STAGING [IN]VISIBLE SUBJECTS: BLACKQUEER BODIES, SOCIAL DEATH AND PERFORMANCE

BY

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DISSEPTION

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Abstract

*Staging [In]visible Subjects: BlackQueer Bodies, Social Death and Performance* is an examination of the ways in which death and violence operate within the lives of black/queer youth. Black/queer youth experience marginalization across several dimensions of difference (i.e. race, class, sexuality, gender, etc). Proximity from white, male, middle class, heteronormative acceptability places these youth particularly vulnerable to violence and death. Moreover, the ubiquitous nature of white supremacy, patriarchy, homophobia, and capitalism normalize the degradation and devaluation of black/queer bodies, lives, stories, and experience. This degradation often materializes in the absence of black/queer narratives and experiences. Whereas, black/queer bodies are not seen as central to black politics, cultural life and struggles, and neither are they central to current articulations of queer politics, cultural life, and struggle. The systematic premature and preventable death experienced by black/queer youth demands an expansion of current conceptualization of those who are the most vulnerable among us. Through an intersectional analysis informed by Black queer theory, Performance theory, and Black feminist theory this project explores the possibility of utilizing personal narrative and art—namely poetry and theatre—to not only understand violence operates within the lives of black/queer youth, but to reinsert their narratives and experiences back into our cultural memory and political liberatory movements and strategies.

KEYWORDS: autoethnography, performance, death, violence, black, queer, performance ethnography, SOLHOT
Dedication

In loving memory of

Silvine L. Bradford & Michael Antonio Boone
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**Prologue**

3208 North Freedman Avenue, holds so many memories of my childhood wonder. An intergenerational house—the “city house,” where generations of my family coalesced to suck on honey suckle, sled down a massive hill after snow fall, get married, and find refuge. A simple brick duplex, which stood in a long row of similarly built row-houses. This was Blue’s house, my house, an intergenerational house, where Lily, Puddin and I—Red—resided.

Freedman Avenue stands as the most solid homeplace I can recall, teaching me responsibility as a latchkey kid walking to and from my elementary school up the street. Folks sitting out on stoops, running up and down alleyways, knowin’ everybodies names—this is what community looks like. And because we knew each other’s names, we knew to look out for one another. Everybody knew not to mess with Mr. Oscar’s daughter even though she didn’t have any arms. Here, borrowing cups of sugar was common courtesy, with no expectation of return. Here, staying next door with a classmate, his sister, and grandmother until May could come and get us after school, was just the Freedman Avenue way.

This was our first and only house, a swift lesson in slimy landlords. And the havoc termites can reek on the infrastructure of not only a building but on the fabric of your family and the house that holds your heart, hopes and dreams. Freedman Ave. was my first lesson in the illusion of safety, what fear drives us to do and how there can be at least two different educational tracks for children from the same household—one for me and one for Puddin.

We moved from Freedman Avenue. That was only the beginning before things got tough:

First the flood of 95

Basement destroyed, memories lost

Then the pestilence of 96
House ravaged, us (re)moved


Homelessness ensued, like Black gypsies material possessions confined to only what our hands could carry, childhood pictures, family heirlooms, album books, all gone

And then there was the plague in 2008—another Black death

Rest in power Gran

Fiyahfiyahfiyah

Yet through the ashes

And pillars of salt

We find

Home

Rising on the phoenix’s tail of hope

Made on our backs

With just the things the creator gave us

1 scooter

4 pairs of shoes

Coffee

Our grandmothers picture-tucked away almost forgotten protecting a still small corner
Memories, Hope, and Breath
To cherish and fuel
Our kindred fires within

Fiyahfiyafiyah
Fiyah fiyah fiyah
Fiyah
Fiyah
Fiyah.

The world was not destroyed
An olive branch again
Us
Here.

A Note to Readers

This document consists of three major components, autoethnographic text, performance-based text and academic writing. I fluctuate between these three different components throughout this document utilizing each in tandem with the other. The autoethnographic texts consist of personal narratives and biographical text used as a lens to better understand our culture. In particular, I use my own narrative to understand the types of love and violences Black and queer individuals experience in our society. Often these reflections take the form of poems and other creative text. Performance text in this document include an entire chapter which was written as a staged play. It is comprised of autoethnographic text, poems, media clips, and
borrows from theatre techniques in order to create the chapter. This chapter is meant to be staged, embodied, performed and read out aloud. Similarly the performative texts like the poems and story being told are all meant to be read aloud, and sensed through the body, mind, and soul. The academic writing consists of standard prose and delves into literature from a variety of traditions which take up Blackness, queerness, violence and love. These traditions offer theoretical and methodological insights, which inform the overall project (e.g., Black Queer Theory, Black Feminist Thought, Autoethnography, etc.).

