TOWARDS A POST-OPPOSTIONAL WOMANIST PEDAGOGY

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGE, CULTURE, & GENDER STUDIES

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

BY

JENNIFER V. MARTIN EMAMI, B.A., M.A.

DENTON, TX

DECEMBER 2021

DEDICATION

For my heavenly father, who was faithful to see this work reach completion.

Philippians 1:6

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My heartfelt gratitude goes several directions. First, I give all my thanks and praise to God. I would like to thank my husband, Malik. As my boyfriend, you stood by my side through the scariest of times. As my husband, you have been my support and my cheerleader in so many ways. Thank you for not only believing in me, but for knowing it was possible and reminding me when I doubted myself. I love you and I can't wait for the future. To my parents, who have always encouraged me to complete this degree and who have kept Eli, supported me financially, emotionally, and opened your home for me to have a writing place. To my mom and mother-in-law, your willingness to sacrifice your own life and watch Eli so that I could work has meant more than you can know, thank you. To all of my church family, fellow Christ followers, and the countless people who have prayed for this day to come, I thank you and appreciate all of your prayers and support.

I want to thank my dissertation chair, AnaLouise Keating. Dr. Keating, you have gently pushed me throughout this whole process. You have offered criticism and inspiration, firm boundaries with kindness, and I have learned to allow space for balance from you. To my committee members, Dr. Philips- Cunningham and Dr. Stabb, thank you for your knowledge and wisdom. Dr. Amy Aldridge Sanford, you know how much you mean to me. Thank you for being a part of every step of my graduate school experiences. I wouldn't be here without you. To my cohort,

you all inspired me and taught me so much. I miss our classes together. To my friends who have paved the way and finished before me: Sheila, Elia, Diana, Carla, Haley, Kimberly, Marcella, and Esther—you have all encouraged me in different ways and different times. From our collective virtual writing times, to text messages filled with laughter and tears, and the phone calls and hang outs. You all were a part of the process.

To my precious son, Elijah Brave. My heart has been yours since before you were born. Our time in the hospital was brutal, but it taught me that we are both fighters. We gave you the middle name Brave, because that's who we want you to be. I believe that you and your name encouraged me to also be brave, to fight for our lives, and to finish this Ph.D. Remember, with God all things are possible! To the rest of my community and academic support, we did it.

ABSTRACT

JENNIFER V. MARTIN EMAMI

TOWARDS A POST-OPPOSITIONAL WOMANIST PEDAGOGY

DECEMBER 2021

Building on the definitions and work of womanist scholars such as Alice Walker, Layli Maparyan, and AnaLouise Keating, this dissertation explores the possibility of a post-oppositional womanist pedagogy that can serve as a potential solution to the oppositional pedagogies and hyper individualistic cultures in Western education systems. This research discusses the following themes that emerged from interviews: (1) womanism draws people in/feels welcoming because of the spiritual component; (2) spirituality is an important aspect of personal choices, pedagogical choices, and worldviews; (3) self-care and community care are deeply connected; and (4) dialogue and an understanding of interconnectedness/interrelatedness are components of post-oppositional pedagogies. This dissertation offers a more expanded definitions of womanism and explores some possible ways of shifting teaching practices to a more post-oppositional approach.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPENDICES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Towards a Post-Oppositional Womanist Pedagogy

> The womanist worldview and its associated social movement is rooted in the lived experience of survival, community building, intimacy with the natural environment, health, healing, and personal growth among everyday people from all walks of life and articulated primarily but not exclusively by women of color from around the world, and now a gift to all humanity. Womanism is not argument based, it does not privilege rationality, and it does not rest its case on academic intelligibility.
>
> —Layli Maparyan, *The Womanist Idea*

> [W]e also accept the responsibility of carrying on the legacy of struggle— the struggle to overcome the distance between white, male-controlled plantation houses of departments, journals, and impersonal pedagogy and the black female kitchens of ethical care—through critical pedagogy which promotes liberation,theorizes across disciplines and centers the Academy as a space for community survival and human development.
>
> —Olga Davis, " In the Kitchen, Transforming the Academy through Safe Space Resitance"

One of my favorite aspects of womanist pedagogy is that it focuses on the individual as well as the community and the ways that they can work together. As described in the first epigraph, the womanist worldview values "everyday people" and lived experiences. Based on womanist thought, womanist pedagogy seeks to demonstrate an ethic of care while also embracing spirituality. A womanist

pedagogy challenges conventional teaching methods[1] in order to promote

survival of an entire people through honoring ancestral knowledge and leaving a

legacy for future generations. Womanist pedagogy encourages students to attain

political efficacy, deconstruct dominant narratives, and validate their own situated

knowledge(s). As the second epigraph suggests, the academy can serve as a

conduit for pedagogy that encourages liberation, human development, and

community survival. Both epigraphs highlight important aspects and salient

characteristics of pedagogy and womanism. There is no separation between

these characteristics and the invitation to shift from a hyper-individualized style of

learning, such as what is seen in conventional pedagogy, towards a more

community focused, interconnected, and universal citizenship.

Attention to community survival[2] is one thing that distinguishes womanist

pedagogy from what I call conventional pedagogy. I define conventional

pedagogy as the practice of teaching that foregrounds the instructor as the

provider of knowledge and typically does not encourage critical thinking in

students. This commonly practiced standard for teaching is built on and

sustained through Western society's predominantly individualistic culture.

Conventional pedagogy reaffirms oppositional consciousness through

---

[1] I will define conventional pedagogy later in this chapter; for now I suggest thinking of conventional pedagogy and teaching methods as Paolo Freire describes the "banking model" of education.

[2] I use the term community survival to include a deep concern for one's community wellness as well as the desire to leave a legacy for future generations.

student/teacher interpersonal relationships, course content that is based on dominant narratives, and depositing knowledge. Oppositional consciousness with student/teacher relationships can look like subordinate and submissive student obeying domineering and directorial teacher. When course content narrowly presents mythical norms and status quo stories, oppositional conscsiousness might be reestablished. If the instructor is only depositing knowledge, meaning presenting information as ''truth'' that students should automatically consume without encouraging questioning, criticial thinking, and discussing what is being presented, then oppositional consciousness may be regenerated.

Oppositional consciousness is also deepened with hyper-individualized cultures. As Jesse Goodman and Jeff Kuzmic argue, "[C]onventional education in the United States has been dominated by an ethos of individualism" (80). This ethos of individualism is socialized into many people at an early age. People in the United States learn to focus on personal success at any cost. As a result, many members of US society subscribe to the myth of meritocracy,[3] which focuses on the individual and perpetuates a lack of concern for community progress. The false story of meritocracy suggests that each person can change their own circumstances if they work hard enough. However, a central problem with an overly individualistic culture is that it discourages people from working

---

[3] Meritocracy was coined by British author Micheal Young in 1958 in his book entitled *The Rise of Meritocracy.*

together to create a more holistic society for all. Instead, focusing on individualism creates division and competition between one person and the next. Unlike a womanist pedagogy, individualism and division are not focused on community survival or on working together to envision possibilities for change.

The West's focus on (hyper) individualism creates and perpetuates oppositional consciousness. I describe oppositional consciousness as the limited understanding of possibilities as either/or concepts. I use the terms oppositional, oppositionality, and oppositional consciousness as defined and discussed by AnaLouise Keating in her book *Transformation Now! Toward a Post-Oppositional Politics of Change*. Keating defines oppositional consciousness as representative of "a binary either/or epistemology and praxis that structures our perceptions, politics, and actions through a resistant energy—a reaction against that which we seek to transform" (2). Oppositional consciousness is established through limited binary thinking such as the division between rich or poor, Black or white, and powerful or powerless. Keating references the binary "us against them" mindset as oppositional pedagogies and politics that hinders social change "by generating nonproductive conflict, suspicion, competition, and debate" (1). Although sometimes necessary, oppositionality limits possibilities by narrowly focusing on either/or realities, that is, by presenting only dichotomous extremes.

Problem Statement

Modern society has created a culture that embodies and encourages opposition (Giroux 103). As mentioned above, children in Western cultures are

taught to strive for personal success at a young age. At all levels, students are

encouraged to focus on their own accomplishments, accept the Cartesian

body/mind split, and believe that knowledge is only created in the brain. These

ideas are so limiting. If we learn to accept and embrace possibilities beyond the

either/or mentality, then perhaps we can begin to disrupt the divides

oppositionality creates. Keating asserts that:

> We need additional tools and tactics, nonbinary forms of oppositional
>
> consciousness that enable us to explore, discover, and create
>
> commonalties. Fortunately, we don't need to start from scratch: Women-
>
> of-colors scholarship and other threshold theories have opened that way
>
> (*Transformation Now!* 10)

Building on what Keating addresses here, which is the limitations of binary,

oppositional thinking, and focusing on her invitation for readers to look to women

of color and threshold theories[4] for examples on how to discover the possibilities

outside of oppositionality leads to my own theorizing.

---

[4] AnaLouise Keating explains that, "Like thresholds—that mark transitional, in-between spaces where new beginnings, and unexpected combinations can occur—threshold theories facilitate and enact movements 'betwixt and between' divergent worlds, enabling us to establish fresh connections among distinct (and sometimes contradictory) perspectives, realities, peoples, theories, texts, and/or worldviews" (*Transformtation Now!* 10).

Although a post-oppositional[5] womanist pedagogy recognizes the need for oppositionality at times, it engages holistic care, which includes the spiritual, political, emotional, and physical concerns of both pedagogues and students. This holistic care for all classroom participants can create a deeper shift away from the oppositional "us against them" consciousness by blurring the divide between teacher and students. The teacher/student divide is one specific example of oppositionality. Blurring this divide complicates the understanding of power and position, creating a more nuanced relationship (or perceived relationship) between the two.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

My dissertation seeks to understand how pedagogues believe womanism impacts and influences their teaching. I employ a qualitative content analysis to data collection that included interviews, review of syllabi, and classroom observations. To frame my study, I ask the following research questions: 1) What makes a pedagogy womanist? 2) How do womanists teach? 3) How can womanism help foster a post-oppositional atmosphere in classrooms? Social justice pedagogies, including feminist and womanist pedagogies, have done significant work to redefine classroom relationships, expand course content, and encourage students to be creators, rather than simply consumers, of knowledge.

---

[5] I describe post-oppositional and post-oppositionality as the possibility of working beyond opposition, working together to find alternate solutions, and the hopeful idea that disagreement does not have to lead to division.

Womanist pedagogy has worked to disrupt the individualistic culture so deeply rooted in conventional pedagogy.

After providing definitions of womanism and dialogue regarding different styles of pedagogy, this chapter moves into a focused review of literature related to my topic. I review the three pillars of womanist pedagogy as discussed by Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant and others. Chapter Two provides information on my methodologies, further discussing my interviews, syllabi review, and classroom observations. In Chapter Three, I provide information regarding interviews, observation write ups, and the ways that the project moved from codes to categories to themes. My final chapter, Chapter Four, provides answers to my research questions and discussion about what a post-oppositional womanist pedagogy might look like. I also address the study's limitations and suggestions for possible future research.

Researcher Perspectives and Assumptions

I want to acknowledge upfront my own privileges. While I am multiracial, I am also white passing. I am an educated, cisgender, able-bodied woman who comes from a Christian, middle-class family. These attributes are accompanied by many unearned privileges. I am aware that given the diversity of our student population my experiences alone are not enough to be helpful in my full understanding of my students' lived realities.

As I entered into this dissertation study, I felt like I embraced a womanist pedagogical style in my own classes, and I have spent years reading,

researching, and learning as much as I could about the topic. My perspective, although never comprehensive, has remained open when it comes to pedagogy. I have a deep love for teaching and for witnessing students as they increasingly realize their own potential. I encourage self-care practices in my own classes. Students share openly with each other about what they do for their own wellbeing. I open almost every face-to-face class by asking a list of self-care questions such as: Are you getting enough rest? Are you drinking water? Are you eating real food? Are you spending time in nature? Are you engaging in some form of spirituality? And then I allow space for responses, and close by encouraging everyone to pick at least one thing they can work on. Perhaps, for instance, they might try to take an extra nap or to be more intentional about their water intake. I encourage them to focus on whatever they have chosen as part of their self-care practice.

For many, the idea of self-care is a privilege, and for some it is survival. I have come to realize that not all my students have access to "real food"[6] or have the capability of getting adequate rest. How could they rest enough when they work the night shift and come straight to class in the morning? How can they eat fresh foods when they live in a food desert? If they are taking an online class because they live in the city without their own transportation, how can they spend

---

[6] I define real food as food that was at one point alive (i.e., fruits, vegetables, fresh meat).

time in nature? I would also like to mention that there is a difference between self-care and the individualism I am critiquing. Individualism is focused on a singular type of self and is motivated by what is often seen as selfish gain, stopping at thought of one's own benefit. Self-care, as discussed later in the dissertation, is concerned with wellbeing. As Mapryan discusses it, self-care starts with "bodily well-being," which consists of good nutrition and health (53). From these forms of vitality, a womanist then moves into trying to rebalance and heal the world. It starts with the self but moves beyond.

My twelve years of college-level teaching experience have taught me to recognize that each person comes to my classroom with different experiences, different knowledges, and different *wisdom systems*.[7] In writing this dissertation, I included pieces of my own worldview and the changes that occurred within me while working on this project. With womanism at the heart of womanist pedagogy, I assume that womanist pedagogues practice holistic[8] self-care; however, as will be discussed in more detail later, this attention to pedagogues' self-care practices is missing from womanist pedagogy literature. In the following section, I work to define terms and draw connections between pedagogies and oppositionality.

---

[7] I borrowed the phrase wisdom systems from one of my participants. She uses this term to acknowledge the many different ways one gains wisdom and understanding about the world.

[8] I use the term holistic self-care to encompass physical, emotional, spiritual, and political care.

Exploring Womanism

The origin of the word womanist is found in Alice Walker's *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens,* published in 1983. In a frequently referenced short piece, Walker provides four main points that address characteristics of a womanist, including behavior, culture, experience, and tradition. Walker highlights the relationship between feminism and womanism, demonstrating the nuances between the two. Womanist scholars across fields of study include Walker's definition as foundational to shaping their own use of the term womanist. In *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Walker defines womanist in this way:

1. From *womanish*. (Opp. Of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish, i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown. "Responsible. In charge. *Serious.*

2. *Also*: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as a natural counterbalance of laughter) and women's strength. Sometimes love individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and

female. Not a separatist, except periodically for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: "Mamma, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?" Ans: "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in "Mamma, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you a bunch of other slaves with me. Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time."

3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless.

4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender (45).

Building on Walker's founding definition, womanism continues to develop and branch out, expanding into multiple disciplines. Across disciplines, womanist theorists have defined womanist pedagogy and shared their specific experiences and ideas on how a pedagogy based on womanism operates differently from more conventional pedagogies (Barkley Brown 173, Hamlet 213, Vaz 233, Lee 148 [9]). Historically, womanist pedagogy has most commonly been discussed as a means of survival for members of the Black community. Specifically, the narratives of Black women teachers are shared in order to demonstrate how

---

[9] These are just some of the authors in the anthology entitled *The Womanist Reader.*

womanist pedagogy has already worked to empower Black students and Black communities. I believe these same concepts apply in desegregated classrooms and can offer similar empowerment for non-Black students and non-Black communities.

Theological Womanism

Theological womanism intersects with womanist theory and religious studies. As described by Katie G. Canon, a leading figure and innovator in this branch of womanism, theological womanism reflects on the ways womanist religious scholars utilize their Black womanist consciousness to interpret scriptures, biblical characters, and concepts from the acknowledged oppression and survival of the African American community (Canon 24, 56). In her article "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voice," Delores S. Williams furthers her definition of womanist theology, stating, "[T]wo of the principal concerns of womanist theology should be survival and community building and maintenance. The goal of this community-building is, of course, to establish positive quality of life—economic, spiritual, educational—for black women, men, and children" (120). As both Canon and Williams suggest, womanist theology values religion, typically Christianity, as a means to community survival. Because I focus on pedagogy, rather than Scripture or Christianity, I draw on scholarship outside religious studies.

Africana and African Womanisms

Clenora Hudson-Weems coined the term Africana womanism to focus the theoretical concept of womanism on the ethnic and cultural background of women of African-descent. Africana Womanism is Afrocentric and focuses on the experience of creating one's own criteria for assessing reality (Hudson-Weems 79). Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi uses the term "African Womanism" to foreground African storytelling and survival history. While these froms of womanism are discussed with the same respect and are adjacent to Walker's definition, they center their theories on Africa and women of African descent, both aspects of womanism that should be acknowledged. My own definition, however, is more inclusive and embraces the belief that "womanism is now a gift to all humanity" (Maparyan 323). Once again, this expansive approach leads me to focus on literature that discusses womanist pedagogy and broader definitions of womanism. I have adopted this more expansive vision because I believe that all people can learn from womanist ideals and that our collective world can benefit from these values.

The Womanist Worldview

The womanist worldview as defined by Maparyan most closely aligns with my own interpretations of womanism. Maparyan pays homage to early womanists, shares multiple definitions of womanism, and discusses in detail different characteristics that shape a womanist worldview. She notes:

Womanism is a social change perspective rooted in Black women's and

other women of color's everyday experiences 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 spiritual

dimension. (Maparyan xx)

Simply put, this social change perspective is concerned with all oppression and a

broad sense of balance. I lean on Maparyan's theorizing, which I will discuss

further in the dissertation, to bridge the gap between womanist pedagogy and

womanist theory.

While womanist theory directly encourages self-care practices defined and

applied broadly, literature in womanist pedagogy focuses heavily on care for

students while at times omitting attention to pedagogues' self-care. However, I

believe that a new "us against them" consciousness can be created when

womanist pedagogues' self-care is excluded from the discourse. Oppositional

consciousness goes against the essence of womanism because womanism

seeks justice for all people; brings together humans, nature, and spirit; and

values personal experiences. As Elsa Barkley Brown explains, "Womanism flows

from a both/and worldview, a consciousness that allows for the resolution of

seeming contradictions 'not through an either/or negation but through the

interaction' and wholeness" (186).

Significantly, womanism allows space for contradictions, and by allowing space for the existence of both contradictions and the possibility of wholeness, womanism sets up the possibility of post-oppositional consciousness. Likewise, I argue that womanism in pedagogy should allow space for holistic care for both the students and the teacher. Womanist scholars provide foundational information and dialogue on how womanism is defined, how womanism has influenced their perspectives, and how womanism validates their own (and other women of color's) experiences.

Oppositionality

Oppositionality has been useful historically. For example, during the civil rights movement, the women's movements of the 1960s and 70s, as well as the LGBTQI movements, there were many forms of necessary opposition and resistance. When there are harmful and hurtful ideologies present, those ideologies must be opposed—that is, confronted with an explicit "no" or "that is not right" type of response. Opposition is often needed and can be critical for survival at times; however, opposition is not *always* necessary. In fact, much of the time, there should and can be alternatives to oppositional consciousness. Keating describes it as follows:

> Although oppositional consciousness, politics, and thinking have been
> necessary to our survival, enabling us to resist and sometimes partially
> reform oppressive social practices and structures, oppositionality is not as
> useful today as it was in the past century. I attribute these limitations to the

underlying binary systems on which our oppositional epistemologies and

practices are generally based. This dichotomous framework declines

reality—and, by extension, knowledge, ethics, and truth—in limited,

mutually exclusive terms. (*Transformation Now!* 5)

In other words, oppositionality has been necessary and needed for survival and

to resist some forms of oppression; however the time for using oppositional

approaches or knowledge may be outdated in many cases. In the twenty-first

century, we need to work to disrupt the "either/or" mentality that encourages an

oppositional consciousness by recognizing the limitations of such thinking.

