions that aren't focused on critical issues like race – it's more difficult to get accepted. So my thinking is that while the avenues for this type of research have grown, because we do have more special interest groups and more journals that specialize in these types of issues, I think that the mainstream has still not integrated these types of issues.

Professor X

In what I think of as a subversive move, Professor X notes,

When I gave you my research, you noticed I have something that's more mainstream and something that is more race, class and gender issues. What I've learned is to do something for them and something for me. I know how the

research that I'm passionate about is viewed I will usually do two publications a year; one for them and one for me and my passion.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2005) in her book *Beyond the Big House* states, “untentured faculty of color are admonished not to pursue a line of inquiry that interrogates race and other issues of diversity. Black faculty confront the presences of racism within the institution in the form of isolation, lack of mentoring [...] and marginalization of their scholarly ideas” (p.5). Professor X shares her personal story,

I remember interviewing for my first professorship and when I went into that room and looked around that table and there was no one at the table who looked like me. We had no people of color at that time on faculty. It was about twelve people on the committee, no people of color. I later found out that I was going to be the sole person of color in that department. I sat there thinking - this research is interesting but it goes there. How am I going to be received because I'm about to go in here and talk about double oppression, what it is to be a woman in a patriarchal society and what it is to be an African American woman in a patriarchal society and to be disenfranchised to the point of prostitution just to survive. I decided in my mind that I really don't care how this is received. I'm going to go in there and speak my truth. I'm going to go in here and be who I am because I don't want to get a job that offers me lifetime employment but I have to be someone else to be there.

Professor X reconciled within herself prior to the interview that she was going to remain true to herself, and the things that she intended to establish her career upon – regardless of how

her work was perceived. Professor X took a risk and uses a kingdom metaphor in regards to higher learning institutions. She states,

You're doing this in the presence of and to people who are going to be able to decide whether you get knighted and led into the kingdom or not. That's martyrdom. You're trying to champion this cause and make a true change, but you're doing this at the risk they'll say, I don't want to be bothered with this, I'm really offended by this.

African American female scholars often find themselves acquiescing in their positions so to not risk their careers, relationships, and research among other things. However, the lack of support and loss of relationships seems inevitable. Professor X recalls,

My second book is about women of color experiences in academia. [...] I had a [White] colleague who said, "I'm going to read your book over the break." We came back and that person has been different with me ever since. It's like "oh we thought you were the nice Negro," "oh look at what she writes." It's almost like they feel betrayed, like you had the nerve to write about this.

Black women scholars offer a distinctive yet legitimate voice in the area of higher education. There are places where there is a much stronger presence of African American female scholars in places of leadership and making great moves – but these moves are not as frequent in curriculum studies. Professor X offers another insight as to why current educational, curricular transformation is slow to change, “*When you start talking about changing education and the way we develop a mind – folks aren't so happy to start letting you tinker with that. When you start*

talking about the building blocks of a mind – that’s a holy grail and nobody wants to give the keys to that kingdom away.”

Additionally, the perspectives, research and scholarship of African American academics has had little impact in mainstream academic environments. At best, the pedagogical practices, methods and theories generated by African American women are known by a small few in the field who actively seek the perspectives of those that are “others” with regards to curriculum studies. A more diverse curriculum, I believe, should be welcoming of others thoughts and views and simultaneously allow a safe space for critical investigation, disagreement, intellectual growth and exploration. When asked about the importance of the voices of women of color in curriculum studies, Professor Y responded by stating the following,

We have some women of color, some men of color. I think the field is predominantly white, but higher education is predominantly white. The voices are really important. There are some - not a lot. I think we bring something very different - just how we are embodied and how the world responds to us and how we’re positioned in the world differently. I think the field needs to be more responsive to what we have to say. But I also think we have to find ways to ask for, to advocate for, and to make it harder for the field to not be responsive to what we have to say.