In order to tease out the relationships between Blackness, queerness, violence and death this document departs from traditional dissertation models and consequently requires a different kind of reading. Utilizing my own biography and performance as means to animate and analyze these relationships this document draws heavily upon performance, and in particular theatre and poetry. To that end, several of the chapters are opened by a “Scene/Seen”. Harvey Young (2010), posits the black body as both the seen—the “epidermalization of blackness the inscription of meaning onto skin color (p. 1),” and the scene—the spectacular event created when discursive imaginings of blackness creates (deleterious) material realities. In staging the Blackqueer body, I find this juxtaposition between being seen (the performance), marked as a thing, and staging a scene, to signify this marking (the performativity of it), useful to my project. To that end, I offer various staging’s to open the beginning of several chapters to illustrate the Seen/Scene of the Blackqueer body. Each Scene/Seen takes the form of both personal narrative and poetry. It is important to note that although each of these precede a chapter, they are in direct conversation with the chapter in which they precede, often times providing a distillation of the chapter. Read the two in relationship to one another. Sit with the varying writing styles. See
the theory, critique, nuance and imagined new possibilities made manifest in the poetry and
storytelling offered throughout this document.

For me, poetry is the place in which I am able to have the most clarity about the world. Since the age of 7, I have used poetry as a means to not only express myself, but to also create new worlds of possibility for myself, my family, and my communities of affinity. Following in the tradition of Black feminist writers, who have utilized the creative as a tool to create theory, which might better, trace the contours of our living, my usage of poetry throughout my dissertation is deliberate. My profound belief in the power of poetry rests on a cultural legacy of Black, queer, women and men who have utilized poetry as a means to preserve culture, incite change, educate and create critical consciousness while offering solace and critique to systems of racialized, sexualized, and gendered forms of oppression (see Beam, 1986; Harris, 2004; Henderson, 2009, Jordan, 1985, 1981, 1970, 1969; Lorde, 2009; Muller & Poetry for the People, 1995; Shange, 1984). To that end, my usage of poetry joins in this legacy, and is a critical site of knowledge production that is vital to my project, and therefore interwoven into nearly every aspect of this dissertation.

Moreover, poetry is what you do with death. Or at the very least it is what I have been able to do with it. To remember it, to mourn those no longer here, to honor their living, to see the relationship of my life to their no longer hereness. Poetry created a bridge, and I am not, have not been alone in this practice. If the Blackqueer body is a body, a collective of imagined bodies, identities, possibilities, and experiences marked not only by what is done against such bodies, but what that body might do poetry mediates a space to be. A space to be a subject, autonomous, agential, and free. An extension of this aesthetic, the choreopoem, and Black theatre, the aspects of performance which manifests in this document as a play, as poems, and as a story are all
attempts, bold and necessary attempts to access a language both written and embodied that might intervene in the various literal and discursive forms of violence, and death (premature or otherwise) experienced by bodies like mine.

Lastly, this is a multi-modal text and as stated before requires you to read and sense it on multiple levels. This is disruptive methodology in practice. Disrupt your own tradition(s), which might hinder you from going there. Go where the text takes you, here the melodies produced, research the songs and listen to their tracks, speak the words out aloud, feel the turn of the jump rope in your hand, a warm summer breeze upon the nape of your neck, time travel with me, witness our living, our dying and imagine with me a world beyond which does not necessitate such ends.
Introduction

“Black lives matter. Blackqueer lives matter. You and I matter,” was the answer. “What is your dot and what is it that you keep knowing (even if nobody else believes it)’’ was the question.” I only knew the answer at the end of the semester. The question was asked on the first day of Arts Based Research Methods as a means to guide for our semester-long research projects. Our notion of a dot—what we knew, and were dedicated to within our lives and research—was informed in part by the artists Yayoi Kusama and poet Nikky Finney.

The knowledge that Black and in particular Blackqueer lives matter, stands at the center of this dissertation and my work as both an artist and researcher. Guided by this knowledge, this dissertation intervenes in the types of systematic violences and disproportionate forms of inequality, which, negatively impact and devalue Blackqueer individuals. I have become increasingly interested in the visibility of Blackqueer individuals, communities, and culture. Thus, this dissertation also makes visible the lives, stories, and desires of Blackqueer individuals and communities.