Oppositionality is a rhetorical and linguistic strategy that allows many to

cling to their dichotomous opinions (Keating, *Transformation Now!* 6), possibly

due to potential loss of control or power. In other situations, this clinging can

happen out of desperation. However, in these scenarios, clinging fiercely to

personal opinions will limit the understanding of multiple possibilities. As Keating

explains, "Differences are drained of complexity and defined in narrow, either/or

terms that limit our options and strangle our imaginations" (*Transformation Now!*

6). Remaining confined by oppositional thinking can eliminate complexities,

imaginations, possibilities, and ideas beyond the either/or options. In short, these

oppositional energies limit our vision for change, restrict our options, and inhibit

our ability to create transformational alliances. Oppositional consciousness

usually prevents scholars from seeing alternatives because the arguments are

grounded in the systems, framework, and worldview that we are trying to transcend (Keating, *Transformation Now!* 7).

Defining Terminology

Conventional Pedagogy

I frame conventional pedagogy using what Paolo Freire terms "the banking model" of education. In his well-known book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire argues, "The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of the world" (730). Consuming passed-down knowledge limits an individual's ability to become a critically engaged citizen of the world. Deposits of knowledge, narrowly focusing on the perspective of the knowledge giver, do not require critical reflection, personal narrative, or engagement with multiple stories. Conventional "banking" pedagogy often perpetuates a disconnection between classroom participants as well as their communities by reinforcing oppositional either/or realities. For example, the idea that something is either inherently bad or inherently good demonstrates an oppositional reality. As Freire highlights, the resulting lack of critical consciousness makes it difficult for individuals to become agents of change in the world. Without the ability to question information, learners become dependent on the knowledge passed to them instead of becoming knowledge creators.

Critical Pedagogy

In response to the limitations of conventional pedagogy, educators such as John Dewey and Freire examine the potential of learning as liberation through critical pedagogy.[10] Both Dewey and Freire advocate for challenging the lack of different perspectives in the classroom. Similarly, bell hooks critiques conventional pedagogy by drawing attention to the prevalence of dominant narratives of white, middle-class men that perpetuate the marginalization of people of color, the working class, the gender non-conforming, and non-heterosexual individuals. She argues:

 If we examine critically the traditional role of the university in the pursuit of truth and the sharing of knowledge and information, it is painfully clear that biases that uphold and maintain white supremacy, imperialism, sexism, and racism have distorted education so that it is no longer about the practice of freedom. (29)

hooks' observation supports my claim that conventional pedagogy inhibits critical thinking and that this is problematic because the result is that dominant narratives and status-quo stories overshadow the multiple lived experiences of students and instructors. Many others (Freire, Giroux, Fasset and Warren) have

---

[10] Expanding on Patti Lather's argument that "critical pedagogy is positioned as that which attends to practices of teaching/learning intended to interrupt particular historical, situated systems of oppression" (121), I further claim that critical thinking, as it pertains to education, seeks to identify and question systems of oppression.

also critiqued conventional pedagogy and sought to develop alternative ways of teaching such as critical pedagogy.

Limitations of Critical Pedagogy

Critical theories have been crucial in revolutionizing social-justice education, but there are limitations to their transformative capabilities. I will address these limitations more thoroughly later; here, I simply outline how critical theory, critical thinking, and critical pedagogy start the work of transformation but do not complete it. Critical pedagogy does a great job at drawing attention to injustice, yet often falls short at effecting change. On this note, critical theorists Deanna Fassett and John Warren argue that "most critical books and articles we've read (and some we've written) disappoint in the end, for they usually offer some final thought that never quite seems to do enough, never seems to respond to the problem they've set out to address" (164). To put it another way, naming the problem or injustice is not enough to create change.

In fact, I argue that by narrowly focusing solely on a problem, an oppositional consciousness is recreated. This time the opposition reinforces a good or bad, justice or injustice mentality. There must be an acknowledgement of the problem as well as discussion for potential solutions or other possibilities. For example, critically questioning the lack of discussion on gender without also offering alternatives only highlights the presence of sexism which may encourage an oppositional approach to the problem. Instead of only presenting an oppositional approach, the possibility of a post-oppositional solution can be

19

offered. Oppositional consciousness, as I define it here, would identify the sexism as bad but stop with this critique, rather than critiquing limitations and then also offering solutions. A critical response to social issues is necessary and valuable but can leave teachers and students without a hopeful approach for transformation. Similarly, the relationship between critical theory and classroom interactions can leave classroom participants frustrated. Melissa Redmond explains the complications between classroom interactions and critical theory:

> Critical theory assumes that classroom interaction can exist in
> created spaces where all participants have the same right to speak,
> that this right is respected by all those present, that classmates feel
> safe to speak, and that all shared ideas will be engaged respectfully
> and critically. However, these assumptions regarding classroom
> dialogue prove illusory due to the embodied and historical
> differences of students and teachers. (8)

Together with Keating's earlier argument on oppositionality, Redmond's observation supports my claims that oppositional consciousness is pervasive in conventional teaching. To assume that all classroom participants can engage in respectful and critical discussion ignores the different lived experiences of those participants. While critical pedagogy significantly shifts teaching practices and classroom dynamics from conventional teaching, these examples illustrate how a critical approach to teaching and learning can be limited. Status-quo stories only emphasize the individualistic nature of conventional pedagogy.

In order to relate and connect students with their communities, classroom participants need to see reflections of their own histories, epistemologies, and experiences in stories presented in the classroom. By engaging fully in relatable stories, the gap between academia and society is bridged. The problem with status-quo stories is that they ignore the complexity and multiplicity of many people's lived experiences. Instead, status-quo stories divide reality into discrete parts. As Keating argues, "Status-quo stories are divisive, teaching us to break the world into parts and label each piece. We read these labels as natural descriptions about reality" (*Transformation Now!* 83). What this means is that status-quo stories provide incomplete stories about people's lives and experiences. That false reality divides people by labeling them. Later in her book, Keating explains how labels can serve to create opposition by dividing individuals and distorting perceptions. Labels can set up these divisions in ways that prevent us from focusing on our commonalities and shared identities. (*Transformation Now!* 84). Building on Keating's analysis, I point out how feminist pedagogy challenges the status quo yet recreates oppositional consciousness.

Feminist Pedagogy

I define feminist pedagogy as a philosophy of teaching that draws on feminist theory to challenge conventional methods by embracing critical thinking, disrupting dominant narratives and status quo stories, and encouraging activism in the pursuit of social change. Typically, critical pedagogy starts the work of social change by acknowledging and labeling injustices. Feminist pedagogy,

21

which usually foregrounds gender, moves beyond this critical approach by incorporating action through activism. While feminist pedagogy has made significant progress, even unintentionally, in moving away from the same type of oppositionality present in conventional pedagogy, I argue that it recreates a different type of oppositional consciousness through a divide between "oppressed" and "oppressor." Despite feminist pedagogies' work to encourage activism, which is an addition to critical pedagogy, the shift from conventional pedagogy still remains oppositional. As mentioned previously, critical theory places emphasis on the problem and feminist pedagogy replicates this critical approach by placing emphasis on who is being oppressed and who is doing the oppressing. Differently, womanist thought and pedagogy work for the good of all and steer away from gender-centered justice endeavors.

Feminist pedagogy embraces diversity of experiences and perspectives as a method of complicating and challenging dominant narratives and status-quo stories. The lack of diversity in conventional pedagogy leads feminist pedagogues to raise awareness about different lived experiences.[11] This work disrupts ideologies based on the mythical norms (Lorde, *Sister* 13) that are reinforced in society and provides opportunity for community building. In describing their own practices, Maralee Mayberry and Ellen Cronan Rose explain

---

[11] See, for instance, Crabtree, Sapp, Licona's *Feminist Pedagogy*; bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress*; Fisher *No Angel in the Classroom*; Maher and Tetreault's *The Feminist Classroom*

that in "the process of building a classroom community we encourage students to start thinking about diversity and their own potential roles in relation to their classmates" (325). As the authors suggest, becoming aware of the differences in people's experiences can help students build a sense of community. Hearing classmates' stories and learning about their worldviews not only creates an opportunity to bond over common experiences, but also enables the listeners to gain new perspectives about different ones. I would add that humanizing experiences and finding commonalities can help students feel more connected to social issues by encouraging empathy.

Feminist pedagogy draws attention to the plural possibilities. Employing different course materials can open up the classroom to diverse experiences and multiple voices. Stephanie Rigerand collegues argue that student demographics have changed immensely, and we are seeing more women of different backgrounds in college classrooms. They add that an awareness of both oppression and experiences, is heightened because of the feminist movement (Riger et al 240). Additionally, these authors argue that "not identifying the various needs of different groups is equally disturbing in that it maintains the status quo," and generalizing is an inadequate way to address the different problems students face (242). It is not helpful or useful to essentialize experiences. Moving away from essentializing experiences, womanist pedagogy focuses on individuals' stories, lived experiences, and community wholeness.

To illustrate this point, I draw from what Beauboeuf-Lafontant has identified as the three characteristics of womanist teachers. She argues that womanist teachers embrace the maternal, value political clarity, and take an ethic of risk ("Womanist Lessons" 437). Because Beaubouf-Lafontant's theory of womanist care has been used to frame several studies' analyses of womanist pedagogy, I focus my literature review on Beaubouf-Lafontant's work and place it in dialogue with other literature on womanist pedagogy in the following section.

Spirituality

Spirituality is defined by scholars in many ways, some of them contradictory. On one hand, there are scholars who discuss spirituality as a sense of personal purpose, practicing kindness to other living beings, and personal growth (Fernandes, Thicht Naht Hahn, Lanzetta). On the other hand, there are scholars who believe that spirituality is deeply connected to traditional organized religion and often related to beliefs about life after death, following religious texts, and practices such as prayer (Canon; Williams). Froma Walsh argues the following that, "Spirituality, an overarching construct, refers to a dimension of human experience involving personal transcendent beliefs and practices, within or outside of formal religion, through family and cultural heritage, and in connection with nature and humanity" (5). Put in other words, Walsh sees spirituality as personal values that may also include organized religious beliefs or not.

Some may argue that religion can be associated with the negativity of dogma and rules; however, others may argue that religion can also be seen as, "a set of organized practices established by tradition and conducted in a central place of worship" (Schlehofer et al 412). What these three authors assert is that spirituality appears to focus more on personal choices and practices while religion can be seen as more focused on collective worship.

Some scholars discuss spirituality as completely separate from religion. In her chapter "Secularity, "[12] Karlyn Crowley suggests that "spirituality is generally defined as both concomitant with the religious and also in reaction to it " (245). While the two terms "used to be synonyms" they have now moved toward being seen as the private realm (spiritual) and the public (religion) realm of membership (245). Crowley makes the argument that specifically in the field of women's and gender studies (WGS), many have sought to bring spirituality and religion into their theorizing and the discourse of the field while many others have sought to make the discourse secular. What she believes has happened is that the two have moved from being discussed interchangeably into a more distinct difference of private or public identities.

Some scholars, like Leela Fernandes, view spirituality and religion as distinctly different. Fernandes states, "What I have come to believe is that spirituality—living within and learning about the divine—is very different from

---

[12] Secular, in western epistemological contexts such as the one Crowley critiques, denotes complete separation from spiritual.

theological and religious expertise" (115). For her, spirituality is separate from

theology or religion. She relates the growth of spirituality to non-violence and

pursuit of social justice. Similarly, the words of Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa best

define an understanding of spirituality: "Spirituality is an ontological belief in the

existence of things outside the body (exosmotic), as opposed to the belief that

material reality is a projection of mentally created images" (*Light* 38). Anzaldúa is

offering a suggestion of a metaphysical or ontological system. She further

discusses how believing in a spiritual world is a different, additional way of

knowing. Several of my interviewees responded to questions about spirituality in

a similar way by explaining the connections they feel with humans, animals,

nature, and so forth as spiritual for them.

 Spirituality can also be connected to one's religious beliefs or faith being

put into action for good (Maparyan 119). I define spirituality as personal

consciousness of relationships, meaning, an awareness of connections with the

self, other humans, the omnipresent being, animals, nature, and spirit. Many of

my participants defined spirituality as separate from organized religion, while

other participants defined their organized religion as part of their spirituality. I

lean on Maparyan's definition for myself and also for several of my participants

who explained that their spirituality is dependent on their religious beliefs. Some

of my participants practice Judaism, different sects of Christianity, Buddhism,

Akan, and other forms of organized religion.

Other participants did not practice any form of organized religion or stopped

ascribing to organized religion earlier in life. Despite the diverse definitions of

spirituality, all of my participants discussed spirituality as essential for their own

self-care as well as their care for community and the world. Spirituality was an

important topic no matter how it was discussed. Please note that I do not intend

to conflate these areas, but recognize spirituality and religion as facets of a

consciousness of relationships whether in the physical world or spiritual realm.

These relationships are discussed by my participants as their interactions with

nature, yoga, mindfulness, prayer, lovingkindness, and journaling just to name a

few. I would argue that both spirituality and religion consider relationships

(whether with other humans, a divine power, or other beings) as necessary

components for progression or growth.

For many womanists and feminists alike, their spirituality and even

religious beliefs have been crucial for survival. When explaining Black womanist

spirituality, Diana Hayes argues that, "Theirs is spirituality grounded in their faith

in a God who affirmed their worth as human beings created in God's image and

likeness" (xii). Hayes' acknowledgement is crucial to womanism. As many

womanist theologians have discussed in depth, womanist spirituality and

womanist theologies are built on the existence of Black women and the belief

that Black women are also created in the image of God. Womanist theologies

had/have to address the white washing of Jesus and Christ in the white Christian

interpretations of Scripture.

Coleman asserts, "Womanist theologies maintain an unflinching commitment to reflect on the social, cultural, and religious experiences of black women. Womanist theologies are ultimately grounded in an accountability to the religious reality of black women's lives" (11). Differently stated, the religious experiences of Black women disrupt the status-quo stories of white males in the church. Black women's stories of their own religious experiences are reflected in womanist theologies and interpretations of the Bible. Later in her chapter, Crowley mentions that, "Obviously, it is critical that a major theoretical concept in the field of WGS—womanism—has a spiritual dimension, *and* that the quality of that dimension changes the very nature of the term" (253). What Crowley does here is she blatantly wants to point her readers attention to the fact that womanism entails a spiritual component which cannot be secularized or separated from its existence.

The significance of reviewing spirituality in greater depth is that spirituality is often a component of womanism that distinguishes it from feminism. It is also specifically the aspect that drew my participants to womanism. There is so much more that can be said about spirituality and religion regarding womanism; however, because my study does not focus on spirituality alone, my discussion is brief and not all encompassing.

Literature Review

As stated above, this literature review is organized according to the three characteristics of womanist teachers as set forth by Beaubouf-Lafontant ("A

28

Womanist Experience"): embracing the maternal, political clarity, and an ethic of risk. Beauboeuf-Lafontant's three pillars are significant to my womanist pedagogy theorizing and a crucial aspect of others' research on womanist pedagogy. I recognize this as a starting point and hope to expand my knowledge beyond these three characteristics.

Embrace of the Maternal

Womanist pedagogues are revered as embracing a maternal form of care for their students. This type of maternal care, which I also label *othermothering*, includes a deep concern for students' wellbeing both academically and non-academically. In my own words, by embracing the maternal, womanist teachers concern themselves with the physical, emotional, and intellectual needs of their students. Othermothering refers to a nurturing/care given to children who are not biologically related. Beaubouf-Lafontant suggests that "teachers often see themselves as 'othermothers' or women who, through feelings of shared responsibility, commit themselves to the social and emotional development of all children in a community" (Beauboeuf-Lafontant's, "A Womanist Experience" 77). As I mentioned above, womanist pedagogues are committed to the physical, emotional, and intellectual wellbeing of their students.

As the literature states, this type of maternal care extends beyond classroom spaces to include interactions in the community. In her foundational piece, "A Womanist Experience of Caring: Understanding the Pedagogy of Exemplary Black Women Teacher," Tamara Beaubouf-Lafontant notes that

29

womanist teachers approach their relationships with students from a maternal standpoint. She explains that "[e]xemplary African-American women teachers use the familiar and familial mother-child relationship as a guide for their interactions with students" (74). Beaubouf-Lafontant observes that mothering is regarded as a broader responsibility to community (76), meaning that the teachers she discusses accepted the role of mothering inside and outside of their classrooms. Beaubouf-Lafontant frames the embrace of the maternal by sharing that "these women viewed the maternal as a profound commitment to the well-being and survival of black children and black people. The maternal lens they brought to their practice powerfully connected their personal relationships with students to an active engagement with social reality" (76). In other words, these teachers viewed their caregiver as necessary for the long-term survival of their communities.

Building on Beaubouf-Lafontant's original work, other scholars have paid specific attention to the womanist embrace of the maternal in their own research. Sheryl Conrad Cozart and Jenny Gordon focused their article, "Using Womanist Caring as a Framework to Teach Social Foundations," on developing a consideration for the maternal in their course. They argue that investing in the maternal "requires teachers to treat all children as if they are the teacher's own and to meet children's particular needs by whatever means necessary" (Cozart and Gordon 12). As these authors suggest, teachers should treat their students as if they are their own children.

In the classroom, maternal care looks like bringing a certain type of attitude into their engagement with students. For example, demonstrating care through discipline,[13] which may look like expressing disappoint and assigning extra homework. Furthermore, they note that ensuring students' success requires sharing responsibilities with the students' families and communities such as encouraging the development of job skills, making sure they have access to healthy foods, and helping with college applications (Cozart and Gordon 12). To put it more simply, child rearing is the work of many.

Responsibility, commitment, and sacrifice are all elements these womanist teachers enacted in order to preserve their communities. The embrace of the maternal is more than passing out hugs. Embracing the maternal is taking on the role of parenting. Womanist teachers are described as accepting their maternal role as part of their cultural understanding of womanhood ("A Womanist Experience " 75) and as a way to connect with not only students but their families. In their research on teachers during segregation, Patterson and colleagues specifically look at Beaubouf-Lafontant's description of womanist teaching to assess the impact on students. Interestingly, the study revealed that students perceived their teachers as "othermothers" because they were caring, loving, warm, and disciplinarians (Patterson et al. 277). Students felt connected to their teachers in a child/parent way because the teachers were both warm and

---

[13] I am not using the term discipline to describe physical harm.

authority figures. Students also felt their connections with their teachers were empowering because of the teachers' presence in the community (Patterson et al. 272).

Because parenting is a sacrificial act and classrooms are filled with children, I wonder about the magnitude of care teachers are able to share. Vanessa Sheared suggests that the "teacher must decenter or disempower herself… in order to empower the students. The teacher allows students to seek and interpret their world and their words in a political, social, historical and economic context...The process is a communal experience" (273). What does it mean to disempower one's self or to shift focus to the students and teachers being equal participants in the classrrom? Does this mean the same thing as sharing power? How can womanist values be a part of all classroom participants' experiences?

Womanists value wellness as a means of self-care. This is clearly exemplified in Maparyan's statement, "Wellness also encompasses self-care. This means pausing to take care of the self, even when others fail to do so. This womanist value relates to women's history, especially women of color's history of overwork and exhaustion on the behalf of others, often others who do not afford or even recognize the need for breaks and self-replenishment" (44). As Maparyan suggests, women of color have historically been known to sacrifice their own needs in order to serve others. Consequently, making the choice to focus on self-care is necessary and a radical form of resistance and activism

(Lorde, "There is No Hierarchy," 219). Jennifer Nash builds on Walker to form her theory of love politics. Nash's focus on Walker is an important reminder of the relationship between womanism and the practice of self-care and self-love. Nash argues that "[l]ove, then, is a practice of self, a labor of the self, that forms the basis of political communities rooted in a radical ethic of care" (14). Womanist pedagogy literature focuses on the love and care that pedagogues demonstrate toward students; however, this literature does not explore pedagogues' love and care of self. Cozart and Gordon argue that "womanist caring conceives relationships as social, political, and ethical moves the teacher/student/community relationship from the private to a public, politicized sphere" (11). Womanist caring in effect complicates the dichotomy of private versus public spheres. Teaching, traditionally viewed as "women's work," is seen as an act of the private sphere. Womanist teachers shift teaching to a public sphere by blatantly politicizing class content and relationships, as well as their own roles in the classroom. As Maparyan writes, "[M]otherists are similar to womanists insofar as they draw from their everyday community roles and caring orientation to enact political action" (63). Significantly, Maparyan relates mothering to womanism and mentions that both sets of people are similar in that they believe their care for others and community creates political action.