Professor Y makes an important critique about curriculum studies and the visibility of women of color. She states,

When I’m at curriculum studies conferences, I don’t see very many women of color around. I tend to see more graduate students who are women of color –but

in terms of professors who are women of color –I don't see that quite as much as I would anticipate.

I continued this conversation with Professor Y and asked her what dynamics she thought were at play here. She responds,

I think its [curriculum studies] has been more masculine. In terms of some of the conferences, some of the dynamics – there are quite a few, well-known, very well established male scholars in curriculum studies who have broad voices - broad voices in terms of their personal voices, and broad voices in terms of their writer voice. So when we get together at conferences, in terms of status and clout – we have different playing fields - unlevelled playing fields in that regard. There are very few women in those places. Even though we critique and write about it we fall into those gender dynamics.

Professor X examines the issue as it pertains to schooling and not so much the field itself but the impact of having the voices of women of color included within curriculum,

It's imperative to have our voices included. When you think about the number of African Americans in the public school systems and all the young women who are not completing school. If they don't see it in [their]community where people are not college educated - what is it to [them]? If the people around are not educated –what's the point?

Summary

In this section, the voices of the participants shed light on their scholarship and how they fit in most academic places. There is concern that the voices of African American female scholars and women in general within the academy receive less recognition and support for their

work. The women were asked (1) how important are the voices of African American women in curriculum studies, and (2) what dynamics did they think were at play? Gender issues in fields that are very masculine play a huge role on the unlevelled playing fields. The women sometimes struggled to find validation for their research pursuits and at times find themselves isolated for pursuing inquiries rooted in race, class and gender.

Engaging with Voices

To give voice requires us to acknowledge different realities and understand that there are different ways of interpreting reality (Sheared, 2006, p. 273) At the genesis of this research, I was unaware of the catalog of writings and scholarly texts concerning the voice of African American women in academia. A whole new world opened up to me as I was in search of this voice in curriculum studies. However, I am discovering that issues of marginalization and lack of voice in curriculum studies is not unique. Literature pertaining to the lived experiences of Black women in academia is seemingly under-researched terrain. Professor Y acknowledges, *“The voice of women in curriculum studies is an issue. I don’t think there are as many women of color in curriculum studies as I would hope that there would be.”* The more I read and researched, I discovered that my position as an African American woman searching for voice is not unique but it is critical and liberating. “Awareness of the need to speak, to give voice to the varied dimensions of our lives, is one way women of color begin the process of education for critical consciousness” (hooks, 1989, p. 13).

What became clearer to me after having in depth discussions with the participants was that there is a need to create and transform the spaces in which we speak. Some of those spaces include but are not limited to educational conferences such as AERA and Curriculum and Pedagogy, academic institutions and the like. Professor Y makes the following observation about

an educational conference, AERA (American Educational Research Association) which is the larger more premier conferences for graduate students, researchers, scholars and educators.

Professor Y points out the division among the divisions,

At AERA when I would go to different SIGS (Special Interest Groups) or divisions there'd be more of one gender or more of the other gender. There'd be more of this race or you know, the groups were just segmented and segregated in certain ways and I felt that the voices weren't quite as rich. And so while AERA has this broad spectrum of people involved in it, there are so many voices and so many perspectives and I don't think that there's much talking across those.

Professor Y also points out another concern, when interacting in these spaces in particular. She states,

The conversation came up on, how do we make this space more inclusive? How do we respond? There is openness for the voices to be heard or at least for the voices to speak, but in terms of transformation of the culture of the field after that happens, I have not yet seen as much as I would like to see. So I think in some ways we're [Curriculum Studies] open and we try to create space, we try to be more inclusive, but we find these little traps – one of them is male privilege - white male privilege specifically.