Recognizing that Blackness and queerness are often separated by mainstream lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) and race based organizations, resulting in a hierarchy of politics as well as fractured political movements I conjoin the two terms Black and queer as “Blackqueer” to recognize the ways that race, sexuality, and gender are constitutive of one another (Hong & Ferguson, 2011). In many ways to be a racialized other within an American context, has always been imagined queerly, despite efforts to understand social justice issues related to race and sexuality through mono-causal lenses. Examples of this can be seen in how

1Nikky Finney while delivering a talk at the 2012 National Books Festival, discusses her Uncle
Black familial structures, sexual lives, and citizenship have been policed and read as aberrant within the United States (Cohen, 1997, Ferguson, 2004, Somerville, 2000). For example, Cathy Cohen (1997), in discussing the regulation of enslaved Black bodies “to endure a history of rape, lynching, and other forms of physical and mental terrorism,” demonstrates how Blacks as a “marginal group [...] lacking power and privilege although engaged in heterosexual behavior, have often found themselves defined as outside the norms and values of dominant society (p. 454). Of importance, is Cohen’s (1997) critique in the failure of queer politics to actualize anti-assimilationist, disruptions to dominant norms, which might produce, “a politics where the nonnormative and marginal position of punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens, for example, is the basis for progressive transformative coalition work (p. 438).” My decision to join Blackness and queerness, builds upon these conversations, to further locate such politics and hope in the bodies of Black youth gun violence victims, Black girls/women, and those Black and youthful bodies which have been the targets of anti-gay violence. Attuning to these particular bodies, and the lessons they have to teach us in actualizing freedom, is I believe borne of necessity. This necessity, to live, practice, and imagine ways of being that liberate and challenge domination is of increasing importance in this moment in which we see the continued expansion of modes of power which brutalize racialized bodies, the poor, women/girls, non-gender confirming and a host of other deviant devalued bodies and communities (Brown, 2013; Cacho, 2011; Hong & Ferguson 2011).

In this way, my stitching together the two words, on paper, seeks to interrupt the ways queerness is separated from Blackness and Blackness from queerness, which renders specific Black populations “vulnerable to processes of death and devaluation over and against other populations (Hong & Ferguson, 2011, p.2).” Lastly, my joining of the two terms, signals the
twoness and oneness of my own identity as a Black and queer male. My queerness is not simply a marker of my sexuality, and is inextricably and always linked to who I am in any given moment\(^2\). I come to this work through my own body, my own narrative, and experience seeking visibility not only for my narrative but those untold, disappeared, and under told stories similar to mine.

**Statement of the Problem**

On September 29, 2009, one of my student mentees, Tyrone Williams and his cousin Percy Day were shot, while sitting on the front porch of their grandmother’s house on the Westside of Chicago (Byrne, 2009). Tyrone had gone home that weekend to spend time with his family and to get clothes for the University of Illinois’ homecoming dance. Tyrone was shot in the back, while trying to run away from an unfamiliar armed assailant. News of Tyrone’s death spread through campus like a hushed rumor. I braced myself for the responsibility of helping other students that my office served begin their mourning process. In attending to my own mourning, I began to write. This was my first attempt to make sense of the violence and death routinely experienced by youth of color. It was also my attempt to disrupt the seemingly status quo nature of this violence. Tyrone, and his cousin Percy joined a long list of “casualties” of gun-related homicides in urban areas. The University of Illinois, Bruce D. Nesbit African American Cultural Center held a vigil in remembrance of Tyrone. To this day Tyrone and Percy’s murderer is still at large.

\(^2\) Dominique C. Hill and Robin Boylorn have been influential in my thinking on this point. Although in relationship to a racial and gendered identity as a Blackgirl, Hill (2014), quoting Boylorn, states that the term Blackgirl “speaks to the twoness and oneness of my raced and gender identity. I am never only Black or only girl/woman, but always both/and at the same time...I merge the words to make them touch on paper the way they touch in my everyday existence.” I find this concept particularly useful in conceptualizing Blackness and queerness.
Earlier that year both Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover and Jaheem Herrera committed suicide. On April 6th Hoover’s mother discovered him, with an extension chord wrapped around his neck, hanging from the third floor rafter of their home in Springfield, Massachusetts (James, 2009). Herrera, a resident of Atlanta, Georgia, took his life 10 days after Hoover (Simon, 2009). He was discovered by his mother and younger sister, hanging by his belt in his bedroom closet (Simon, 2009). Hoover and Herrera were both only 11, when they decided to silence the daily taunts they experienced, of being called, “girlie,” “gay,” or “fag” (James, 2009; Simon, 2009).

For a brief moment there were national conversations about bullying experienced by LGBT students, the needs to address anti-gay harassment in schools, as well as suicide rates among LGBT youth (James, 2009). The national conversation shortly fizzled. What stood out to me were the ways the Black body, and people of color were erased. Many of the organizations, which stood at the forefront of these conversations, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), and the Trevor Project, were largely white LGBT organizations, despite the fact that neither Herrera nor Hoover had identified themselves as gay, and/or were attracted to the same gender (James, 2009). And what is important here is not simply about the designation of reading the other in the case of Herrera and Hoover as gay, but rather attending to the difference embodied by both Walker and Hoover.