Political Clarity

Political clarity requires teachers to draw connections between classrooms and society and to inspire students to become politically active members of

society. Political clarity requires the identification of and action towards injustices. Pursuing a position of political clarity creates a ripple impact that moves from students out to communities. Beauboeuf-Lafontant argues:

> Political clarity is the recognition by teachers that there are relationships between schools and society that differentially structure the successes and failures of groups and children. Womanist teachers see racism and other systemic injustices as simultaneously social *and* education problems. ("A Womanist Experience" 77)

Womanist teachers acknowledge the impact education can have on addressing systems of injustice. Beauboeuf-Lafontant notes that womanist teachers in Black segregated schools were often discussed as obtaining the "presence of political clarity" (77). Using political clarity as a method of community survival goes back to the sense of responsibility also present in embracing the maternal. Teachers feel a strong obligation to empower students to know their rights (77). Political clarity enables students to draw connections between injustice, stereotypes, experiences, classrooms, and their successes as well as the lack thereof. As a means of empowering others, political clarity moves beyond personal political awareness. It pointedly names and identifies injustice and resists debating whether injustice exists in unfair systems, including the education system.

Political clarity is a conduit for student political efficacy and encourages students to become actively engaged political citizens, which is necessary for community survival. Students must know their rights, understand laws, and know

how to access resources to address unjust systems. They must learn who they can trust, how to ask questions, and how to claim their role as agents of change. This happens within the classroom walls and extends out of the classroom into homes, communities, states, and countries. Cozart and Gordon argue, "Political clarity gives students a way to conceptualize what moving from system maintenance to system transformation would look like" (13). Importantly, political clarity provides an avenue through which students can conceive change.

Womanist educators address the falsities of stereotypes and seek clear understanding of their student's realities (Beaubouf-Lafontant, "Womanist Experience" 79), which impacts students' own perceptions of their roles as political agents of change. In the Patterson et al. study on womanist classrooms, students reflected positively on the impact political clarity had on their own understandings of racial domination, desires to challenge stereotypes, affirmation of their own identities, and self-efficacy (272, 279). Womanist pedagogues help students become aware of social issues, which encourages students to become politically engaged. Simultaneously, the decision to address social issues and raise awareness in the classroom is in itself a way for teachers to be political agents.

Women of color's political agency is tied to their long history of being caregivers. From slavery to domestic workers, women of color have often been expected to quietly do as told, provide care as labor (unwaged as well as

waged), and maintain certain gendered roles. Davis discusses this idea further by arguing:

> This notion of transforming the curriculum parallels our foremothers' transformation of the segregated plantation kitchen space. Indeed, this transformation took them *beyond* their relegated kitchen space of inferiority, across the threshold, and into the dining room; it signaled an increasing acceptance of their responsibility to confront discursive positions of power through oppositional histories and pedagogical practices. (374)

Davis's comparison of the plantation kitchen space and pedagogical practice provides a framework for comparing womanist teachers and the foremothers in kitchens—teachers transform their classrooms into spaces of empowerment, just as foremothers used their kitchens for activism.

Political efficacy and critical awareness work together to impact individuals as well as communities. Canon claims that "the heuristic nature of womanist pedagogy means that students use cognitive, self-educating exploratory processes to discern mechanisms of exploitation and identity patterns that must be altered in order for justice to occur" (139). In other words, Canon theorizes how students practice critical awareness by identifying social issues, considering the systems that create injustice, and finally exploring the possibilities of creating change.

Ethic of Risk

Womanist pedagogues embrace a sense of self-responsibility as part of their commitments to their communities. This self-responsibility holds womanist pedagogues accountable to themselves, their students, and their community, while also requiring a level of vulnerability that strengthens relationships in all of the aforementioned areas.The term "ethic of risk" is used by Beauboeuf-Lafontant to describe responsibility broadly but always ties back to self-responsibility in one way or another. An ethic of risk is multifaceted as it works to build the relationships in all of these areas by recognizing that relationships happen both internally, within one's self, but also externally with classroom participants and community. As Beauboeuf-Lafontant puts it, "While individuals have an ethic of risk, their commitments to working for social justice rest on a concept of self that is part of rather than apart from other people" ("Womanist Experience" 81). The author further demonstrates the connection to community as an essential part of an ethic of risk. This characteristic also encourages a mutual responsibility for teaching and learning in the classroom that is shared between teachers and students alike. Operating in an ethic of risk pushes teachers to think outside of their own consequences such as allowing students to have a role in facilitating learning and possible institutional repricutions. Instructors must challenge themselves to be able to rely on students. An ethic of risk requires the teacher to let go of total control and trust students to uphold their part in classroom activities and learning (Beaubouf-Lafontant ,"Womanist

Experience" 81). For example, an instructor might allow students to facilitate

class discussion by providing a list of questions or sharing reading notes over the

assigned topic. One way an ethic of risk benefits teaching is by demonstrating

trust through handing over some responsibility to the students that will instill

confidence and make the classroom feel more inclusive (Beaubouf-Lafontant,

"Womanist Experience" 83).

In an education system that practices an ethic of risk, teachers hold

themselves just as accountable as the students, creating a much more mutually

inclusive relationship between teachers and students. Students know that they

are being held responsible for their classmates, teachers, and communities.

Because both students and teachers are held at the same level of expectation,

all classroom participants seek to challenge systems of inequality (Cozart and

Gordon 13). This ethic of risk establishes a sense of obligation to change the

school system and to see the education system as one place of inequality.

Cozart and Gordon suggest that "teachers who have adopted an ethic of risk

rooted in womanist caring do not expect such immediate success. Instead,

teachers with an ethic of risk expect the challenges and frustrations that surely

arise in the process of transforming schools" (14). These authors note that the

process is difficult and requires endurance. Similarly, Beauboeuf-Lafontant

argues, "Thus, informed by an ethic of risk, womanist caring encourages

educators to see their action as a humble, yet essential, contribution to an

extensive, collaborative, and enduring project of social change" ("Womanist

Experience" 83). In sum, teachers must understand that their efforts may not yield the immediate desired results; however, working to dismantle and unmask inequality is worth the effort.

Womanist theory embraces embodiment of self-care. In their piece titled, "Womanist Spirituality as a Response to the Racism-Sexism Double Bind in African American Home," authors Carmen Braun Williams and Marsha Wiggins suggest that:

> Womanist theory emphasizes emotional wholeness, psychological strength, resilience, and a unique spirituality—and the ways these attributes are central to African American women's historical struggles. Interconnection, particularly among women, is another important aspect of womanism." (Canon 181)

Braun Williams and Wiggins highlight emotional wholeness, resilience, and spirituality as aspects of womanist theory that are pertinent to Black women's experiences. As noted previously, much of what is written about womanist pedagogy focuses on narratives and oral histories but does not explicitly discuss emotional wholeness and self-care as a means to psychological strength, emotional wellness, and spirituality. These methods of research can be womanist because they demonstrate the validity of experience as a form of knowledge production. Existing literature on womanist pedagogy (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, Cozart and Gordon, and Davis) does good work in defining how the womanist identity of the instructor impacts their ideas about teaching. The area that still

39

needs further discussion is how womanism translates into praxis—the "how to" aspect of teaching. Additionally, I note several aspects of womanist theory that are (at best) minimally discussed in the literature on womanist pedagogy. While discussions of personal acts of self-care, political efficacy, and an ethic of risk are present in womanist theory, they are not as present in womanist pedagogy.

Womanist Idea, Womanism, Womanist Worldview, and Pedagogies

Womanist theorists across disciplines have defined womanist pedagogy and shared their specific experiences, narratives, and ideas on how a pedagogy based on womanism operates differently from conventional pedagogies. Historically, womanist pedagogy has most commonly been discussed as a means of survival for members of the Black community. Specifically, the narratives of Black women teachers are shared in order to demonstrate how womanist pedagogy has already functioned to empower students and communities. In her book *Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*, Canon provides a specific discussion of the roots of womanist pedagogy. She argues:

> Womanist pedagogy emerges out of this experience of Black women challenging conventional and outmoded dominant theological resources, deconstructing ideologies that led us into complicity with our own oppression. Seminary-trained African American women began inventing

opposable-thumb processes by problematizing the 'obvious' to create

alternative ways of conceptualizing the 'natural.' (Canon 137)

As Cannon suggests, the practice of womanist pedagogy seeks to challenge

dominant discourse and invite discussions of other ways of knowing. While she is

specifically rooted in her own field, womanist scholars in other academic fields

express these sentiments as well (Phillips and McCaskill, Williams, and Reid[14]).

Canon continues her discussion by drawing a connection between

womanist pedagogy and womanist theology. She explains, "The imperative

suggested by this pedagogy is an engaged scholarship that leads us to resist

domination through mindful activism and helps all of us to live more faithfully the

radicality of the gospel" (138). Canon is highlighting how a womanist pedagogy

can work within a theological paradigm. In her article "Womanist Theology: Black

Women's Voice," Delores S. Williams further discusses the principles of

womanist theology that are embedded in the literature on womanist pedagogy.

These concepts translate to the practice of teaching in the narratives discussed

by scholars like Beauboeuf-Lafontant. What is consistent in the scholarship is

that theology has played a role in the survival of the Black community and so it

should be recognized as a valid epistemological thread. As stated earlier, I view

theology as one facet under the larger umbrella of spirituality.

---

[14] All authors from the anthology *The Womanist Reader.*

Womanist pedagogy embraces spirituality, theology, religion, and many forms of spiritual practice. While some womanist pedagogues may focus on Afro-Christian spirituality or theology, there are other definitions of spirituality as well. Aspects of womanist theology and spirgitualtiy exist in some womanist pedagogy scholarship. Williams suggests that "[T]wo of the principal concerns of womanist theology should be survival and community building and maintenance. The goal of this community building is, of course, to establish positive quality of life—economic, spiritual, educational—for black women, men, and children" (120). Important to this discussion, and true for the broader scholarship of womanist pedagogy, is the concern for survival and wellbeing for all people. This concern is holistic and touches on economics, spirituality, and education. I will also discuss spirituality throughout my interviews and findings. This observation is crucial as it helps demonstrate what makes a pedagogy based on womanism different from feminist pedagogy.

Prominent Characteristics of Womanist Pedagogy

I highlight how womanist pedagogy redefines student/teacher relationships, acknowledges different lived experiences as legitimate ways of knowing, and encourages critical awareness of social issues in students. Examining these characteristics not only provides a clearer understanding of womanist pedagogy and its core components, but also forms post-oppositional womanist pedagogy implications by bringing attention to the areas for growth.

Another characteristic of womanist pedagogy is the value it places on lived experience. By valuing multiple realities as part of the learning process, womanist pedagogues broaden what counts as "legitimatized" ways of knowing in the classroom. Womanism recognizes the larger impact of social injustice as well as the potential for social change through operating in an understanding of relationality and connection. In her essay "Giving Voice: An Inclusive Model of Instruction—A Womanist Perspective," Vanessa Sheared explains that the "womanist perspective shapes the both/and reality into a connected polyrhythmic whole. We no longer see ourselves as separate beings but as communal spirits" (272). As expressed by Sheared, womanism observes interconnections among differently situated people and challenges the individualistic culture that is pervasive in the United States. Sheared explains the ways a womanist pedagogy operates within interconnectedness, stating, "The teacher allows students to seek and interpret their world and their words in a political, social, historical, and economics context. The self is understood in relation to its connectedness with others and their perceptions of reality. The process is a communal experience" (273). Womanist pedagogues approach learning from a larger context than the interpersonal logistics of the classroom. In this pedagogy, individual lived experiences contribute to the larger learning process.

Instead of solely depending on the dominant narratives present in conventional course materials, womanist pedagogy allows space for individual and collective stories. In *Womanist Lessons for Reinventing Teaching,*

Beauboeuf-Lafontant argues that "womanism both recognizes and interrogates the social realities of slavery, segregation, sexism, and economic exploitation this group has experiences during its history in the United States" (437). As Beauboeuf-Lafontant notes, womanism acknowledges and questions the intersections of identity and the systems that maintain oppressions. Specifically, as Beauboeuf-Lafontant claims, womanism focuses on the experiences of people of color, which is important because traditionally these experiences are overshadowed by hegemonic stories of whiteness. This is different from conventional pedagogy, because conventional teaching methods depend heavily on status-quo stories and texts that center white, male experiences and don't typically open up discussion to multiple realities.

Similarly, Davis provides a comparison of "the kitchen" and present-day academe in order to analyze how Black women navigate spaces from which they are traditionally excluded or barred. In reference to domestic labor and the movement between kitchen space and the rest of the master's house, Davis looks at how domestic workers used space as a means of survival. She explains that:

> Their collective experiences shaped their efforts to resist what Patricia Hill Collins terms the *interlocking system* of multiple oppressions-racism, sexism, and classism. In contemporary times some African American women scholars are using the conceptual framework of womanism to recover our traditions, to attain equality, and to give expression to our

social, political, and cultural contributions to American history and

scholarship. (Davis 365)

Davis highlights the significance of Black women in the academy, using

womanism as a means of bringing attention to the many ways Black culture has

contributed to history in the United States as well as scholarship.

Post-Oppositional Womanist Pedagogy and Society

Post-oppositional womanist pedagogy can create not only positive (and in

my opinion transformational) impact in classrooms and lives of classroom

participants, but it also can come at a cost. One complication (or source of

dissonance) described in the scholarship is that academic settings are typically

patriarchal in that they are androcentric and function on a scale of dominance.

The academy can also be highly self-serving and self-reliant in contrast to a

womanist pedagogy's focus on collective well-being. These characteristics

juxtaposed with conventional pedagogy and climate of academia often leave

womanist pedagogues feeling lost. Layli Phillips and Barbara McCaskill describe

it in the following way:

So the hardest part for many of us is not bringing womanist

pedagogy/womanist practices *into* anything. The difficulty is generating *out*

of self-reliant, self-serving academic societies, like the proverbial round

peg in the square hole, the responsibility for collective well-being,

women's and men's and the reliance upon each other that are second

nature to most contemporary womanist enterprises. (1014)

Navigating between working within an education system that does not

traditionally embrace womanist pedagogy because of patriarchal ideals and

practicing teaching methods that seemingly go against those expectations leaves

pedagogues feeling lost (or like they are failing). Phillips and McCaskill argue that

the academy creates an opposition between loyalty to academia (work) and

loyalty to community in that it

> pits us in an adversarial relationship that opposes home, family,
>
> neighborhood, church, and culture versus Quality Time on the PC for our
>
> focused, relevant, academic projects. This dichotomy stands as another
>
> exquisite marginalization that harms both black women and the academy.
>
> (1015)

As these authors assert, an oppositional, either/or dichotomy is created

particularly for women of color, and this limits how one can both progress in their

work and contribute to their community. As the literature indicates, community

progress is extremely valuable to womanist pedagogy. Attention to community

pigeonholes womanist pedagogues as people who dismiss discussions of

personal progress, such as work growth. Similarly, another place of contention is

the vulnerability embodied by womanist pedagogues.

In collegiate settings, many womanist pedagogues elect to have more

friendly/collegial types of relationships, as opposed to the "holder of all

knowledge" role seen in many conventional classrooms, with their students,

which redefines their own role as facilitators instead of knowledge providers in

their classrooms. Where as knowledge providers pass on information in a non-invititational way, a facilitator invites students to generate their own information based on the text, discussion, experience, and the students' own ways of understanding the world. In her essay "The Cultural Translator: Toward an Ethnic Womanist Pedagogy," Bonnie Tusmith explains, "When students are used to authoritarian teachers, they often react to an alternative teaching style based on collaborative learning with suspicion and resentment" (19). As Tusmith suggests, students grow accustomed to authoritative teaching. When a womanist teacher resists authoritative, patriarchal, and androcentric pedagogical styles it can lead to the pedagogue experiencing fatigue. Tusmith continues, "While I can fruitfully draw from feminist pedagogy as it is being developed, I must also keep in mind the race, ethnicity, and class are additional complicating factors which the feminist process cannot adequately address" (20). Tusmith brings attention to the elements that feminist pedagogy may sometimes but does not always address. Tusmith's vulnerability is a relatable testimony for others. My assumption is that many women of color pedagogues face the same realities in their own classrooms. As a woman of color, Tusmith must consider how her students' perception of race, ethnicity, and class complicate her role as instructor and may make her feel more vulnerable. Her racial and ethnic identities can also complicate the way students perceive her as both a person and as the professor. Tusmith highlights some positives as well as, noting what does not work for her

classroom. She grapples with the blatant realities for both her students and herself (24).

Tusmith encourages me and perhaps other womanist pedagogues to continue our unconventional practices.

She states, "Ethnic womanist pedagogy means change, innovation, and adaptation. It means devising ways of reaching hostile students who, out of fear or apathy, hide in the back of the room and whisper among themselves" (27). In other words, it might take more planning, thinking, and trial and error to create spaces of learning that can engage and encourage participation from those students who may feel like outliers, but what an achievement to be able to reach those students who would otherwise remain detached. Moreover, as we work to overcome these apparent obstacles, we invent new teaching tactics.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

> Womanism is a social change perspective rooted in Black women's and other women of color's everyday experiences 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 spiritual dimension.
>
> —Layli Phillips, "Womanism on its Own" xx

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

This project draws from existing literature and data from interviews to develop a more expansive womanist pedagogy that includes, in part, a post-oppositional approach to teaching. I believe that a post-oppositional approach to teaching can influence not only students and teachers, but also communities. I use the data I collected to focus expanding my perspectives on post-oppositionality as well as womanist pedagogy. To frame my study, I asked the following research questions: What makes a pedagogy womanist? How do womanists teach? How can womanism help foster a post-oppositional atmosphere in classrooms? More specifically, my dissertation seeks to understand how pedagogues believe womanism impacts and influences their teaching. Data was collected through qualitative interviews, which allowed my participants the space to tell their stories and me, the researcher to gather details that informed the research design and data analysis.

Research Design

The following information about the research design is broken up into two sections. The first, "Data Collection,"includes information on recruitment, participants, interviews, member checking, syllabi, and observation. The second, "Data Analysis,"includes a description of my coding process, the limitations of the study, and a brief review and conclusion.

Data Collection

A detailed discussion of how data was collected for this project is found below. As many qualitative researchers have explained, it was important to interview individuals who would provide the most information to answer my overall research questions (Josselson 15). This desire for finding interviewees who would provide the most information for my study led me to interview people who believed they embodied a womanist approach in their classrooms.

Recruitment

The specifics of the qualitative approach I used included theory-based sampling, which led me to select participants based on their "potential manifestation or representation of important theoretical constructs"—such as adopting a womanist worldview (Patton 238). In order to recruit participants, I sent out a call for participants via the women's studies listserv WMST-L, used my department's Facebook page to post the call, and shared the call on my own personal Facebook page.

I asked for self-identified womanist pedagogues who are currently teaching (or have taught within the last year) women's studies and/or courses cross-listed with WGS. I chose to focus on individuals who taught WGS or cross-listed courses because I was specifically looking for a narrow sampling and for participants who had the ability to bring womanist beliefs into their classrooms. I am aware that this may happen across multiple fields, but I know that womanist ideas can be and sometimes are welcomed specifically in WGS classrooms.

Because I lean on a broad definition of womanism that goes beyond identifying womanism exclusively with self-identified Black and/or women of color, I was open to accepting as participants any person who identifies as womanist and/or subscribes to a womanist worldview—including but not limited to women of all races, men, transfolk, and people of different religious, cultural, and economic backgrounds. After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, my goal was to conduct up to thirty semi-structured interviews either in person or via Skype or Google Hangouts. Participants were informed of the study's details and given a consent form. I conducted fourteen semi-structured interviews and at that point reached saturation (i.e., no new data coming in; Patton 36).