Professor Y, although finds engaging with voices to be ideal, she expresses important concerns that complicates this notion,

What are the dynamics, what are the strategies around our hearing and not hearing of certain people's experiences, our seeing or not seeing of other people's experiences? It has been an ethical question that I have not sufficiently

resolved. Many academics will share other people's experiences and other people's voices and the challenge that comes up with me with that is "Why should I be privileged as an academic to bring some peoples voices to the public as opposed to their being able to bring their own voices to the public?" That's one of the reasons why I focus on what are the dynamics because my hope is that by understanding the dynamics and how we might engage those relations of power, we all might be able to present our voices and have the action taken that we'd like to have taken.

Summary

Throughout this section, the voices of the participants discussed the act of coming to voice and being heard in various settings. As a researcher, I discovered that the marginalization of African American women was not limited to curriculum studies, but that research on the lived experiences of African American women in the academy in general is a seemingly under-researched area that deserves more attention. The women agree that there needs to be more ways to be inclusive and bring more diverse perspectives to the mainstream. While transforming the spaces that currently exist for the voices to speak and be heard is still a challenge, the participants are committed to finding ways of presenting their voices.

V. I'm the only person who looks like me

Professor X: "It's imperative to see your life, your experience in education. If not, then education becomes foreign."

During my experiences within the university as a student, I often found myself in almost every course – the only student of color. Furthermore, I had not had one professor of color until one year later during my undergraduate studies and I intentionally sought her out. Dr. Tarver taught Multicultural and African American Literature. It was also the only class I had ever taken

where there was more than one African American student in class. In bell hooks' *Talking Back*, she asserts, often black women are such an "invisible presence" on campuses that many students may not be aware that any black women teach at the universities they attend (hooks, 1989). This is true for me. As I mentioned earlier, I searched for a professor of color because I wanted to see another African American woman in a position of leadership on my campus. Not only that – she taught courses that were of interest to me. I wanted to establish relationships with some of the other students of color whom, I rarely had an opportunity to interact with around campus. Professor IDK describes her experiences in a predominantly white Midwestern university, "*The first year was really hard. There really is no black community here so there was no place to escape. It was hard dealing with all white classes, it was quite an adjustment.*"

Gloria Ladson- Billings argues that students of color and teacher educators of color that are in locations of higher education are usually "in the midst of the overwhelming presences of whiteness. Their colleagues, peers, college or university administration, and often the local community are likely to be mostly White" (2005, p. 5). As I walk around the university today, I'm giving more attention to who is and who is not present around this campus and another question unrelated to issue within curriculum studies arises. I wonder to myself are African Americans not attending institutions of higher education as frequent as their White counter-parts. Then I was reminded – college for me was an afterthought, I almost did not attend. Someone had to expose me and encourage me to pursue my post secondary education. At home, college was not an important issue that took priority. Furthermore, I didn't display an interest in attending.

Summary

In this brief section, the participants and me, reflect upon being the only person of color either in the classroom or in academic departments. Higher education is predominantly white and

students of color and faculty of color sometimes find it challenging to maintain or establish visibility.

Coping and Finding Support

Some of the participants talk about the ways in which they cope and how they find support when they've had to face issues of discrimination in their work place. Dealing with discriminatory acts, isolation, blatant disrespect and other forms of degradation in the academy can be detrimental for anyone. Farmer (1993) said, African American women are constantly under fire in predominantly White institutions. Farmer suggests that it is a necessary to establish professional connections as a means of support. Professor IDK states,

People don't really talk about how to cope. People might do a study about the problem that people of color face –faculty of color face, but they don't really speak about how do you cope with it, how to adjust to having to deal with these problems. I think that's something that needs to be put out there.

Some of the participants find support through family or friends, taking up a hobby or finding support through spiritual connections such as church or meditation. Professor IDK believes it is important to create a life outside of the academy. If possible it is advised to try to create networks and establish healthy and positive relationships within your department. Scholars of color should take on more proactive roles within their fields and even in the academic homes to promote groups that unify and encourage students and scholars of color (Farmer, 1993).