Participants

My original IRB document stated that I would seek up to thirty participants through posting a call on WMST-L, the women's studies listserv that is an

international email forum for people involved in WGS as teachers, researchers, librarians, administrators, and activists.

WMST-L comes out of the University of Maryland and is commonly used to request participants for research studies. However, relying exclusively on WMST-L did not produce sufficient interest or response even after several weeks, so revisions were made to my IRB to include my personal Facebook page as well as my department's Facebook pages for recruitment. I also knew prior to beginning the study that a maximum of up to thirty interviews might be difficult to achieve and that I would stop the interviews once I reached saturation. Of the fourteen interviews I conducted, most were held over the phone, some took place face-to-face, and only one occurred on Google Hangouts. Many of my participants used their commute for our interview, which made the phone most ideal. I talked with people in Texas, Florida, Wisconsin, Georgia, Massachusetts, North Carolina, and Alabama.

Seven of the participants were from my own department, two other participants attended my same institution but earned their doctorates in other departments, and the other five participants had no affiliation with my university. Although several of the participants came from my institution, they came from different demographic backgrounds. I interviewed two male-identified participants and the rest identified as female. Three interviewees identified as Black, one identified as Black and Indigenous, one identified as Jewish-American, one identified as Japanese-American, one identified as Iranian-American, one

identified as Latina, one identified as Hispanic, and five identified as Euro-American or white. Initial interviews ranged in time between twenty minutes to an hour and forty-five minutes.

Whether or not the participant knew me personally made a huge difference in the time spent on the initial interview. The participants who knew me personally had less to say, whereas the participants who did not know me spent much of our time giving me background information and context for their answers.

Interviews

Interviews seemed to be the best way to learn about womanist pedagogues and their teaching practices because I could listen to their stories, learn about their teaching practices, and potentially discover things that I would not be able to find in books or articles. Qualitative interviews provide a means to form relationships, really hear participants' stories, allow space for reflection and contemplation, and, for the researcher, an opportunity to sit with the responses and personal reflections (Josselson 13). Several themes, trends, and similarities were identified right away and are discussed with greater detail in the following chapter. At the recommendation of my first interviewee, an additional probe, which asked about self-care during the political climate of the study (the Trump presidency), was added to one of my questions.

Semi-structured interviews are designed to allow the interviewees less restrictions in their responses. I asked open-ended questions with the intention of allowing participants to share freely (Patton 354). The interviews all took place

during the fall semester of 2018, beginning in September and concluding in December.

 Interviews were always conducted during a convenient time for the interviewees. All interviews were recorded, and I also took notes during the interviews. As the interviewer, it is important for me to build rapport with participants. Patton suggests that this happens through reciprocity. My goal was to demonstrate respect towards participants and their stories by sharing a little about my own experiences, providing feedback, and displaying empathy and understanding during our interviews (366). For the interviews I asked the following questions:

1. How did you become interested in becoming an educator?

2. Tell me about your journey to calling yourself a womanist?

3. How do you explain the relationship between feminism and womanism?

4. How do you see womanism in your classroom? Can you give a specific example? probes: class discussion; disagreement; grading; lecture; assignments

5. Did you have teachers or professors that you would call womanist? If yes, tell me about them. If no, what makes you say that they weren't?

6. What are your experiences with students' self-care? How do you encourage them?

7. How do you engage in self-care? How do you practice self-care in the current political climate? How do you practice your own spirituality?

I downloaded all recorded interviews and sent them to a professional

company, GoTranscript, for transcription. This company hires individuals to listen

and transcribe recordings into Word documents. Patton writes that "transcribing

offers another point of transition between data collection and analysis as part of

data management and preparation" (441). Although I did not personally

transcribe each interview, I did listen to all recordings multiple times to ensure

that the transcribed versions matched. I also had to correct mistakes the

transcribers made and include words they missed. Immersing myself in the

words of my participants helped me begin to think about the general data

gathered. In order to validate my findings, I decided to do follow-up interviews for

member checking. Member checking typically happens through consulting

participants during the analysis process in order to validate findings (Saldaña

37). Because my study was more flexible than a strict social science project

(landing somewhere on a humanities-centered qualitative approach and

borrowing from social science methodology), revisiting my participants became

most valued as this allowed for more space for their voices.

Member Checking

Member checking or follow-up interviews happened after the initial

interviews were reviewed, themes and patterns were identified, and analysis

began. I sent out an email to all of the participants and asked if they would like to

participate in follow-up interviews. I also asked that they let me know how they

preferred to respond to my questions. Many responded that they would prefer

email, one responded that she would like to have a phone call, some never responded, and one said she did not have time at the moment.

It is important that my participants felt that my coding was an accurate representation of their repsonses. After confirming that they agreed with my codes and interpretation of the information they shared, I asked the following questions:

1. I heard a lot about community care when asking about self-care. What does "community care" look like to you? In your Personal life? In and outside of your classroom?

2. Do you demonstrate care to your students outside of the classroom (i.e., showing up to athletic events, award assemblies, writing recommendations, etc)? (please provide any examples)

3. Another term that came up multiple times was *Interrelatedness* or the connection between nature and human, human and human, human and spirit. Is this something you are mindful of in your own life? (please explain)
-Is interrelatedness something you see in your discussions or in your classrooms? Can you give me an example?

4. Based on previous interviews, I would say that my findings highlight community, spirituality (however practiced), and interrelatedness as pillars of womanist pedagogical practice. Do you agree?

5. Is there anything else you would like to add or suggest I consider?

Syllabi

In addition to the interviews and member checking, I requested a copy of a syllabus from all participants. I believe that reading through someone's syllabus gives insight into how they operate their class, their expectations of the students and themselves, how the course is designed, and what they as a teacher value for their classroom. I know that for my own classes I am intentional about the language used on my syllabus as well as the additional items included, such as a statement on maintaining a spirit of community, how our class discussions should remain respectful, and that students should always talk with me about anything that might hinder their ability to meet a deadline. Many but not all participants sent me a copy of current syllabi. I collected a total of eight syllabi, which I then reviewed to look for similarities, common language, and overlapping themes. While I do not have syllabi requirements from all of the institutions represented in my study, I believe many of the additional sections and the language give me more information about the teachers and their classes.

I studied the syllabi, did word searches for some of the common themes that arose in the interviews, and used a cross-platform application for analyzing data called Dedoose to catch any other similarities I may have overlooked. Upon completing syllabi analysis, the final phase of my research design was to perform classroom observations.

Observations

My final method of data collection was observation. I was able to attend one of my interviewee's classes. The reason I only attended one class was because this was the only face-to-face class taught by a local interviewee, and I was also five months pregnant with a high-risk pregnancy. Although I would have considered observing additional classes, as we moved to the next semester, the world was shut down due to the pandemic. (More details on this timeline are offered in the following chapter.) Universities were no longer meeting face-to-face, many of my interviewees were no longer teaching due to department budget cuts, many were dealing with the trauma of a global pandemic and did not feel comfortable having me observe an online class. In the fall of 2020, I again reached out to interviewees to see if anyone was teaching a class I might observe. There was only one positive response. Thankfully, this class was online at my own university. It was easy to get access to the course with permission from the interim department chair. I did not know any of the students in the course, and it gave me the opportunity to observe at least one more interviewee's class. I share my observations of both the face-to-face class and the online class in the next chapter.

Data Analysis

My project utilized qualitative content analysis (QCA) as its methodology. QCA is traditionally used in nursing; however, it is flexible and works in a number of disciplines. QCA is used to analyze "written, verbal, or visual communication

messages" (Elo and Kyngas 108.) I believe this type of analysis was a nice fit for my project as I had interviews, syllabi, and observations. QCA is also a "systemic approach based on analysing and interpreting text, providing a deeper meaning of the data" (Hyli et al. 3). Finding deeper meaning in the text seemed to be the most accurate approach for this project.

Open Coding

With QCA, open coding is used as a starting point in order to begin to see what emerges. In order to remain open to my participants' comments, insights, and stories, I pursued open coding (Patton 453-4). This type of data analysis is considered inductive. As Corbin and Strauss explain, "Qualitative analysis is typically inductive in the early stages especially when developing a codebook for or figuring out possible categories, patterns, and themes" (223). As these authors suggest, often qualitative analysis moves from specific examples to broader ideas especially during the coding process. I created codes to organize data in my code book (see Appendix A).

After open coding, my analysis process moved to codifying. Saldaña writes that "to codify is to arrange things into systemic order, to make something part of a system or classification, to categorize" (9). In other words, the process of codifying includes taking your codes and organizing them, breaking them down, and then creating groups. This process helps identify patterns and themes and eventually may lead to either discovering new theories or applying existing theory to the findings.

Initially I believed that to guide the organization of categories in this project I would use what Boeuboeuf-Lafont describes as the three pillars of womanist pedagogy: embracing the maternal, political clarity, and ethic of risk ("Womanist Experience" 81). However, the main categories of my study emerged as womanist ideology, a broader version of care, post-oppositionality, instruction, and spirituality. These categories came from the codifying process.[15] I discuss the codes as well as the categories below.

Womanist Ideology

Womanist Ideology was the category that was identified from two codes. The first code was womanist values which labeled any information that pertained to ethics or principles that align with womanist thought. The second code was womanist practice which labeled any actions or behaviors within the classroom or outside of the classroom that embrace womanism.

Care

Care was separated into the following categories for coding purposes: self-care, student care, and community care. Self-care included anything related to instructors caring for the self. Student care included anything related to caring for students whether it be their physical needs (i.e., food, rest, health), emotional needs, or academic needs. Community care referred to anything that impacted a larger group outside of the individual.

---

[15] See Appendices A and B.

Post-Oppositionality

Post-Oppositionality emerged in the codes regarding dialogue and interrelatedness. Dialogue focused on open discussions, and Interrelatedness focused on an acknowledgement of responsibility to another person, being, nature, or spirit.

Instruction

Instruction was a category that developed from three codes. Teaching inspiration was the first code used to label people or events that ignited passion for things related to teaching. Teaching practice was the second code that helped group any practice or decision or choice regarding classroom participants. Teaching assignments was the third code that highlighted anything related to classroom work and/or homework.

Spirituality

The category of spirituality came from three codes. The first code involved individual spirituality which means the instructor's personal spiritual practice or beliefs. The second code was classroom spirituality which described how students bring their own spiritual practices or beliefs into the classroom. Lastly, spiritual assignments was the code that labeled any assignment that might engage a spiritual practice. For example: meditation, lovingkindness, journaling, walks in nature, and mindfulness.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter briefly discusses the analysis portion of my study and

provides greater detail regarding my findings. In the analysis section there is a

short overview describing how I arrived at my findings. In the section following

analysis, I provide biographical sketches of each of my participants, write-ups of

my classroom observations, the overarching themes of my data collection, and

participant quotes that support those themes.

Analysis

During my analysis my data was organized into themes and categories to

support the content outcomes by helping to clarify my findings—which describes

the process of performing content analysis. As Michael Q. Patton suggests, "any

qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of

qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings"

(453) describes the process of analyzing qualitative data. I used this process in

order to identify the ways womanist teachers intend on applying womanism in

their classrooms. Another important aspect of this analysis is to identify any

missing information regarding self-care or other values of womanist theory in

womanist pedagogy discourse. To be more specific, missing information that can

help to offer a critique about the lack of discussion in womanist pedagogy which

62

specifically addresses post-oppositional womanist pedagogies. I believe this to be a gap in scholarship and an important element of pedagogy and womanism that needs to be discussed explicitly.

Triangulation in Analysis

Multiple forms of data collection were used for triangulation,[16] including member checking, review of syllabi, and observation. By member checking I ensured that the interpretation of the data from interviews was accurate. In order to perform a document analysis, I collected syllabi from eight interviewees. Reading through the documents closely, I looked for commonalities across the syllabi and noted how these codes and categories correlated with the data from interviews. Then, I visited two of my interviewees' classes for observation.

Findings

As indicated in my appendices, my codes lead to categories which then became my themes. The four main themes of my study are as follows: (1) womanism draws people in/feels more welcoming because of the spiritual component; (2) spirituality is an important aspect of personal choices, pedagogical choices, and the shaping of worldviews for womanist; (3) self-care and community care are deeply connected; and (4) dialogue and an

---

[16] Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Patton 1999).

understanding of interconnectedness or interrelatedness are components of post-oppositional pedagogies.

Biographical Sketches of Participants

Although in this chapter's subsection "Moving from Codes to Categories to Themes. I go into greater detail regarding each theme and the supporting categories and codes, I now provide brief biographical sketches of each of the fourteen interviewed participants in order to establish an understanding of their identities. This description includes demographic information, information shared during our interviews, and my personal interpretation of each individual. Most of the participants chose or were assigned a pseudonym, but real names were used when requested.

Amanda, a white-identified woman located in North Texas, serves as a visiting professor and adjunct. She teaches WGS courses as well as yoga. She is very interested in embodiment and spirit. Amanda identifies as a witch, and one of her favorite spiritual practices is tending to her altar. She has taught English composition courses, the introductory to women's studies course, Feminist Theory, upper-level undergraduate courses such as Womanist Spiritual Activism, as well as graduate courses such as Ecofeminism, Feminist Pedagogy, and a variety of yoga classes. Her teaching experience stretches over nine years. She loves animals. Her research has focused on do-it-yourself (DIY) endeavors, food, and blogging.

Carla, another white-identified participant located in North Texas, sees spirit in all things and, thus, does not differentiate spiritual from secular. She has a strong affinity for nature, animals, books, and trees. As a graduate teaching assistant, she has taught courses in women's studies for eight years, including Gender and Social Change, Feminist Theory, and Womanist Spiritual Activism, as well as English composition courses. Carla has been a guest in my classes, where she has guided students through compassionate listening workshops. Her research focuses on contemplative practices in the classroom, and this fact is evident in her teaching practices and assignments.

Diana is a Latina-identified woman located in Florida who embodies a free spirit. She has a love for creativity, poetry, and menstrual art. As a graduate teaching assistant, she teaches classes in women's studies such as Gender and Social Change and US Women of Colors. Diana has also taught the Freshman Experience class and assisted with a rhetoric course. She also teaches English to students overseas. At the time of the interview, her teaching experience spanned eight years. Her research focuses on menstruation and the taboo culture that surrounds it.

Elaine is the most seasoned participant. At the time of the interview, she was located in Massachusetts, had forty-two years of teaching experience, and had a wealth of knowledge. She continues to teach as an adjunct. Elaine has a background in psychology and has spent years in practice. Her teaching has mostly covered topics such as feminist theories and therapy. She embraces fully

the values of womanism although does not identify as a womanist. She is of Jewish descent and openly discussed her radical views and beliefs.

Ida's story was most inspirational to me. She has spiritual and religious beliefs similar to my own. Ida lives in Georgia and teaches at a historically Back college. She was also just about to defend her dissertation and had been teaching for approximately seven years. I know she taught courses in her communication department that were focused on social justice. She calls herself a womanist scholar, and as a Black woman believes that being a womanist was pertinent to her career. Ironically, Ida came to learn about other womanist scholars from a white male professor, and she is grateful to him for helping her find her "home."

Jamie is Iranian and white and resides in North Carolina. She explained in her interview her progress and growth into a much more spiritually aware life. She embraces a vegan lifestyle and enjoys yoga, physical activity, and her community. Jamie has been teaching as a graduate teaching assitant for eight years. Her teaching experience in women's studies has been broad: She has taught several undergraduate courses including Gender and Social Change, Feminist Theory, and Womanist Spiritual Activism. She also mentioned that she uses a variety of assignments, such as a gratitude assignment, journaling, yoga, and mindfulness—all spiritual practices she encourages her students to explore throughout the semester.

Kari is a white-identified woman who teaches at two universities in North Texas. She teaches as a graduate assistant at one university and adjuncts for the other. At these universities she teaches undergraduate classes such as Feminist Theory, Womanist Spiritual Activism, Gender and Social Change, Feminist Foundations, and Women of Colors Feminism. At the time of the interview, she had nine years of teaching experience. During the interview Kari expressed some resistance to spirituality as it relates to religion (i.e., scripture, prayer, clergy) because of her interpretation of her strict oppressive Catholic background; however, she actively practices other forms of spirituality such as meditation and yoga. Kari was friendly yet reserved, and it seemed that she felt the need to be guarded. Despite this reservation, I learned that she loves dogs, is learning about spirituality, and enjoys travel.

Leo, a Hispanic man with a background in criminal justice, lives in South Texas. As of the interview he had been teaching for nine and a half years. His experience in teaching broadly covers psychology, sociology, criminal justice, and women's studies topics. At the time of the interview, he was teaching a course on Gender, Crime, and Justice. Leo is interested in the scholar Gloria Anzaldúa, having learned to love her work in graduate school. He has a deep love for family and believes in caring for and honoring his elders. Leo calls his grandmother his best friend and happily visits her regularly. Part of his dedication to family is cultural, and he believes dedication to family and culture is also important to his students.

Linda is a self-identified white woman located in Wisconsin. At the time of the interview, she had fifteen years of teaching experience and worked at a very unique institution that focuses on educating the whole person by providing living and learning communities for all students. Linda works closely with her colleagues to help each student grow and learn at their own pace. Her classes are very small; students live in small learning communities, are graded on their own individual progress, are taught life skills beyond book knowledge, and become more like family than classroom participants. At this all-women school, Linda has taught introductory WGS classes, Women in Leadership, and women's history courses.

Marcus is a Black man who teaches in Massachusetts. At the time of the interview, he had seven years of experience teaching sociology and was focused on bringing social justice into each class. He took many WGS courses in graduate school, and his attention to womanist-informed pedagogies was obvious in his teaching practices. One of the most amazing things I learned from Marcus was that he keeps in mind each student's personal life details, especially if he knows how specific details might impact their studies. He was flexible with due dates and checked in with his classes often.

Melody is a white woman who lives and teaches in Wisconsin. At the time of the interview, she had eleven years of teaching experience. Melody is very aware of her need to be transparent with her students and does not try to hide her own life experiences. With her classes, she openly discusses her mood,

struggles, and triumphs, and allows students space to share their own. Melody's interview lasted the longest of all my interviews because she had so much to say and share.

Star, who identifies as Japanese and white, is located in North Texas. An artist who has taught women's studies courses as well as art classes, Star is pleasant and calming, genuinely cares for her students, and made it evident that her strongest desire is for them to succeed in her courses. Star has taught undergraduate women's studies courses such Gender and Social Change, Feminist Theory, and US Women of Colors. She also has experience teaching classes for the art department. At the time of the interview her teaching experience spanned nine years.

Susie Kelly identifies as Black and Indigenous and lives in North Texas. She is the only participant who is an ordained minister. She has a calm and welcoming presence. Susie Kelly has taught several women's studies courses including Gender and Social Change, US Women of Colors, and Womanist Spiritual Activism. She has also taught English classes. Her teaching experience spanned nine years at the time of the interview. She was truly inspirational because of the rhetoric she utilizes in her classroom spaces. Embracing the term from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., she refers to her students as "beloved community" and also uses different languages and cultures in creating names for class group names, which I share later on in this chapter.

Tamara is an openly queer Black woman living in Georgia. She comes from a diverse spiritual and religious background. She seemed very open and uninhibited by social expectations. Tamara explained the types of conversations that happen in her classroom. At the time of the interview, Tamara had been teaching for at least eight years. She held a lecturer position after completing her Ph.D. Tamara loves using popular culture in her classroom as a starting point for important conversations. Dialogue seems to hold a lot of value for her. Her courses centered around race, gender, and power.

Observations

I was able to observe only two of my interviewees' classes, for reasons explained below. The first class that I observed was in December 2019. This was a face-to-face English composition class taught by Carla. The next class observation took place during the fall semester of 2020 and was an online art class taught by Star. In between these two observations, a lot of things happened both to me personally and to society in general. In late February 2020 I was hospitalized due to complications with my pregnancy and stayed through the first week in March when my son was born. He immediately was taken to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) and stayed there for nine days. When my baby was released from the NICU and we both went home, the COVID-19[17]

---

[17] COVID-19 is the official name of the coronavirus pandemic that spread globally, created complete shutdowns of countries, eliminated social gatherings and interactions of any kind, closed schools, forced everyone to stay at home by legal orders in the spring/winter of 2020, and has continued in some places during the beginning of 2021.

pandemic was just beginning. My newborn son and I were essentially released from the hospital into a shut-down, quarantined world. I was adjusting to life with a newborn, recovering from a C-section, and working through Postpartum post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and severe anxiety, and universities across the nation had transitioned to only online teaching. By the fall of 2020 the world was trying to recover and learn how to move forward through this pandemic, and I felt well enough to seek out another class to observe. After sending an email request to my participants, it became apparent that Star was the only one who was willing and also one of the very few actually teaching a class that semester. The fact that Star taught at my institution was also a bonus: She was teaching an online class via Canvas,[18] and because I already had a Canvas account as an instructor, it was easy for her to add me as an observer in her online course.

While I would have preferred to have observed a third class taught by an interviewee, I had to accept that I would only be able to observe two. Other interviewees were at different institutions where I would not have been able to be added easily to an online class, many no longer had jobs teaching (due to the pandemic), and some did not reply to my request. What follows are my teaching observations. The first one is written in more of a creative writing style, written during my in-person observation. I chose to use a creative approach in order to

---

[18] Canvas is a web-based educational learning platform typically used for online courses.

recreate the experience for my readers. The second is reflection drawn from my notes and written in a style more in alignment with the rest of the chapter because it is based on only my virtual experience and not an in-person account.

First Observation: December 2019

It had been a while since I stepped foot on my old campus. Even longer since I had walked into the Arts and Sciences Building. I used to teach and take classes in this building, and all of those memories hit me in the face as soon as I walked in and was greeted by the building's familiar scent. I stood still at the entrance because, being pregnant, I needed to catch my breath after walking up the entrance stairs. The building's air smelled, as always, like burnt popcorn. I wasn't disgusted by the smell. This time it smelled like a warm "welcome back." Like the microwave in the lounge was expecting me and made sure to burn a little popcorn along with the lunches it was warming up that day.

As I found my way to the classroom, I crossed paths with an old colleague in the hallway and shared a smile and brief chat. When I entered Carla's classroom, I saw that she was already present at her desk. The classroom was very bright and warm. It was early December, and the heat was on in the building. Students were just returning from Thanksgiving break, and the sun shone brightly through the blinds. There were five rows where sleepy students were squinting their eyes behind computers. I greeted them with boxes of donuts as a "thank you" gesture for sharing their space with me that day. Lots of eyes brightened up as they happily grabbed their choice of donut.

Carla introduced me to the students, explaining that I was observing the class for my project but that I would not be talking to any of them. She then continued with her welcome to the class. Her tone was friendly, gentle yet assertive, and positive. Carla embodied both a personal anxiousness and outward compassion that seemed obvious to me. I believe the students picked up on her energy and embraced the compassion she showed. She used the beginning of class to ask if anyone had traveled anywhere recently, and if anyone had any fun plans for the following weekend. She patiently waited for replies and listened as they shared. She then moved onto discussion about assignments. She told the students that she had a hard time assessing their work, not because they did poorly, but because she wished she wasn't obligated to assess and provide grades. She took responsibility for students missing some assignment requirements and expressed her flexibility in grading. She also reminded them that there were multiple options for submitting work and that she would accept assignments in different ways.

Carla then moved into the plan for the day by talking about the new assignment. She first spent approximately ten minutes defining a "zine.[19]" Instead of lecturing at students, Carla opened the conversation and encouraged questions and dialogue. She then presented a brief PowerPoint that thoroughly explained the goal of the assignment and shared an applicable video. This took

---

[19] A zine is a "self-published photocopied magazines" (Downes 9).

up maybe thirty minutes of the class time, but never felt rushed. She encouraged creativity on any level and affirmed to the students that however they choose to participate would be acceptable. She also provided materials such as old magazines, blank paper, markers, scissors, glue sticks, and tape to be used in zine building.

After the students expressed their many opinions about this assignment through words, body language, or sighs, they all got to work. Carla remained invitational and open by encouraging students to use this activity to manifest positivity and let go of negativity. She reminded them that activities like this can be healing and therapeutic. She reassured them that they didn't have to share their work with anyone else or provide an explanation of their work and that personal reflection is completely appropriate for this assignment.

I could see that many students were eager to process and create. Some were nervous and unsure of what they would do. Carla continued to provide a smile, walking around the room as a constant presence, talking to students privately and offering praise for their work. She even gently laid a hand on some of their backs and provided mini pep talks to those who needed it. I hadn't known what to expect from an English composition class, and honestly, I wasn't excited about only having this one class as an option for observation. I did, however, know what to expect from Carla. I knew from my interview that she would demonstrate some type of kindness and compassion towards her students and that is exactly what she did.

Second Observation: Fall 2020

Star's online class was second course that I was able to observe, and observing it brought so much to my attention. First, I realized how much I loved teaching and honestly missed it as I had taken time off to focus on mothering. I also was able to see just how much students have been affected by the pandemic. Star structured her online course very intentionally. She provided space for students to openly discuss, via writing, their reflections and resources regarding what Star termed the *triple pandemic*. This triple pandemic includes racial trauma and economic stress as well as COVID-19. She also recorded videos, shared PowerPoints, used Open Educational Resources (OER) instead of assigning a costly textbook, had a variety of assignment types, and made sure to emphasize that the most important thing for her was that her students were well and that she could help them succeed in her course. I really liked that she recorded a welcome video in which students could see her, hear her voice, and follow along with images from Canvas. In the video, she is soft-spoken but assertive, kind and warm, and definitely not intimidating. Her concern and care for students appeared genuine. Star also provided a video to help students learn how to navigate Canvas because the university had recently made the switch to Canvas and because this was an introductory first-year course, some or many of the students may not have been familiar with the teaching platform.

In the discussion board focused on the triple pandemic, I saw students discussing the financial hardships COVID-19 had created. They discussed issues

like where to get free food and how long it would last. It broke my heart to think about other classes in which instructors may not be concerned about the students' physical needs. How can students be expected to produce work if they aren't eating? Womanist pedagogy is concerned with students' physical needs.

The course was virtually interactive. Star included links for each week containing items such as videos, websites, PDFs, slide shows, and other content for different types of learning. Each week had a specific module where students could find everything they needed for that week. For example, the week one module had a syllabus, a welcome video, a syllabus video, a video on navigating Canvas, and the first assignment link. Week two had an outline for the week, the readings, a slide lecture, a website link, information on how to embed images into the discussion board posts, and the link for the discussion board.

During this semester, I struggled with Postpartum PTSD and had to dedicate time for therapy twice a week. We also moved homes, and I dealt with major sleep loss. My writing time had to pause as I focused on myself. It was also difficult to make detailed notes about an online class in the same way that I could with a face-to-face class. My overall summary remained the same, though: Both instructors embodied womanist ideals, demonstrated deep care for their students as humans first, exhibited patience and flexibility, and wholeheartedly desired success for each student in their courses. Beyond these results from my observations, the thematic analysis from my interviews also brought many insights.

Moving from Codes to Categories to Themes

As noted in my code book (see Appendix A), the codes I used in my coding process were as follows: teaching inspiration, teaching practice, assignments, self-care, student care, community care, dialogue, interrelatedness, individual spirituality, classroom spirituality, spiritual assignment, womanist values, and womanist practice. During the codifying process these codes led to broader categories such as instruction, care, post-oppositionality, spirituality, and womanist ideology.

I was advised to create a concept map that could identify the many ways these things overlapped and related to one another (see Appendix B). Creating this map helped me see code co-occurrences and connections. This conceptual map allowed overarching themes to emerge and become more obvious. The final process of codifying led to the discovery of four main themes: (1) womanism draws people in/feels welcoming because of the spiritual component; (2) spirituality[20] is an important aspect of personal choices, pedagogical choices, and worldviews; (3) self-care and community care are deeply connected; and (4) dialogue and an understanding of interconnectedness/interrelatedness are components of post-oppositional pedagogies. In the sections to follow, I discuss

---

[20] Spirituality, as discussed previously is consciousness of relationships in both the physical world and spiritual realm including but not limited to things such as meditation, mindfulness, and prayer.

these themes and provide quotes from my interview participants that support my recognition and development of the main themes that emerged from my data.

Theme One: Womanism Draws People in and Feels Welcoming because of the Spiritual Component

Many interviewees explained that they were pulled towards womanism because it embraces a spiritual component no matter how each of them defines spiritualty. How each individual practiced their spirituality would be accepted in womanism and this spiritual acceptance made womanism appealing. As previously mentioned, all participants mentioned spirituality in some way, but not in the same way. For some there was overlap with their religious beliefs and for others religion and spirituality were very different. For all participants, spirituality covered their practices of doing good, whether through prayer, meditation, yoga, maintaining an alter, or whatever ways they chose to engage in spiritual practice. Womanism as theory in praxis allows space for spirit and escapes the secular/nonsecular divide. Here are some important quotes from our interviews that help support this main theme.

When asked the question "tell me about your journey to womanism," Tamara answered, "[…] there were some things about womanism that in particular talked about spirituality and other theoretical orientations." Much like Tamara, Susie Kelly answered the same question with the following statement:

There's been some tension with women of color and feminism which was why there were offshoots of feminism. Like Black feminism, Indigenous,

Asian feminism, et cetera, but the main component of womanism that is

vitally important to me is the embrace of the spiritual component. That for

me really cultivated womanism.

As Susie Kelly reiterated, the spiritual component of womanism was vitally

important to her. She identifies as a minister and fully embraces her religious

beliefs as part of her spirituality.

On a different side of the spectrum, Carla, who sees spirituality as a part

of everything but does not identify with any religion, explained that "another

difference is womanism is more inclusive of spiritual component than feminism, I

don't see that much in feminist work." Likewise, Amanda who calls herself a witch

stated:

I think that the biggest thing in it for me is that womanism is more

spiritually based than feminism, not that feminism isn't spiritual. I think that

a lot of feminism is really secular especially like liberal feminism, but I

think the second biggest thing is that womanism really focuses on

transformation and feminism seems to me to focus more on problems and

solving the problems. Whereas womanism has this really interconnected

transformative worldview. It's more a transformative justice.

Amanda's comment expressed womanism as more spiritually open which

provides the possibility of transformation, and as not prioritizing any one type of

oppression or marginalization above another. For those who know themselves to

be marginalized, realizing that all forms of oppression are harmful and that all

forms of oppression should be recognized and acknowledged is an excellent starting point in understanding or empathizing with others.

The work womanists do to be aware of many types of oppression is connected to spirituality. Drawing attention to the inclusiveness of womanism as one aspect that she appreciates, Star commented: "I think that the inclusiveness of womanism, as well as its history and roots, and women of colors' lives, and perspectives, and experiences, really resonated with me." On a note similar to Star's, Jamie said:

> Womanism is a lot more about the anti-oppression of all beings, of all people, and nature, the environment and this holistic wellness that can be fostered in relationships and in our other relationships, personal relationships, professional relationships, and interpersonal relationship. They are very much based on how we treat people, how we treat ourselves, which is ultimately the most important foundation for creating social change.

Jamie pointed to some very important characteristics of womanism. First, she noted that womanism isn't only about challenging systems of oppression that impact humans, but challenging systems of oppression that also impact all beings including animals and spirit. This concern for nature and environment is spiritual for many. Similar to Jamie's views, Kari explained that

> I always point out that whereas feminism has historically believed in a fundamental oppression of sexism, womanism is embracing all forms of

oppression. I feel like feminism is really trying really hard to be womanism.

It's trying to be intersectional. Womanism doesn't have to try to be

intersectional because it already is. [21]

Differently stated, Kari's point is that many versions womanism have always

worked for justice in all areas, for all beings, and as such addresses any type of

injustice while also continuing to connect to the spirituality.

Womanism recognizes the larger impact of social injustice as well as the

potential for social change by operating through an understanding of relationality

and connection. Put differently, womanism allows space for you, me, us, them,

our collective stories, and the individual stories too. Attention to the connections

and the way stories, even individual ones, are interrelated and share

commonalitites highlights how social change is necessary for all. In *The*

Womanist Reader, Vanessa Sheared's essay, "Giving Voice: An Inclusive Model

of Instruction—A Womanist Perspective," discusses womanist pedagogy.

Sheared explains, "The womanist perspective shapes the both/and reality into a

connected polyrhythmic whole. We no longer see ourselves as separate beings

but as communal spirits" (272). In other words, womanism acknowledges lived

experiences and the fact that realities often overlap and intersect. Womanism

observes interrelatedness and interconnectedness among these realities,

---

[21] This is a great statement but does not also acknowledge that some forms of womanism may not be very intersectional.

challenging the individualistic culture discussed in chapter one, the individualism that Keating asserts as pervasive in the United States.

Theme two: Spirituality is an Important Aspect of Personal Choices, Pedagogical Choices, and Shaping a Worldview

Womanist pedagogues approach learning from a larger context than the classroom or the textbooks. In womanist pedagogy, individual experiences contribute to the larger learning process.There is no expectation that only textbooks and status-quo stories, are the only realities or possibilities. In discussing the ways through which interviewees individually practice spirituality and how they include spiritual assignments in their courses, it became very obvious that spirituality, or the recognition of spirit, played a large role in how my participants discussed their worldviews and their pedagogical choices. Whether spirituality meant religion, meditation, or just living in awareness and connection with the rest of the world, participants discussed spirituality as part of their worldview. Speaking of her own life, Star explained that "in terms of practicing spirituality, I think that meditation is useful. Then also, just I don't know, being out in nature." She continued by expanding on the discussion of nature and how she feels an energy that makes her feel more connected to the world. On a similar note, Melody mentioned, "I yoga a lot. Yoga has become the thing that doesn't take other people to manage my pain." She went on to talk about how yoga has truly changed her life, and even though there are other things like oils and massage that help manage her physical pains, it seems that yoga has made the

biggest difference. Moving from personal spirituality to classroom spirituality and students, Kari said:

> I actually try to make them [students] talk about where they are in the semester, how they're feeling. Even in the face-to-face classes, we'll sometimes do meditations just to center ourselves or to relax ourselves. That opens the door, and then they start coming into class talking about it, 'I don't feel good today, I could really use some meditation.'"

In other words, students begin to notice the positives of spiritually based practices like meditation and yoga. They begin to recognize when they need to practice one or more of these methods, and they ask for them. Outside the classroom, Jamie took the conversation in a new direction as she discussed spirituality as an important part of her worldview. She stated:

> Self-care and spirituality are very deeply linked. Simply because things like meditating, yoga, and journaling are all about connection for me, about connecting these separate parts of myself, whether I'm connecting to other people in a room, or whether I'm connecting to my body during a physical practice. Exercise is a huge part of my spirituality, the food that I put into my body. I maintain a plant-based diet so I don't eat any animals or animal byproducts, and that is very important to my spirituality because it's my personal beliefs around interconnectedness.

Again, Jamie emphasized her personal beliefs and choices and the ways that these things are connected not only to her self-care but are also a part of her spirituality.

While these few quotes are not an extensive list of responses, they]highlight the significance of spirituality as being a large part of participants' own personal choices, their pedagogical choices, and their worldviews. They are a small sample of the many quotes that also express the same or similar sentiments.

Theme Three: Self-Care and Community Care are Deeply Connected

Another important theme was the significance of self-care and community care as intrinsically intertwined. When discussing self-care, many of the conversations immediately mentioned community care. One participant, whose identity will remain anonymous in this section only, even mentioned that part of her self-care was being able to check in with her community. At the time of the interview, there was a nationwide hearing in which a university professor was reliving her sexual assault in the public eye. This participant said she felt best about being able to call her friends and ask, "How are you doing with the trial?" instead of focusing on her own trauma from sexual assault.

I was amazed to learn about the many ways all of my participants emphasized that their own self-care truly involves caring for others. These realizations lead me to understand that the reason we do not read much about self-care in womanist pedagogy is because womanist pedagogues do not see

self-care as separate from community care. Not only is this belief post-oppositional in my own interpretation, but it is also the antithesis of the hyper-individualism mentioned earlier. Self-care and community were considered almost inseparable, as evident in this quote from Jamie:

Most currently my favorite form of self-care is engaging the people in my community. Community has been really core to me at this point in my life because I recently moved from Texas to North Carolina. I'm in the stages now where I don't really have my core group of people that I have had for so many years around me to just fall back on. I'm in the process right now of developing connections in the community so that I can sort of build up that support system.

For Jamie, her community was a crucial aspect of her self-care and she realized that it is where her support lies. In the same vein, Melody discussed the value of her community, noting that:

I just turned thirty-six, and I now live in a world where I have a number of people who, if I was struggling or if I needed something, all I would have to do is text or call and say, "I need you to tell me I'm worthy." They'll be like, "Oh, my god you're so worthy. Here are twenty-seven million reasons why you're worthy." You know what I mean? You're not doing that self-care alone, that you have this network. I have literally people, Jennifer, who will message me for no reason. My Amanda will message me and say, "I just wanted to remind you that you're doing a great job today." We live thirteen

hours away and never get to see each other. She has no idea what I'm

doing today, but she knows I'm doing it well. [laughs] She wants me to

know I'm worthy.

As Melody explained, surrounding oneself with community is often crucial for

personal survival. It works both ways, as noted above, because the community

needs support too. Checking in with communities—whether it be friends, chosen

family, colleagues, students, or whomever—is important for both self-care and

community care. On this subject Tamara responded, "I make sure to surround

myself with people who believe in me." I also heard responses that really

highlighted the importance of having a group of close friends who shared similar

beliefs.

The classroom is also an important place to cultivate community. In her

book *Teaching with Tenderness*, Becky Thompson discusses the significance of

the classroom as a space that fosters a sense of belonging. Part of inviting

students to feel like they "belong" is being open to whatever emotions are

brought to the classroom. She says, "Allowing emotion—including grief that often

masquerades as anger—in the classroom suggests that people have some

collective responsibility to each other" (88). In other words, Thompson argues

that when the classroom becomes a place where everyone can express their

emotions freely, they also start to feel responsible for helping their community

work through those emotions.

Ida discussed relatability with students and the importance of safe(r)[22] classroom spaces. When discussing self-care with students, Ida explained that she may say something such as the following:

> "Hey, I've lost a parent as well or experienced a lot of loss." "I'm from the same community." "I understand what you're going through." That's a way of relating because a lot of them feel like nobody cares. I've had students that were suicidal, so we've intervened in different ways like that. Self-care is really big, like I said, with the population we have, it's just tremendous. We do things here that other colleges probably don't do. We have a retention team that just calls the students. We pull all in our division, go down each student and just call them periodically throughout the semester to encourage them. "Are you doing, okay? Are you working?" Like I said, self-care is a really big part of here.

Creating a place where students can relate and know that others have had similar struggles makes it more inviting for them. Speaking about her own self-care, Ida also remarked, "I think that's a form of self-care, deliberately finding those people and building relationships with them so that you all could be an outlet or a resource to one another." This idea translates to the classroom too. When a teacher is willing to be vulnerable, students are invitied to be vulnerable too. Likewise, in his follow-up interview, Leo said, "Community care is being

---

[22] I elected to use the term safe(r) spaces because I do not believe that it is possible to provide a space that can be fully safe for all people.

87

accountable and responsible to creating social change for one's self and others."

That is, when an individual creates space to hear about other struggles, they gain

a sense of responsibility to end those struggles whether it impacts their own life

or not.