A Reflection

What's next? As a nascent scholar, it is not my intention to speak on behalf of others or to pretend that I have a solution facing African American female academics. However, it is my intention to bring awareness to the voices that are missing from the field of curriculum studies. While I believe there is so much more research that needs to be performed, I want to contribute my own personal thoughts and discuss the issues I struggle with as a woman of color on the margins. I truly believe it is not only the field of curriculum studies that benefits from diverse perspectives, but other fields as well. There is little literature on the roles and contributions of African American female scholars in curriculum studies which is still a point of concern. As I think about this project, I am reminded of the difficult task I faced in locating Black women in this particular field. I was not as successful as I had hoped to be in this regard. However, I am more than grateful to those that were willing to share their experiences and shed light on my question. They have made remarkable strides in their own academic endeavors. So then are the voices of African American women in curriculum studies silenced or ignored? For now, this is not a question that I can sufficiently and effectively resolve. As I continue this work and attempt to develop my own perspectives, I acknowledge that I must be responsible for my own learning and scholarship. As a first generation college graduate and scholar, I realize that our autobiography, our experiences and our insights matter. We must continue to create safe spaces for emerging scholars, intellectuals, classroom teachers and educators. A place where ideas are welcomed and notions about educational and curriculum reforms are shared and rethought. This work for me is a liberating journey in self - discovery.

*Learning to stand
Learning to speak out
Learning to act
Learning when to hold back.
Learning to wash away paralyzing insecurities
Learning to breathe
Learning to be patient and take long strides
Learning how to react when injustices arise
Learning how to exist in these times
Learning consciousness, loving action
Loving what a passion for learning provides*

Appendices

APPENDIX A

Marginalized Perspective: The Voices of Black Women in Curriculum Studies Interview Protocol

Before the interview, the interviewer will obtain and review background information, published statistics, and other documents about the educational institution.

Part I: The educator's educational history/background

I understand that you are currently completing or hold a master's degree/doctoral degree in [field of study?]

[The respondent will share information about degrees held and scholarship]

What made you decide to focus your attention on this area of study?

How would you describe your experiences as a Black woman in [field of study?]

Part II: The educator's observations and experiences in their department or educational institution on a whole

I understand that you are an educator/researcher/scholar at [name of institution]. How did you come to work for [name of institution]?

[If the interviewer cannot figure out the length of time at the institution]
How long have you worked for this institution?

[If the respondent has worked at the institution for many years]

What changes or trends have you noticed in your discipline/ curriculum studies over the years?
[The respondent will share something important about the institution.]

What else do you think I need to know about your academic life or [name of institution] before we begin talking about your concerns within curriculum studies?

- The interviewer will weave information about the institution into questions that build upon what the respondent has stated. For this section of the interview, the interviewer will find ways to ask about the following:

- The way students, faculty, and administrators are treated in the institution and the relationships among subgroups
- Climate, tone, feel, and mood of the institution
- The moral of people in the institution

You have been selected for this study because of your concern about marginalized voices of Black women scholars in curriculum studies. What are your concerns?

- The interviewer will respond to the respondent with probing questions to find out about
 - How the respondent became concerned
 - What the respondent has observed or experienced that led to or solidified these concerns
 - Descriptions of situations and experiences that show why the respondent is concerned
 - Details that will help clarify what the respondent is explaining
 - In what ways have you felt silenced or observed the silencing of other women

Part III: The ways the educator has tried to encourage or incorporate marginalized voices into curriculum studies transformation

[The interviewer will comment on something the respondent said that would transition into what s/he has tried to do]

In what ways have you tried to respond to [the situation previously described]?

- The interviewer will respond to the respondent with probing questions to encourage
 - Descriptions of specific situations in which the respondent thought about trying and tried to do something(s) to address her concern.
 - The sharing of experiences that may seem insignificant to the respondent, as well as successful and unsuccessful attempts.
 - Explanations of the respondent's thinking and reasoning behind the chosen actions.
 - Explanations of the respondent's reflections and thinking after the action.
 - Sharing about how the respondent felt during the described events.
 - Descriptions of the ways the respondent has worked independently and with others to address the concern(s) and create safe spaces for Black women in curriculum studies.