It is so important to consider how those around us experience the world

through their lived realities and how our own choices or privileges impact others

and the world around us. In discussing commonweal, Maparyan asserts that,

"Commonweal is not predicated on homogeneity of identity or ideas but, rather,

on harmonious diversity and coordinated difference" (60). Commonweal is

concerned with the wellbeing of community. It is not individualistic. Commonweal,

or a concern for wellness among community, is demonstrated by Marcus as he

explained the following:

> I mostly relate to spiritual components like compassion and trust and
>
> forgiveness and love. It's just practicing those things. Even having this
>
> conversation with you about my class, it makes me think more about, is
>
> everything good for this person to be successful? Then, when I start to
>
> think about these things, and I start to find ways to make sure that people
>
> and students are getting what they need, it's exciting. Then it's like a form
>
> of self-care. Once you recognize that the self is made up of non-self-
>
> components, then you really start to see everything to have a direct impact
>
> on you and people around you. Then when I'm taking care of the tree, I'm

taking care of myself and the other people around me. This is my self-

care, I suppose.

To put it another way, for participants like Marcus, any form of caring becomes self-care. Whether this is demonstrated as caring for other people, animals, nature, or other non-self-parts of the world. Self-care is about caring outside of the self as much as it is about the self.

While somewhere in the back of my mind I knew going in that community was an important part of womanist pedagogy, I had not fully grasped the salience of community and communal care. In fact, this was a learning moment for me. I was so perplexed with why there was so little talk about self-care within scholarship concerning womanist pedagogy. I am almost embarrassed that I was so focused on the "self." I know that Lorde and Maparayan both emphasize the importance of taking care of oneself and that self-care is a radical act of activism, but I almost forgot about communal care. It was through my interviews that I first felt the reminder.

In connection to communal care, Linda described a group of faculty members who shared similar worldviews and goals for their classrooms, noting, "Other times, we engage in common reading, and we talk about that. By just having that safe space to do that reinvigorates my soul when other things happening might actually be depleting it." As Linda emphasized, having a community who supports and aligns their beliefs with yours is encouraging and

energizing. Again, in relation to the idea of community or communities, Diana posited:

> Then also just when I think of community now as a mom in relation to womanism, I think of things like kitchen table womanisms. Just the value of having women in your life that you can—yes, I stood up at the kitchen table and talked to you, but also the kind of symbolic kitchen table of just having discussions about family, about love, about partners. I think that it really—without community it can become just really lots of solitude which for some is an important part of self-care, but I think for me being alone is not the constant but it's what I do day-to-day. To have community really helps to just better myself overall. Not just "Oh I'm going to be better and stronger and all this," but just wellbeing, feeling fulfilled by sharing about your lives and stuff.

In other words, it is so important for survival and for growth simply to know that there are others who are invested in knowing about your everyday life, others with whom you can talk to about your relationships and family.

Lastly, I draw attention to what Melody shared regarding the ways that she cultivates a supportive classroom environment:

> I've got someone right now who's not turning in his work. I keep going to him, and he just keeps telling me how he's struggling and stuff. I'm like, "How can I be a support? How are you taking care of yourself? What can we do about this?" Also, very aware that there might not be anything to do

Then, you're just making it very clear to him, I'm not judging you as a

person, because you're not turning in your reflection. Do I want you to turn

in your reflection? Yes. Do I understand that you might have other things

going on that you need to take care of and put first and all of that? Yes, of

course. I think in those individualized mentor moments and modeling it

myself, I think that is the space I most promote self-care.

As Melody suggested, knowing what is going on in your students' lives and

remembering that they are people too is so important. They have jobs, families,

people they care for, and so much more going on. Just acknowledging these

things makes a difference. These were just a few of the many quotes that helped

shape the theme of self-care and community care as deeply connected. They are

intertwined in a way that is seemingly impossible to separate. I also loved

learning about the ways these pedagogues see their students as part of their

own community.

There is a sense of responsibility to take care of the students. I can

remember in my own teaching experience many times having discussions about

food and where students might access food. We also discussed regularly what

other services were available through our campus. I had students who would find

themselves homeless in the middle of the semester and need emergency

housing on campus. I have had students who did not receive student loan money

for textbooks and would need free access from a library copy. I have had single

mothers who desperately needed diapers and did not know where to go to obtain

them. There are so many examples of situations where students just needed someone to listen and be on their side. I have spent many office hours, as well as time before or after class and time outside my office hours to just listen, look up information, serve as a guide for resources, or even walk a student down to the counseling offices. As a teacher and as a womanist, these are just some examples of what one might do. We find ways to help without stepping outside of the boundaries placed on us from the institution. We find ways to show we care.

Theme Four: Dialogue and an Understanding of Interconnectedness or Interrelatedness are Components of Post-Oppositional Pedagogies

This theme emerged from discussions about dialogue and interrelatedness specifically in the classroom. All of the responses regarding classroom dialogue and an understanding of interrelatedness or interconnectedness spoke directly to post-oppositionality. To more fully understand what post-oppositional pedagogies look like, we must first be reminded of what causes oppositionality. As explained in the last chapter, we see that oppositionality can be traced back to the root of hyper individualism within Western ideology and conventional pedagogy. Keating asserts that the focus on individualism can be a source of opposition. She states, "This hyper-individualism and the oppositional framework on which it rests prevent us from recognizing our interconnectedness with others and working together for social change" (*Teaching Transformation* 27). I believe that Keating makes a crucial point about social change and the need to recognize interconnectedness.

Interconnectedness or interrelatedness is not a new concept. As Keating points out, Indigenous scholars refer to ancient interconnection. She writes, "I want to replace our status-quo stories of self-enclosed individualism with not-so-new, though very forgotten, stories of our radical interconnectedness—or what Gregory Cajete[23] describes as the 'ancient idea of relationship'" (175). Keating uses Cajete's work to define interconnectedness as relationship. Indigenous scholars and women of color have recognized relationships as significant in creating social change. An understanding that personal choices impact more than the individual leads to an awareness of interconnection. With this awareness of interconnection, social justice issues can no longer be viewed as divided between oppressed and oppressor. Social injustices impact everyone on some level. Explaining the ways that a womanist pedagogue operates in fostering understanding of this interrelatedness, Sheared writes, "The teacher allows students to seek and interpret their world and their words in a political, social, historical, and economics context. The self is understood in relation to its connectedness with others and their perceptions of reality. The process is a communal experience" (273).

As noted previously in the responses of the participants, self-care was deeply connected with community care and led to a sense of interrelated

---

[23] Gregory Cajete discusses "ancient idea of relationship" in his book *Native Science* (105).

responsibility in the work to end all oppression. Star expressed similar sentiments in her reflections:

> The way that I conceptualize spirituality is an understanding of Interconnectivity. An idea that everyone and everything is connected, and I like to think of it as energy. We're all composed of energy and so that is just like a tie that binds everything together. If we're all bound together, then we're all in it together and so that means that I have a responsibility to everyone and everything and likewise, with everyone else and so that, to me, is what fuels my desire to work towards social justice and environmental justice.

Differently stated, we all share each other's pain as well as celebrations. If we embrace the concept of interconnectedness or interrelatedness there is no me separated from you. We all are responsible for each other.

Susie Kelly has the warmest spirit. She can greet anyone and turn their whole day around. She walks with the strength and poise of her ancestors and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. She reminds me of Proverbs 31:36: "She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue" (Holy Bible, New International Version). During our interview, she described how she refers to the groups in her classes with different names, which she describes in her syllabus. Each group's name reflects a proverb or a saying from a different culture: Mitakuye Oyasin (Lakota: "We are all related"), Harambee (Swahili: "Let's pull together"), Terranga (Wolof: "Hospitality"), Ethiad (Arabic:

"Cooperation," "Union"), In Lak Ech (Mayan: "I am another yourself"), Ahimsa (Hindu: "Non-violence"), and "One for All and All for One" (European English). I love that she incorporates a diverse variety of group names that reflect similar values reflecting community and the importance of recognizing interrelatedness. On this topic, Susie Kelly explained, "I try to bring the multi-lingual concepts into the classroom from marginalized communities so that we see each other in a kinship relational type of way. Then immediately take them into levels of being and honoring our interrelatedness." To put it another way, Susie Kelly is purposeful in her use of group names and in the languages utilized in her classroom space. She feels that including multiple languages not only raises awareness of interrelatedness, but also cultivates relationship.

Honoring radical interconnectedness encourages a shift from individualistic, oppositional consciousness to consciousness of communal wellness. As Keating suggests, "First, adopting this story of interconnectedness enables me to redefine individual and communal identities as mutually inclusive, rather than mutually exclusive" (*Transformation Now!* 176). She further explains that positing interconnectivity in her pedagogy means inviting students to shift from "me to we consciousness" (*Transformation Now!* ch. 179). I saw these transitions or shifts mentioned over and over again in my interviews. I saw statements in syllabi that reemphasized the need to operate in the spirit of community and to acknowledge relationships. In her follow-up interview, Elaine explained that:

95

You can't extend compassion to others if you don't know what it means for you. I think that's true, most of the stuff that we talk about in a psychological world is that, if you can't connect to it, then how are you going to deal with it with somebody else? It doesn't mean you need to experience everything everybody's experienced, but you need to have a connection to it. You need to have a way of understanding. I think it's more than just knowledge.

Again, Elaine emphasized the significance of self-compassion in relationship with outward compassion as well as the vitality of learning about connection.

Post-oppositional pedagogy as developed by Keating (who identifies as a womanist), was mainly influenced by Gloria Anzaldúa who adamantly identified as a feminist. The main point of the discussion is that whether feminist or womanist, post-oppositionality and post-oppositional pedagogies move beyond the restriction of oppositional, either/or thinking. Regarding how this looks in womanism, it is notable that in my study participants relied on dialogue and understandings of interconnectedness to demonstrate their own womanist ideology and as part of their own spirituality.

To support the claim that dialogue and interconnectivity work not only in creating post-oppositional pedagogies but connect also to womanist ideology and spirituality, I offer the following quotes from my participants. Diana noted, "I allow myself to begin again to be anew and always with this idea of spirituality as connection, as a web between me and others, and then also me and non-others,

to exist in the world and beyond. I think that spirituality, for me anyway, is really helpful." As Diana explained, she defines spirituality to entail her connectedness with other things and beings. It creates an invisible web linking us and them, bringing our existence beyond our tangible world. Similarly, in her follow up interview, Elaine explained, "In my life I believe that we are all connected and that our relationships with each other and our communities reflect the total of human behavior, feelings, and thoughts. I believe in the mind, body, spirit connection." Beautifully stated, Elaine explained how connection is really at the heart of spirituality and wellbeing for all. In other words, she noted her own personal belief in the value of relationships and community. Womanism moves beyond oppositionality in the classroom by cultivating an understanding of relationality and interconnectedness and interrelatedness.

Many instructors in this study foster relationality by communicating on a first name basis with students, some even indicated this in their syllabus. Not only does the use of first names in the classroom work to decenter classroom hierarchy, but using first names humanizes the instructor, making them a relatable participant. As Linda explained, "The other thing I would note is we don't use the labels of like Doctor. It seems like maybe it's such a small thing but it's important because the ways that our college was created, this assessment learning curriculum, it was trying to put students and instructors on the same field as equals." As Linda noted here, her college purposefully encouraged the instructors or professors to not use their title. I have heard very similar ideas from

the other participants too. Mostly the choice to drop the title "doctor" was a personal decision made for the same reason—to help students feel more comfortable.It is also important to note that some of my interviewees, specifically people of color, have not made the same choice for various reasons such as lack of respect from their colleagues, institutions, and even students.

Creating an environment that welcomes a spirit of community while also encouraging the struggle of growth is challenging and difficult. Many teachers in trying to avoid conflict and disagreement may avoid or discourage any topic that might evoke differing opinions. These topics do not have to be avoided but instead can be addressed with intentionality and grace. For example, in my own classroom I once had a white male student voice out loud his opinion that people of color should just respect the police and thereby avoid getting shot.

His comment happened within a US Women of Colors class which was made up of approximately ninety percent Black women. I could feel the disgust and anger and almost see the fumes rising from the women in the room. I immediately said, "What you are referring to is called respectability politics." Recognizing my own social location as an educated and white-passing woman, I immediately opened the floor for others to share how the comment made them feel. It did not turn into a fight or a lashing back and forth. Several Black women expressed how exhausting it is to feel like they have to be something that they are not in order to be recognized as "respectful." A couple of the women shared how because of their skin color everything they do is assumed to be disrespectful

and dishonest. One student brought up the names of men of color who were unarmed and still killed while there are many instances of white murderers who are taken into custody without being killed.

I believe hearing these stories from his own classmates gave the white male student something to think about. Later that day that he approached me in the hallway. He apologized for his comment and mentioned that he felt like maybe this particular class was a space where he could listen more than speak. He later apologized to the whole class and from that day forward he would take notes and write down any of his thoughts before sharing.

I tell this story to provide an example of how hearing experientially based emotions can create a change in resistant students. In my face-to-face classes we often start the semester with an activity in which I ask the students to name the language that is hurtful to them. This activity is always optional, I provide a trigger warning and information on where the counseling center is located on campus, and students may leave at any time. I have to encourage and start the conversation myself many times, but once it is started students say all kinds of things. I have heard the n word, lazy, terrorist, illegal alien, that's so gay, and so many more examples. We then listen to students explain why this language is hurtful to them and discuss what other language, if any, should be used in its place. This activity always happens while sitting in a circle where we can see each other's faces. I think these kinds of activities are important because they put a face to an identity, and this makes other students be more cautious about the

language they use. The next time a student decides to talk about "illegal aliens" in a class discussion, they will remember the girl who cried because her parents are undocumented and she's fearful they will be deported. This might not change their mind, but it will soften their heart and push them to think about their connected relationship with a person and a story.

Interconnectivity is a difficult concept for many to grasp. It is difficult to help a classroom full of students from a relatively conservative red state understand that their own actions impact more than themselves, and for me and many other womanist pedagogues, it comes back to disrupting hyper-individualism. There must be examples throughout the semester that encourage the class to identify interconnectivities. In order to facilitate this encouragement, I may remind students that good intentions do not necessarily mean good works, and then initiate a class discussion about recycling that includes a video on how upcycling is dumping trash in India. Or perhaps we will read about early settlers and Indigenous women and discuss how the Indigenous people value all life including the animals they hunt, the plants, and the people in their communities.

Dialogue that brings our attention to the many ways we are all connected is as important as reminding students that they are part of our "beloved community" and that they bring value and wisdom to our class engagement. In helping students learn how to connect, it is vital to acknowledge that family, stories, oral traditions, and ancestral knowledge are just a valuable as the book knowledge we learn in school. It is crucial that students learn to pay attention to

their own bodies, nature, each other, and the spiritual world. So many students and teachers live disconnected from everything, focused only on their own "success" and finishing ahead. This disconnection benefits neither the individual nor the community. As Thompson explains, "Our lives are connected through history, experience, love, and hardship. In a similar way, I have come to see that students bring to the classroom their own individual stories as well as those of many others (biological and chosen family, friends, spirits)" (83). What Thompson is saying is that whether realized or not, everyone comes to the classroom with not only their own stories but also with the history and experiences of their families and communities. Their bodies carry information, trauma, and pain. Their spirits are impacted by emotions and experiences. Their wellbeing is supported by the care they demonstrate towards self, nature, animals, and others. Drawing from my data to illustrate this idea, I share Carla's statement:

> The problem with the whole term of self-care, and the Indigenous, and people of colors communities are about community care, and so is collective healing. There is really no such thing as self-care, you do take care of yourself but it's really about the community; it's tied in an interdependence with community care.

As Carla stated, Indigenous and people of colors communities have long viewed personal wellbeing as deeply intertwined with the wellbeing of others. Dialogue and an understanding of interconnectedness with all things ignites a sense of compassion and a responsibility to address the oppression felt by members of

the community. This makes one see these oppressions as one's own—not in a distanced sympathetic way, but in a compassionate way that creates responsibility. In other words, the oppression is not "someone else's problem" to ignore or just pity, it is now everyone's oppression to change. Compassion and responsibility are aspects of spirituality and are demonstrated through womanist ideology.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Womanism challenges the distinction between theory and action. Too often we
have assumed theory is to be found only in carefully articulated position
statements.
—Elsa Barkley Brown, "Womanist Consciousness: Maggies Lena Walker and the

Independent Order of Saint Luke" 186

In Chapter One, I provided an introduction to the dissertation, which

explained the problem of a hyper-individualized education system and the lack of

social progress that comes with that; I then defined key terms, and then I

reviewed literature on womanist pedagogy. In Chapter Two, I provided a

description of my research methods, which included interviews, member

checking, review of syllabi, and observations. I noted that I utilized coding and

moved from codes to categories to themes. In Chapter Three I discussed my

findings and mention that my major themes were: womanism draws people

in/feels more welcoming because of the spiritual component; spirituality is an

important aspect of personal choices, pedagogical choices, and worldviews; self-

care and community care are deeply connected; and dialogue and an

understanding of interconnectedness or interrelatedness are components of

post-oppositional pedagogies.

In this chapter, I provide further discussion on my assumed outcomes, my

conclusive findings, the study's limitations, and possible future research. I would

like to mention that although my findings were not surprising, they were

unexpected. In retrospect, the findings made sense based on the knowledge I

gained from reviewing literature. Additionally, newer insights, knowledge, and

deeper understanding was gained from the interviews and my own experience

during the final stages of the study. Member checking, syllabi review, and

observations all served to solidify and support my interpretations of the data.

Initially, I anticipated discovering that those who identify as womanist or

hold a womanist worldview would practice self-care. I also anticipated that I

would learn more about the types of self-care my participants practiced, how

these practices might be evident within their classrooms, and what it looked like

to be a womanist pedagogue. I believed that the participants would answer

questions about self-care related to their own personal practices.

While all interviewees did answer questions about self-care in this way,

many also discussed their personal self-care in relationship with their community

care. As mentioned previously, they did not see their self-care as separate from

their community. Womanist pedagogues value community care so highly that

they strongly believe that they are not well if the community is not well.[24]

Community care is intertwined with their own self-care, so much so that there is

no need to only talk about "the self" separately. This concept of self-care as a

part of community care and vice versa is not surprising when looking at the

---

[24] As discussed by Maparyan and mentioned previously in Chapter One (10).

literature (Beaubeouf-Lafontant,"Womanist Lessons" 439; Nash 268; Sheared 276), although it was more evident through interviews. Participants rarely answered questions about self-care in which the answers were truly only about self. I heard a couple participants mention things like spa days or massages as their self-care, but most participants explained that they view collective activities, such as time with family or likeminded colleagues, as part of their self-care. Additionally, checking in with their friends, making sure their students are managing the balalnce between school and life, and spending time in nature were all aspects of self-care which also can be considered community care.

I anticipated that participants would discuss students' self-care practices during class-time. As mentioned previously, I take time during every class to have a discussion about self-care with my own students. What I learned about my participants is that while many may spend class time asking students about their wellness practices, the instructors mostly keep their students' stories in mind when it comes to assignments and grading. To put it another way, as Marcus explained, that if one student is a single parent and does not get to class on time because they are taking their kids to childcare, he is understanding and does not deduct points for tardiness. Or, as Melody expressed, if one of her students is struggling with depression and has difficulty getting an assignment in on time when they are switching their medications, she is understanding and accepts the assignment late.

Womanist teachers are flexible and comfortable altering their expectations based on the students' needs. I saw this flexibility firsthand in both Carla's face-to-face classroom and Star's online class. While some educators may believe that flexibility is a sign of weakness, for my participants remaining flexible and aware of students' needs is a strength, not a weakness, for both instructors and student . To put it more simply, when a student knows their instructor cares about their own circumstances and demonstrates flexibility—that builds trust between the student and the instructor, it creates a sense of responsibility and desire to not disappoint on behalf of the student, and it helps the student have a much better chance at succeeding in the course. Many may argue that the flexibility can set students up for failure in their future workplaces because employers will likely have rigid expectations and will not be flexible; however, I believe that when students learn to trust and gain a sense of responsibility that makes them not want to let their instructor down, they will likely carry this same sense of responsibility into the workplace. Additionally, I learned about how the interviewees and students navigate discussion and disagreement in the classroom. The discussions about interrelatedness and dialogue (Maparyan 58) both helped me understand how these aspects of womanist pedagogy serve as ways towards post-oppositional consciousness. The next section digs deeper into a discussion of findings.

Discussion

In an effort to initiate the discussion here, we must take a look back at my research questions. The questions that I used to frame my study were as follows: What makes a pedagogy womanist? How do womanists teach? How can womanism help foster a post-oppositional atmosphere in classrooms? This section will briefly answer these research questions. The answers provided are based on responses from interviews, syllabi, observations, and reflections on reviewed literature.

What Makes a Pedagogy Womanist?

Some womanist pedagogues embrace the maternal, seek political clarity, and take an ethic of risk. While these three pillars are primary characteristics in womanist pedagogies, due different definitions of womanist pedagogy, there are many things beyond just these three. What I am learning is that while some embrace the maternal, many (if not all) absolutely embrace an expansive form of care which may or may not be considered maternal. A post-oppositional womanist pedagogy shifts to embracing all forms of care (physical, spiritual, emotional, political) as well as care for nature and all beings. Caring is an important element of womanist pedagogy.

Political clarity can also take many different forms and be defined several different ways. In the existing womanist pedagogy literature, political clarity means making sure students are aware of information about politics (Beaubeouf-Lafontant, "A Womanist Experience" 80; Davis 367) such as government, law,

voting, policies and so forth as well as making sure students know about systemic issues like racism, sexism, homophobia and more.

In my interviews, I learned that many participants believed that a person's wellbeing is more important than what is happening in the national and international news. Surprisingly, wellbeing when applied to politics looks completely different for each individual. On one hand, I heard responses saying that they were more actively engaged in politics and political activism than ever before. On the other hand, I heard responses that said they have to disengage from news or politics for their own mental health. Disengaging from politics does not mean excluding discussions about racism or sexism or other forms of oppression. Instead, I interpreted this response as disengaging from watching news constantly, obsessing over newspaper articles, and feeling hopeless because of the status of the world. The irony in these two seemingly extremes, is that both scenarios (and any in between) are fully connected with the individual's self-care. Some felt they were fighting and engaging for their own voices to be heard, for their communities needs to be known, and for the desperate need to ignite a change. Others believed that for survival's sake they could not allow themselves to be bombarded by the news. They felt they were also fighting the system, which was never meant to help them, by disengaging, by using silence as a weapon, and by enacting radical activism with their own self-care. No matter how political clarity is being defined it is clear that for my participants, political clarity may look different, but it always is intertwined with self-care.

Lastly, having an ethic of risk also looks different based on how it is being defined. For some, taking an ethic of risk means choosing to be open and transparent with students and sharing personal information to feel humanized and more relatable. For others, it means being present and available outside of the classroom, being willing to offer resources and help, as well as being vulnerable with them. Whatever a pedagogue's definition of taking an ethic of risk may be, it is clear that many womanist teachers are willing to take risks especially for the benefit of their students.

How Do Womanists Teach?

Womanists teach from the heart which means they operate with compassion. They cannot and will not ignore what is happening in their students' personal lives. They acknowledge lived experiences and refuse to allow status-quo stories to define the narrative in their classrooms. I saw this firsthand after Trump was elected president. Many of my colleagues and I paused our lesson plans to allow students an opportunity to discuss how his election was directly impacting them. We took two days in my classes for students (especially students of color) to cry, tell stories of the mistreatment they were experiencing, and express the fears they were facing. As this example suggests, womanists allow space for questions and for cognitive dissonance and grappling with new information or concepts. Womanists make space for all sorts of discussions, including but not limited to identity, healing practices, spirit, ancestral knowledge, embodiment, and movement.

How Can Womanism Help Foster a Post-Oppositional Atmosphere in

Classrooms?

        Womanism helps foster a post-oppositional atmosphere by shifting from community survival to community wellbeing, transforming the focus on individual lived experience to interconnectedness, and moving from being aware of spirit to spiritual activism. Shifting from community survival to community wellbeing looks like a more preventative approach versus a curative approach. In other words, instead of only providing memorials for lives lost within the community, it looks like working for a remedy to save lives before they are lost. Shifting focus from individuals to interconnectedness requires allowing space for individual stories but also asking for connections to be drawn across multiple stories. Drawing connections means looking for commonalities among differences. Moving from being aware of spirit to spiritual activism means not only acknowledging the existence of a spiritual world, but becoming a participant in actions which help transform spiritual and physical world. For example, knowing that some people meditate is very different than engaging in meditation yourself. Scholarship on womanist pedagogy focuses on the lived experiences of women of color and the role of spirituality in those experiences. Specifically, this scholarship (Beauobeouf-Lafontant, "A Womanist Experience" 77; Cozart and Gordan 13) focuses how women of color have used teaching practices that focus on care, community, politics, and identity.

Womanist pedagogy becomes post-oppositional by acknowledging the need for opposition[25] and building on it to create future possibilities. What I mean is that most of the literature on womanist pedagogy focuses on what women of color have already done in their role as teachers from the eras of slavery to segregation to desegregation (Patterson et al. 272, 277). What has already happened is important. Much is also said about the fact that womanist pedagogy is resistant to conventional, patriarchal methods of teaching (Davis 374). I would suggest that these types of conversations based on resistance can be oppositional. What is missing in this discourse is how to demonstrate these same values through a womanist pedagogy that operates post-oppositionally. A womanist pedagogy must be built on the resistance, struggles, re-naming, re-envisioning, and work against dominant stories; however, a post-oppositional womanist pedagogy stands on the work that opposition has already done but goes further by offering, in a sense, wings to fly above it. Post-oppositional womanist pedagogy moves beyond critical theory in order to envision the possibility of something new. So, what does something new look like? In the following section, I discuss some possibilities.

It is beyond the scope of my project to fully discuss all possibilities, but I offer a few examples based on my study's findings. First, classroom participants

---

[25] As Keating explains in her book *Transformation Now!*, "oppositional politics and other forms of oppositional consciousness" are vital in enabling humans to "survive under hostile conditions and make important social-change. (3).

can work toward enacting a "radical respect" as the authors Thornton and Romano label it, for each other and for differing opinions. In short, radical respect means creating space to hear, learn, and even embrace differences. This space is radical because it moves beyond presenting status-quo stories as "normal" and provides alternatives. In their article "Beyond Oppositional Thinking: Radical Respect," Thornton and Romano propose that "the formation of radical respect can move students and teachers beyond the confines of oppositional thinking and relating" (199). They continue their discussion by explaining, "This will require our ability to tolerate the ambiguity that is involved in relating across differences, a move that is not easy and definitely not comfortable. But we must enter this new terrain, and we ignore it to our own peril" (200). In other words, the authors note that radical respect is created outside or beyond the rigidity or oppositional thinking in conventional classrooms and that it can only be created when individuals choose to relate across their differences. An excellent starting point is dialogue in which participants are open to both hearing about differing perspectives and also willing to question their own biases or ideals.

I believe that one way to create a radical respect for others is to understand the innate beauty, humanity, and importance of both the self and others. I assert that acknowledging each person's sacredness is part of radical respect. Maparyan demonstrates this approach in her theory of LUXOCRACY, which she describes as the inner light within each person. LUXOCRACY, or innate divinity, encompasses a person's soul, their creative center, their vision,

and their intention (3). Maparyan asserts that when people begin to recognize the LUXOCRACY within themselves, they also start to notice it within others. This recognition of the sacredness within everyone can create a deep sense of appreciation for self (Nash 14) and others and ultimately a type of respect for humanity and dignity. My research supports LUXOCRACY because acknowledging everyone's innate sacredness and interacting based on radical respect for others requires shifting away from hyper-individualism or focusing solely on the self.

Another thing that may help create a post-oppositional womanist pedagogy is shifting from "me to we" consciousness. In my own words, shifting from me to we means considering all things (people, animals, nature, spirit) in decisions—consciously working to benefit (or not harm) all instead of just focusing on the one. In her article "Transforming Status-Quo Stories: Shifting from 'Me' to 'We' Consciousness," Keating digs deep into the problem status-quo stories create. She states, "This belief in the status-quo's permanence becomes self-fulfilling: we do not try to make change because we believe that change is impossible" (210). Buying into the status-quo stories limits our ability to believe in an alternative, to think critically, or to consider other possibilities. Status-quo stories about hyper-individualism also create an illusion that humans are or should be self-sufficient ("Transforming" 211). While independence is not inherently bad and that is not what Keating is suggesting, the dependency on the false narratives created by status-quo stories are not whole truths and therefore

113

are limiting. Later in her article, Keating ends her discussion by saying, "I invite

my students to shift their perspectives, to move from me to we consciousness. I

hope to awaken in them a compassionate understanding of the need to work

together for social change" ("Transforming" 219). To put it differently, Keating

believes that only focusing on what has always been limits the discussions of

what might be. This move towards visionary compassion relates to my research

because shifting from what Keating calls a "'me' to 'we' consciousness" is also

accepting a responsibility for all oppression and this disrupts the "me against

them" divide. Accepting a responsibility for all oppression means acknowledging

that we are all both the oppressed and the oppressor (Lorde, "There is no

Hierarchy of Oppression" 220) and that even if we do not personally feel the

impact of one form of oppression, it does not mean we are not impacted by it. All

of these things encourage post-oppositional consciousness which translates to

post-oppositional pedagogies.

Drawing from Keating's discussion, I want to highlight the way Keating

addresses identities as both restrictive and potentially transformational. She

invites her readers to consider how binary, either/or type identities cannot work in

transformative ways but encourages the reader to consider how the authors she

mentions use their identities to eventually transform into threshold identities,

multiple/shifting identities (Keating, *Transformation Now!* 96). She draws on

Audre Lorde's shifting self-definitions to illustrate this point, explaining that

despite Lorde's multiple oppressed identities, she becomes relatable as she does

not deny obstacles that can then be used as creative tools to elicit discussion.

Shifting from me to we in our conversations happens through moves such as

Lorde's, where we learn to decenter the oppression and take on the responsibility

as oppressor as well. We all can simultaneously experience both. Moving from

me to we consciousness includes things such as disrupting the dichotomous

frameworks that encourage and perpetuate hyper-individualism.

Responsibility to self and to others including nature is another means to a

post-oppositional womanist pedagogy (Braun Williams and Wiggins 181). This

idea about gaining a sense of responsibility for other humans, nature, and beings

is reiterated in *The Womanist Idea.* Maparyan discusses how in many cultures

women are the ones protecting their cultures for future generations. They enact

this protection through such things as guarding spiritual practices and traditions

and preserving items such as seeds for future crops (Maparyan 12–13). I would

also add that in many cultures, women pass down to the newer generations their

culture's oral histories, traditional clothing or fabrics, and their language(s)

(Tusmith 24). In other words, Maparyan highlighs the ways women (and in some

cases womanists) demonstrate their responsibility to future generations and

other humans. Later in her book, she discusses the triad of concern for

womanists.

The triad is comprised of human-to-human relationships at the bottom left

point, human-to-spiritual relationships at the top point, and human-to-nature

relationships at the bottom right point. All three points connect to each other

forming a triangle, demonstrating the relationships and connections between them. Maparyan goes on to say, "For womanists, invisible dimensions and all they contain are no less real than visible dimensions" (36). Womanists value what is seen and what is not seen in the same way. They believe in the spiritual realm as strongly as they do in their connection with other humans and nature, and they feel a sense of responsibility to treat all beings, humans, and spirits with respect and reverence. In this section of her book, Maparyan sums it up nicely when she states, "Harmony as a womanist value refers to positive and mutually enhancing interrelationships among various subgroups or entities comprising community or ecosystems" (45). Womanists value their connections with the other living and nonliving entities that comprise their communities and ecosystems. This connects to my research because, as mentioned earlier, womanism draws people in because of its openness to spirit. I furthered this assertion by explaining how interconnectedness moves beyond the dichotomous, either/or mindsets that are prevalent in conventional teaching.

Lastly, I suggest that a post-oppositional womanist pedagogy can be achieved through spiritual activism. Spiritual activism, in my own words, is participating in an activity which engages the spirit realm. For example: prayer, meditation, mindfulness, and even being out in nature can all be types of spiritual activism. Maparayan, who borrows the term from Gloria Anzaldúa (who introduced it into feminist theory and academic thought), defines spiritual activism as a "social or ecological transformational activity rooted in a spiritual belief

116 at bottom

system or set of spiritual practices" (19). Just as spirituality looks different to all people, the enactment of spiritual activism can take many forms. From my interviews, I noticed that participants who specifically taught courses with "spiritual activism" in the titles would invite students during the semester to take on a new practice such as journaling, meditation, praying, mindful eating, walks in nature, adopting a plant-based diet, self-affirmations, or creating an altar. Despite this diversity, the practices share a focus on relationality. The various practices ask the student to just consider what their relationships with food, nature, animals, and others might look like. It invites them to consider how their own actions impact more than just themselves. As Anzaldúa states so beautifully:

> With awe and wonder you look around, recognizing the preciousness of earth, the sanctity of every human being on the planet, the ultimate unity of interdependence of all beings—somos todos un país. Love swells in your body and shoots out of your heart chakra, linking you to everyone/everything. ("Now Let Us Shift" 558)

I love this quote because it reminds us of our interconnectedness with all things, the beauty of our planet, and the value of every human.

What Anzaldúa suggests is that if we stop for a second and breathe in the complex and amazing reality we will be left in awe, perhaps reconsider our relationships with all things, and embrace a radical love that propels us into spiritual activism. Similarly, Rachel Ricketts offers this thought: "[A]s we move through this work together, I invite you to be brave. And vulnerable. To lean into

compassion, to stretch past your discomfort and to prioritize all those rarely

prioritized elsewhere" (xix). In other words, she is inviting all people to fearlessy

be exposed and to cling to empathy that encourages us, pedagogues included,

to make those who are not traditionally highly regarded as valued in our

classroom spaces. I believe that this encompasses all spaces including our

classrooms and pertains to all people including our students. Through my study's

interviews and observations, I found these themes demonstrated in the

participants' empathy, care, and concern for students' wellbeing.

Limitations

Several limitations became obvious to me during this study. For one, I had

limited ability to recruit participants. Many of the participants who responded to

my call were unsure about using the term "womanist" to describe themselves but

were adamant that their own worldview aligned most closely to a womanist,

rather than a feminist, worldview. Upon further questioning, it became apparent

that many of the white-identified participants were uncomfortable using the term

womanist to identify themselves because of their deep desire not to appropriate a

term birthed by women of color. This sensitivity and awareness from white-

identified participants was expressed across interviewees and, while admirable,

the overt cautiousness might limit the spreading of womanist knowledge, theory,

and pedagogy to the world. Instead, many of the white participants choose the

label feminist because this term felt safe(r) and potentially more respectful.

The fact that not all of the interviewees sent me a copy of their syllabus and/or did not choose to participate in member checking is also a limitation. I would have potentially had more insights with more syllabi and further follow-up interviews. It is also important to recognize that almost half of my participants were somehow connected to my own institution, Texas Woman's University. While not all were from the Multicultural Women's and Gender Studies department, all had taken courses in the department. In our program, and in the classes our department offers, womanism is a prominent component of discussions. Our faculty encourages and includes womanist theory and writings from womanist scholars, as well as Indigenous texts and concepts. This emphasis is in sharp contrast with the mainstream standard for WGS programs across the nation. For instance, according to the National Women's Studies Association's (NWSA) 2019 annual conference program[26] out of the six hundred and nine sessions topics and titles, only three presenters used the term womanism in their paper titles. This is an example of the prevalence womanism does or does not have in the field, which could have definitely impacted the worldviews of those particular interviewees. Despite this matter, the other interviewees who were not connected to TWU still emphasized many of the claims in my findings.

---

[26] The 2019 NWSA conference was the last face-to-face conference as the COVID-19 pandemic was occurring in 2020 which prevented the organization from having their normal conference.

Another limitation is the COVID-19 pandemic, which greatly impacted all of us. After the pandemic started in March 2020, many participants from my study did not respond to any form of communication, and many were no longer teaching. The way we understood the world had drastically changed. We lost connection through no longer seeing one another. Our classrooms went virtual, and for some this format was a new platform that took considerably more tie. The stress from a global pandemic also impacted so many, as participants were struggling with fear, loss, financial burdens, and illness.

As explained below in more detail, my personal battle (PTSD) and severe anxiety also greatly impacted this project. By April 2020, it became paralyzing to even think about proceeding with my work. Despite my efforts to be diligent, I still struggled. I was completely sleep deprived, taking care of a newborn, having emotional outbursts, and dealing with high levels of stress and uncontrollable anxiety. It became imperative that I take a semester off to focus on my health. With the help of therapy and medication, I was able to come back to this project May 2020.

My Experience Leading to Theory in Praxis

For some background information and to help ground my experience in a way that supports my premise, I want to point out that in the story that follows, I explain how I practiced my own womanist theory of self-care and communal care by not separating myself as teacher from my own humanity and vulnerability. Through valuing and acknowledging the importance of my personal story and

lived experience I was (and still am) learning to practice self- compassion, and I am seeing how my survival is based on interconnectivity.

In what follows, I share more details about my experience with the birth of my beautiful son. I became pregnant the summer of 2019. This was a dream come true and my pregnancy was beautiful and so enjoyable until, after a routine check-up in late February, I was sent to the emergency room because of elevated blood pressure. I was only thirty-three weeks pregnant. Although they were only following the protocols given to them, the medical staff scared me. They cut off all food, water, even ice chips for me. I was put on multiple IV drips and had to give blood for testing literally every hour. For forty-eight hours, they tried to induce me; however, I never dilated above one centimeter. After receiving two rounds of steroid shots, being put on a magnesium drip, and suffering the long-awaited induction without making any progress—I opted for a cesarean section. At this point, I was one day shy of the thirty-fifth week of my pregnancy. I knew that I would be too weak to push, having been without food or water for two days, and I was also informed that my baby would immediately be rushed to the NICU. Two rounds of anesthesia later, profuse vomiting while on the operating table, and with a rush of concern—my sweet Eli was brought into this world. I did not get to hold him or have him laid on my chest. The medical team showed him to me and took him away abruptly. Because of the magnesium drip, I was also not allowed to see him for the next twenty-four hours. This was the most painful, heart-breaking experience of my life.

I spent eight days in the hospital. I believe that because I am a woman of color and that my married name is obviously middle eastern, I was treated poorly and without the care I should have received. I was consistently denied food. I would receive a meal tray with only lettuce. No protein, no carbohydrates, nothing but lettuce. I was promised snacks and never received them. I would beg for a nurse to help me bathe (as in just stand outside of the shower holding my arm so that I would not fall down). None of the nurses would help. My room also did not get cleaned regularly. I had to ask for more pads for the postpartum bleeding a couple different times. I was not given the proper medications or doses. I was woken up every hour during the nights for routine checks of my blood pressure and blood sugar, never allowing me to rest. My arms were black and blue, and my iv ports were not changed during the typical one-to-two-day time frames. My NICU visits were extremely important to me and while there were only certain times, I would be allowed to touch my baby, it seemed that the doctors would order a test or something else to happen during those times, preventing me from being able to touch my baby. After six days, I felt myself start to go into a mental breakdown. I could not handle it any longer and I honestly felt like a prisoner. This should have been one of the happiest times of my life, but it was the absolute worse. By the eighth day, I had had enough. I cannot explain it, but I felt like an inner womanist warrior came alive. I felt bold and strong enough to tell the nurses "no more." I discharged myself that night. It was difficult to leave my baby alone in the hospital, but I desperately needed rest. We went home and

I slept. I ate real food. I took all of my supplements and used my essential oils. I went to visit my baby several times each day until he was released. It was still hard, but at least I was recovering.