Part IV: The limitations and barriers faced by the educator

[The interviewer will comment on something(s) the respondent said that will transition to what barriers s/he has faced.]

What barriers or limitations have you faced in your effort to respond to [the situation previously described]?

- The interviewer will respond to the respondent with probing questions to encourage
 - Detailed descriptions of specific barriers and situations in which these barriers have been faced.
 - The respondent's explorations of barriers presented by the broader society, administration, colleagues, students, laws, policies, financial resources, the respondent herself, and so forth.
 - Explanations of any attempts to overcome barriers and limitations.
 - In what ways have the respondent received support or established support within the academic community

Sharing of the ways the respondent thinks and feels about the barriers.

APPENDIX B

Invitation to Participate

February 2, 2011

Greetings _____:

I am Kara Waller. I'm a current Graduate student in the College of Education at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, TX, focusing on Curriculum Studies. This is my last year at TCU and I am in the beginning phases of preparing my proposal and committee for my thesis. You are invited to participate in this study.

To give you some background information, I'm interested in exploring the educational and professional lives of black women in higher education, in particular, those with foci in curriculum studies. My study seeks to open and create space for the marginalized or silenced voices of black women, especially in the discipline of curriculum. I'm interested in knowing how black women in higher education view their own lived experiences in academia, and what sorts of barriers and limitations they face. I am questioning why there are so few voices in curriculum studies of African American women. Are the unique perspectives of black women in higher education being silenced or ignored by those dominant voices in the field? I'm taking this direction thus far.

[Name] immediately thought of you and advised me that you may be a person of interest and in turn could possibly identify others.

I have received IRB approval, and currently I am arranging interviews with voluntary participants. If this project sounds of interest to you and you would like to participate - please let me know.

Thank you again for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Kara Waller
College of Education
Curriculum Studies
Graduate Student
Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, TX
817-350-4354

APPENDIX C

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Research: Marginalized Perspective: The Voices of Black Women in Curriculum Studies

Funding Agency/Sponsor: N/A

Study Investigators: Kara J. Waller

What is the purpose of the research?

This study explores the experiences of Black women's professional lives within academia, and focuses on those educators who are concerned with marginalized voices of Black women within curriculum studies in U.S. colleges and universities. The study will explore the ways in which the selected educators (1) see themselves and their experiences as valuable and how Black women educators can begin to generate theory about how their consciousness and understandings at the intersections of their race, class, gender and culture can expand pedagogical knowledge and practice to the field of curriculum, (2) are able to contribute to the developing body of knowledge pertaining to curriculum studies (3) face limitations in developing more multi-voiced curriculum within and among their learning environments, (4) establish support within the academic community, and (5) and how they themselves have felt silenced. This study should add a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which concerns for marginalized voices impact educators' professional lives, the forms of influence they have, and the barriers they face.

How many people will participate in this study?

5 to 20

What is my involvement for taking part in this study?

Your involvement is to participate in an interview about your concerns, observation and experiences around racial and gender issues concerning marginalized voices of Black women scholars, and teacher-educators in curriculum studies.

How long am I expected to be in this study for and how much of my time is required?

By agreeing to this study, you will participate in an interview for about 90 minutes. Thereafter, any other involvement will be to clarify responses if needed.

What are the risks of taking part in this study and how will they be minimized?

The physical, psychological, and emotional risks are minimal in this study and not greater than risks associated with daily activities. Due to the topic of this study, there is a moderate social risk to participating in this study. However, procedures to minimize the social risk have been established. I realize that because gender, race and education are topics of prominent concern in communities, schools, and public forums, the researcher of this study is committed to protecting your confidentiality—that is making sure your identity is not revealed to anyone including your colleagues, employers, and members of your community.