Elijah Brave was released from the NICU just a few days later. I now see that Eli's early arrival may have been a blessing because as he left the NICU we quickly entered a shut down, closed world. The COVID-19 pandemic was in full effect, and as the fear ramped up people were encouraged to stay home, avoid contact with others, and only leave their homes for essential needs such as doctor appointments and groceries. Everything was closed including parks, playgrounds, stores, restaurants, and other businesses. The severity of this mysterious plague-like illness was unknown; correct treatments were unknown; and people were dying by the thousands. Other than the follow-up appointments after birth, I stayed home with my newborn from March to May and only left to go to my parents' house. My husband would go grocery shopping. He would wear gloves, a mask, and use disinfectant wipes to wipe down every grocery item. He would leave the groceries in the garage or garage refrigerator for twenty-four to forty-eight hours before bringing them inside the house. I was trying to heal from a c-section, care for a newborn baby, and also cook meals. It was a sad, scary, confusing time. My friends seemingly disappeared: I was not seeing anyone, no one was calling me or communicating through Skype or Facetime calls. Whereas in more "normal" times, friends and family support a new mother by providing food, helping with household chores, and offering to sit with the baby so she can

nap or shower, COVID prevented such things from happening: No one was providing meals for us. No one understood how COVID spread, so I am sure many were fearful and being cautious by not bringing food to a home with a new baby. We had no visitors. No help with housekeeping or daily chores. My friends were no longer communicating as they tried to navigate their own lives during the pandemic, sending only a text message on occasion. I was desperate for community and so sad that I did not seem to have the community I thought I had created. Months later, I was finally diagnosed with PTSD and severe anxiety. The months of trying to work through the trauma, the flash backs, the unimaginable anxiety that it created, the anger, and the many other ripple effects from his birth was beyond difficult.

The events mentioned above are all crucial to the shaping of my understanding and analysis of the data I collected. The idea of community became so much more salient in my own thoughts because I desperately was in need of a community. From the spring 2020 semester onwards, I was no longer teaching, so I felt a disconnect with the classroom and students. In the hospital, I found myself in a situation where I experienced discrimination based on several things such as my race, ideas about my ethnicity, my sex, and my overweight body. I had to fight for my own life as I do believe I would have been trapped in that hospital until ultimately my death. The medical staff were trying to follow protocols that did not work for me. The hospital's choice to ignore my knowledge of my own body and force their protocols had me in a vicious repetitive cycle

where I was never going to heal. As a new mother during a global pandemic, I did not receive the help that would have been greatly appreciated. I desperately needed community and had to start a virtual one myself. Also, because of the traditional, gendered expectations of a heterosexual partnership, as the woman, I was the only one with cooking knowledge and abilities. I had to perform this task because when my husband "cooked" he only knew how to make sandwiches. (They are killer sandwiches, but you can only eat so many.)

These experiences connected me more closely to the ideas that eventually emerged from my research. Self-care took on new meaning. Spirituality became extremely important. Mothering was now tangible for me, and I was able to recognize the types of sacrifice that it requires. I more fully understood how oppression can function and I was angrier about the suffering in the world. I believed that while people drove less and stayed home more, the world began to heal. We saw less smog, forests seem to be flourishing, animals multiplying, life in nature becoming free to bloom. It seemed that nature was starting to heal, and it made me more sensitive to the damage humans create.[27] I believe my experiences are relevant because while I knew the importance of

---

[27] Searle and Turnbull argued that "Our relationships with the nonhuman world – our food systems, healthcare systems, the climate, conservation – are now more in-focus than ever due to COVID-19. We have argued that stories claiming that 'Earth is healing, we are the virus' must be resisted to recognise the work required to nurture nature's real resurgence. Thinking with emergence provides fruitful avenues for post-COVID-19 environmentalisms: requiring multispecies cooperation, cultivation, and care to foster more liveable futures". This is important to note because while there is no evidence that the world was actually healing, the perception still impacted my own awareness of the damage humans create.

spirituality, othermothering, taking responsibility for all oppression, nature healing, and the need for community, I do not believe I could have ever understood these things so deeply had I not experienced exactly what I did.

Possible Future Research

Future researchers might consider replicating this study with only participants who solely identify as womanist. As mentioned previously, my study heavily relied on participants who identified with a womanist worldview, but not necessarily as womanists. It could also be enlightening for someone to duplicate the study as a comparison between those who identify as womanists and those who identify as feminists in order to understand better the differences (if any) and nuances between womanist and other social justice pedagogies such as feminist pedagogy. Another researcher might focus on the other possibilities of a post-oppositional womanist pedagogy and expand the discussion.

Someone could study more in-depth how the role dialogue and an understanding of interconnectedness in the classroom can impact communities outside of the classroom. What, if any, is the ripple effect? We may learn more about the role spirituality (defined broadly) plays in how students and instructors interact with the world (including animals, nature, and spirit) and each other. I would love for the study to be continued with only a focus on community care, what that specifically means, and what it looks like. Someone could also expand the discussion by interviewing the students who have taken courses with my participants. How were they impacted and was it different from other classes?

Lastly, I believe it would truly be beneficial for someone to explore what spiritual activism might look like in other college classrooms. For example, what would spiritual activism look like in a biology class or in an English literature course? These are all just a few of the possible ways someone may duplicate, expand, and add to the discussion presented in my study. There are many opportunities and possibilities for future research.

WORKS CITED

Anzaldúa, Gloria. "Now Let Us Shift. The Path of Conocimiento. Inner Work,

Public Acts." *The Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for*

Transformation, editors. Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating.

Routledge, 2002, pp. 540-578.

---. *Light in the Dark, Luz en Lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality.*

editor. AnaLouise Keating. Duke University Press, 2015.

Barkley Brown, Elsa. "Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the

Independent Order of Saint Luke." *Signs*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1989, pp. 610-33.

Beaubeouf-Lafontant, Tamara. "A Womanist Experience of Caring:

Understanding the Pedagogy of Exemplary Black Women Teacher." *The*

Urban Review, vol. 34, no. 1, 2002, pp. 71-86.

---. "Womanist Lessons for Reinventing Teaching." *Journal of Teacher*

Education, vol. 56, no. 5, Nov. 2005, pp. 437-445.

Braun Williams, Carmen, and Marsha Wiggins. "Womanist Spirituality as a

Response to the Racism-Sexism Double Bind in African American Home."

Counseling and Values, vol. 54, 2010, pp. 175-186.

Cajete, Gregory. *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence.* Clear Light

Publishing. 2000.

Canon, Katie G. *Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*. The

Continuum Publishing Company, 1996.

Coleman, Monica. *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology*.

Fortress Press, 2008.

Conrad Cozart, Cheryl, and Jenny Gordon. "Using Womanist Caring as a

Framework to Teach Social Foundations." *The High School Journal*, vol.

90, no. 1, 2006, pp. 9-15.

Corbin, Juliet and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques

and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory.* 4th edition. Sage

Publications, 2014.

Crabtree, Robbin, David A. Sapp, and Adela C. Licona. *Feminist Pedagogy:

Looking Back to Move Forward*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.

Crowley, Karlyn. "Secularity." *Rethinking Women's and Gender Studies.*

Ed. Katherine Orr, Ann Braithwaite, and Diane Lichtenstein. Routledge.

2012, pp. 240-257.

Davis, Olga I. "In the Kitchen: Transforming the Academy through Safe Spaces

of Resistance." *Western Journal of Communication*, vol. 63, no. 3, 1999,

pp. 364-81.

Dewey, John. *Democracy in Education*. Macmillan Co, 1916.

Downes, Julia Riot Grrrl: Legacy and Contemporary Landscape of DIY.*Riot Grrrl:

Revolution Girl Style Now!*: Black Dog Publishing, 2007.

Elo, Satu, and Kyngas, Helvi. The Qualitative Content Analysis Process. *Journal

of Advanced Nursing.* vol. 62, 2008, pp.107-15.

Fassett, Deanna L., and John T. Warren. *Critical Communication Pedagogy*, Sage Publications, 2007.

Fernandes, Leela. *Transforming Feminist Practice: Non-violence, Social Justice, and the Possibilities of a Spiritualized Feminism*. Aunt Lute Books, 2003.

Fisher, Berenice Malka. *No Angel in the Classroom: Teaching through Feminist Discourse*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.

Freire, Paolo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th anniversaryth ed., Continuum, 2003.

Giroux, Henry A. *Theory and Resistance in Education: A Pedagogy for the Opposition*. Bergin & Garvey, 1983.

Goodman, Jesse, and Jeff Kuzmic. "Bringing a progressive pedagogy to conventional schools: Theoretical and practical implications from harmony." *Theory Into Practice*, vol. 36 no. 2, 1 Mar. 1997, pp. 79-86.

Hahn, Thich Nhat. *A Lifetime of Peace: Essential Writing by Thich Nhat Hanh*. Publishers Group West, 2003.

Hamlet, Janice D. "Assing Womanist Thought: The Rhetoric of SusanL.Taylor." *The Womanist Reader.* editor. Layli Phillips, Routledge, 2006, pp. 213-232.

Hayes, Diana. *No Crystal Chair: Womanist Spirituality*. Orbis Books, 2016

hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Teachers College Press, 1994.

Hudson-Weems, Clenora. *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*. Bedford

      Publishers, 1993.

Hyli, Mary et al., "Exploring How Medical Students Learn with the Help of a

      Digital Presentation: A Qualitative Study." *BMC Medical Education*, vol.

      19, pp.1-8, 2019.

Josselson, Ruthellen. *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry: A Relational Approach.*

      The Giulford Press, 2013.

Keating, AnaLouise. *Teaching Transformation: Transcultural Classroom*

      Dialogues. Palgrave MacMillan, 2007.

---.*Transformation Now! Toward a Post-Oppositional Politics of Change*,

      University of Illinois Press, 2013.

---."Transforming Status-Quo Stories, Shifting from 'Me' to 'We' Consciousness."

      Education and Hope in Troubled Times: Visions of Change for Our

      Children's World, editor. Svi Shapiro. Routledge, pp. 210-22, 2009.

Lanzetta, Beverly. "Women, Soul Wounds, and Integrative Medicine." *Alternative*

      Therapies. vol 16. no. 1., Feb 2010, pp 20-25.

Lather, Patti. "Post-Critical Pedagogies: A Feminist Reading." *Feminisms and*

      Critical Pedagogy, editors. Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore, Routledge,

      1992, pp. 120-37.

Lee, Wenshu. "Kuaering Queer Theory: My Autocritography and a Race

      Conscious, Womanist, Transnational Turn" (2003). *The Womanist Reader,*

      editor. Layli Phillips, Routledge, 2006, pp.327-346.

Lorde, Audre. *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. Crossings Press, 1984.

---."There is No Hierarchy of Oppression." *Homophobia and Education: New York*

    *Council on Interracial Books for Childre*n, 1983, pp. 219-220.

Maher, Frances A., and Mary K. T. Tetreault. *The Feminist Classroom: Dynamics*

    of Gender, Race, and Privilege. Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.

Maparyan, Layli. *The Womanist Idea*. Routledge, 2012.

Mayberry, Marelee, and Ellen Cronan Rose. *Meeting the Challenge: Innovative*

    Feminist Pedagogies in Action. Routledge, 1999.

Nash, Jennifer. "Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-

    Intersectionality." *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, vol. 11,

    no. 2, pp. 1-24.

Ogunyemi, Chikwenye Okonjo, *Africa Wo/Man Palava: The Nigerian Novel by*

    Women. University Of Chicago Press, 1996.

Patterson, Jean A.,et al. "Remembering Teachers in a Segregated School:

    Narratives of Womanist Pedagogy." *Urban Education*, vol. 46 no. 3, 2011,

    pp. 267-91.

Patton, Michael Q. *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*. 3rd ed., Sage

    Publications, 2002.

Phillips, Layli, editor. "Womanism: On its Own." *The Womanist Reader*,

    Routledge, 2006, pp. xix-lv.

---., and Barbara McCaskill. "Who's Schooling Who?: Black Women and the

    Bringing of the Everyday into Academe, or Why We Started The

Womanist." *Signs: Journal of Women in Society and* Culture, vol. 20. no. 4, 1995, pp. 117-18.

Redmond, Melissa. "Safe Space Oddity: Revisiting Critical Pedagogy." *Journal of Teaching Social Work*, vol. 1, no. 14, 2010.

Reid, Mark. Dialogic Modes of Refrencing Africa(s) Womanist Film. *The Womanist Reader*, Routledge, 2006, pp. 193-206.

Ricketts, Rachel. *Do Better: Spiritual Activism for Fighting and Healing from White Supremacy*. Atria Books, 2021.

Riger, Stephanie, et al. "Dynamics of the Pluralistic Classroom: A Selected Bibliography." *Feminist Pedagogy: Looking Back to Move Forward*, edited by Robin Crabtree, David Sapp, and Adela Licona, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009, pp. 240-56.

Saldaña, Johnny. T*he Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers.* Sage, 2016.

Searle, Adam and Jonathan Turnbull. "Resurgent Natures? More than Human Perspectives on COVID-19." *Dialogues in Human Geography*. vol.10 no. 2, 2020, pp. 291-295.

Schlehofer, Michelle M., et al."How do 'religion' and 'spirituality' differ? Lay Definitions Among Older Adults." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,* vol. 47 no. 3, pp. 411–425.

Sheared, Vanessa. "Giving Voice: An Inclusive Model of Instruction—A Womanist Perspective." *The Womanist Reader*, edited by Layli Maparyan, Routledge, 2006, pp. 269-279.
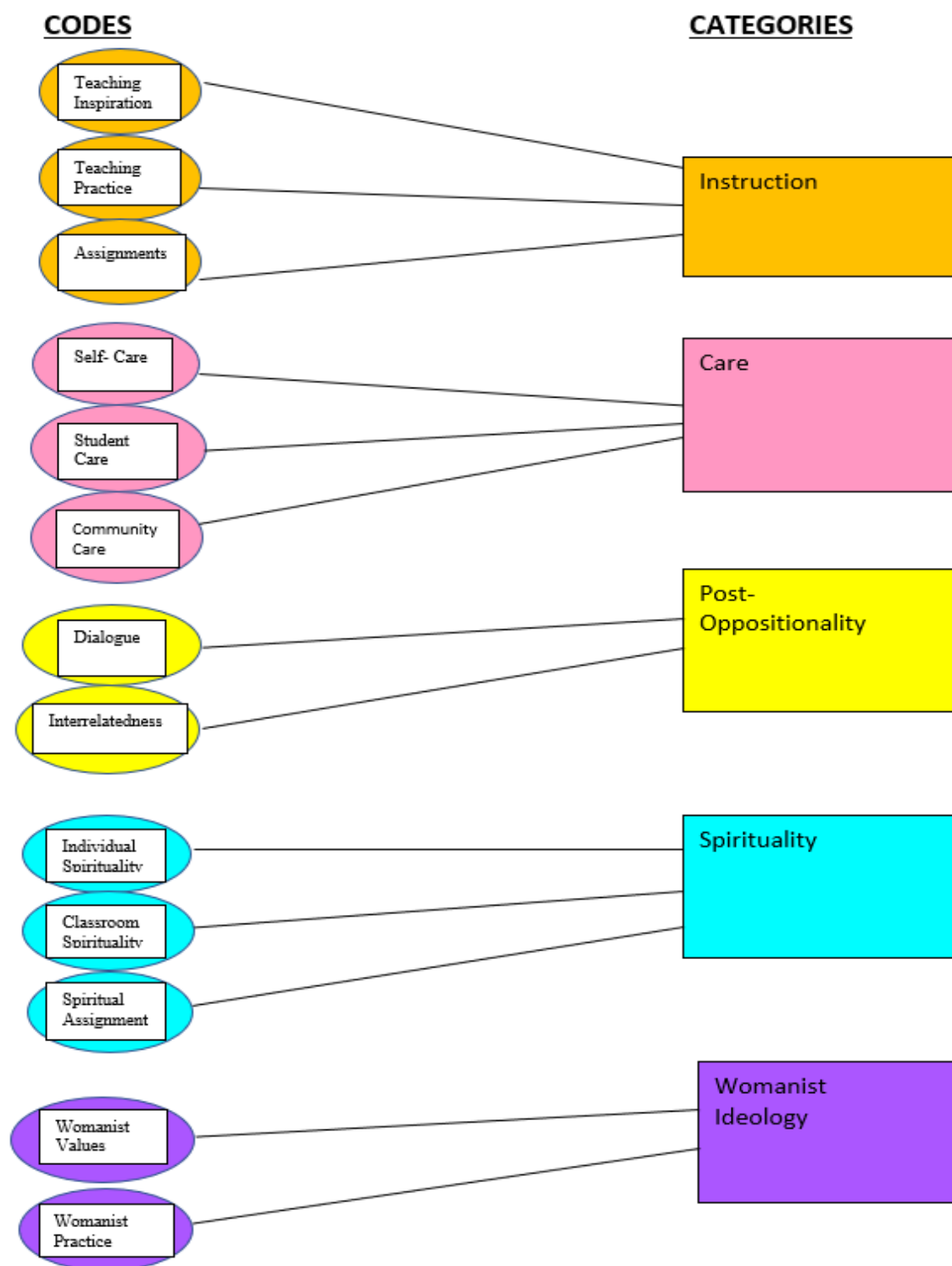
The Holy Bible. New International Version, Bible Gateway 1993.

Thompson, Becky. *Teaching With Tenderness: Toward and Embodied Practice*. University of Illinois Press, 2017.

Thornton, Sharon, and Rosalie Romano. "Beyond Post-Oppositional Thinking: Radical Respect". *Philosophical Studies in Education*. vol 38. 2007, pp. 199-209.

Tusmith, Bonnie. "The Cultural Translator: Toward an Ethnic Womanist Pedagogy." *MELUS,* vol.16. no.2, pp.17-29.

Vaz, Kim Marie. "Womanist Archetypal Psychology: A Model of Counseling for Black Women and Couples Basedon Yoruba Mythology." *The Womanist Reader,* edited by Layli Phillips, Routledge, 2006, pp.233-246.

Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. Orlando, Harcourt, Inc, 1983.

Walsh, Froma. Religion and Spirituality: Wellsprings for helaing and resilience. *Spiritual Resources in Family Therapy.* Gullford Publications, 1999, pp. 3-27.

Williams, Delores S. "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices." *Christianity Crisis*, 1987, pp. 66-70.

Young, Michael D. *The Rise of the Meritocracy*: *The New Elite of Our Social Revolution*. Random House, 1959, pp.1870-2033.

Appendix A

Code Book: Rules and Guidelines

Codes:	Definition:	Categories:
-TCH INSP -TCH PRAC -ASSIGN	-teaching inspiration -teaching practices -assignments	Instruction
-SLF -STU -COM	-self-care -student-care -community care	Care
-DIA -INTER	-dialogue -interrelatedness	Post-Oppositionality
-IND -CLASS -SP ASSIGN	-Individual -Classroom -Spirituality Assignments	Spirituality
-WMN-VAL -WMN PRC	Womanist Value Womanist practice	Womanist ideology

Appendix B

Codifying Graph

CODES

Teaching Inspiration

Teaching Practice

Assignments

Self- Care

Student Care

Community Care

Dialogue

Interrelatedness

Individual Spirituality

Classroom Spirituality

Spiritual Assignment

Womanist Values

Womanist Practice

CATEGORIES

Instruction

Care

Post-Oppositionality

Spirituality

Womanist Ideology

Appendix C

Concept Map

Womanist Values

Interrelatedness

Womanist Ideology

Post-Oppositionality

Womanist practice

Individual Spirituality

Dialogue

Classroom Spirituality

Spiritual Assignments

Spirituality

Teaching Inspiration

Self care

Instruction

Care

Student care

Teaching Practice

Community Care

Assignments

140