What are the benefits for participating in this study?

The benefits to participating in this study, which may include an opportunity to express and reflect upon my experiences and concerns as an educator.

Will I be compensated for participating in this study?

You will not be compensated for your participation, time or input.

What is an alternate procedure(s) that I can choose instead of participating in this study?

You can refer or make recommendations of someone whom might be interested in participating in this study.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

The actions to maintain your confidentiality include:

1. Conducting your interview in a mutually agreed upon location (university office or conference room, restaurant, or coffee shop) to reduce the likelihood of people in your work or community environment knowing that I am in this study.
2. Storing any identifying information, such as this consent form, in a locked filing cabinet in Dr. Reynolds's office.
3. Ensuring that all data (transcription of this interview and notes) do not contain your name and are stored in a locked file drawer that is separate from the drawer with my consent form.
4. Ensuring that you will have an opportunity to review and request changes to any papers, articles, and reports before they are submitted for publication or presented. Once a paper is published or presented, the information contained in it enters a public arena. I understand that I will have an opportunity to read what is written about me and to request changes prior to publication, and that the researcher will use the information I write below to contact me.

Is my participation voluntary?

Yes, your participation is voluntary.

Can I stop taking part in this research?

Yes, you may stop taking part in this research at any time without penalty.

What are the procedures for withdrawal?

You may tell (Kara J. Waller) in person, via email at (k.j.waller@tcu.edu), or telephone at (817-350-4354) that you no longer wish to participate.

Will I be given a copy of the consent document to keep?

Yes, you will have a copy of the consent document to keep.

Whom should I contact if I have questions regarding the study?

Kara Waller

Whom should I contact if I have concerns regarding my rights as a study participant?

Dr. Kay Stevens, Associate Professor & Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, Telephone 817-257-6079.

Dr. Sherrie Reynolds, Professor, Telephone 817-257-6782.

Your signature below indicates that you have been read the information provided above, you have received answers to all of your questions and have been told who to call if you have any more questions, you have freely decided to participate in this research, and you understand that you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

Participant's Name (please print): _____ **Date:** _____

Participant's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Investigator's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

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Personal Background

Kara Janette Waller
Fort Worth, Texas
Daughter of Johnny and Karen Waller

Education

Diploma, University City Senior High School, Saint Louis,
Missouri, 1993
Bachelor of Science in Education, Texas Christian
University, 2006
Master of Education, Curriculum Studies, Texas Christian
University, Fort Worth, Texas, 2011

Experience

Big Brothers Big Sisters Volunteer
Tarrant County, 2000 - 2009
Graduate Teaching Assistant 2008 - 2009
Graduate Research Assistant 2008 - 2009
American Airlines Web Support Agent
Fort Worth 1999 - present

ABSTRACT

MARGINALIZED PERSPECTIVE: THE VOICES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN CURRICULUM STUDIES

By Kara Janette Waller
College of Education
Texas Christian University

Thesis Advisor: Sherrie L. Reynolds, Professor of Education

M. Francyne Huckaby, Assistant Professor of Education

Melanie L. Harris, Assistant Professor of Religion and Ethics

This study explores the experiences of Black women's professional lives within academia, and focuses on those educators who are concerned with marginalized voices of Black women within curriculum studies in U.S. colleges and universities. The study will explore the ways in which the selected educators (1) see themselves and their experiences as valuable and how Black women educators can begin to generate theory about how their consciousness and understandings at the intersections of their race, class, gender and culture can expand pedagogical knowledge and practice to the field of curriculum, (2) are able to contribute to the developing body of knowledge pertaining to curriculum studies (3) face limitations in developing more multi - voiced curriculum within and among their learning environments, (4) establish support within the academic community, and (5) and how they themselves have felt silenced. This study should add a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which concerns for marginalized voices impact educators' professional lives, the forms of influence they have, and the barriers they face.