The ways that Herrera and Hoover’s bodies are utilized by both the GLSEN and Trevor Project are peculiar at best, and exploitative at worst, given the sordid history of predominately white LGBT organizations working with and against LGBT people of color (Cohen, 1997). Puar (2011), notes that within our post-civil rights era, “we see gay as white, the other is assumed straight,” highlighting the complexity of how Walker’s and Hoover’s bodies are put into the service of LGBT organizations, but not necessarily in ways which would have actually saved or
enriched their lives. As youth of color, issues of Hoover and Herrera’s race/ethnic backgrounds as well as class and their non-normative performances of masculinity were erased and placed secondary to anti-gay bullying efforts.

Walker’s mother, Sirdeaner Walker, on more than one occasion, wished to express the fact that her son was not gay, but that he was relentlessly bullied, and that the schools did nothing (Essence, 2009; Walker & Byard 2011). In an interview with Essence magazine, Sirdeaner stated,

No, there was no indication of that. Carl was just 11 years old. I don't even think he reached puberty yet. His voice hadn't started to change. This is bigger than a gay issue. In fact, I'm worried about one of Carl's friends who is being picked on as well because she's overweight. That's why it's bigger than a gay issue. These kids will tease you over anything. (Essence 2009)

Sirdeaner’s insistence on it being bigger, “than a gay issue,” can be read complexly as a given from denial regarding the possibility of Carl not being straight, a desire to wanting to maintain a level of privacy as well as a means to shift our focus to actual ways to affirm and save the lives of individuals like Carl. And certainly these are not the only ways to read her insistence. However, it is this latter insistence, that I believe offers important ways to think through social justice strategies which do not negate complexity, nor work to advance the advancement of one group over the devaluation of another. In another interview, Sirdeaner, states, “I have been homeless, but Carl and I made it through [...] I was a victim of domestic violence, and we made it through. The one thing we couldn't get through was public school (James, 2009, p. 3).” What would it mean to think of these suicides in relationship to a failing public school system, which abuses and punishes racialized, feminine, gender non-confirming, and low-income/working class bodies? Further, what would it mean to analyze the structures, which perpetuate this type of violence and the inter-relationships of anti-bullying within schools to, homelessness, and
domestic violence—other forms of violence which disproportionately affect people of color and queer people of color (National Coalition of Anti Violence, 2013).

For me, Sirdeaner’s focus on bullying, demonstrates Pritchard’s (2013), call to “refashion our discourses of identity (p. 329).” The importance of doing so, as illustrated in Sirdeaner’s efforts through her anti-bullying work, demonstrates how multiple identities conspire to produce the violence Carl endured, and that this sort of violence marks youth as queer not based upon sexuality or gender expression (Cohen, 2004; Pritchard, 2013). As a Blackqueer body, Carl’s embodiment of complexity requires complex action. Further, it is important to note that, my intention here is not to simply add race into our analysis, but rather to turn our attention towards Hoover, Herrera, Williams and Day as queer subjects. In doing so I illuminate strategies which might 1) be borne out of the desires of similarly situated bodies, 2) build and strengthen coalitions beyond our current fragile alliances based upon identity politics, and 3) affirm the inherent value of individuals like Williams and Hoover.

Another observation in my noting the disappearance of Blackqueer bodies, lives, and stories is the It Get’s Better Project. In September 2010, Dan Savage, syndicated columnists and author created a YouTube video along with his partner Terry Miller to inspire “hope” for LGBT youth experiencing bullying and harassment (It Gets Better Project). Savage and Miller’s initial video was a “response to a number of students taking their own lives after being bullied in school, they wanted to create a personal way for supporters everywhere to tell LGBT youth that, yes, it does indeed get better (It Gets Better Project).” This video spurned the creation of the It Gets Better Project (IGBP), launching its initial website in October, 2010 (It Gets Better Project).

The IGBP timeline for “How It’s Gotten Better,” begins in July, 2009, with the death of Justin Aaberg, erasing the deaths, and subsequent memory of Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover, and
Jaheem Herrera’s racialized bodies (It Gets Better Project, 2013). The death of Aaberg as an origin for concern, and catalyst for Savage and Miller illustrates the centering of and care for gay white male bodies. Even the celebratory events lauded by the campaign include the repeal of laws (i.e. Defense of Marriage Act, Don’t Ask Don’t Tell), or the passing of marriage equality laws throughout the US, and a host of other events which do not directly effect, benefit youth or attend to the complex needs of LGBTQ communities across the multiple dimensions of race, class, gender expression, citizenship etc.

The connection between Tyron, Percy, Jaheem, and Carl’s stories can easily go unnoticed, since anti-gay sentiment and violence, is rarely ever considered in conjunction with anti-Black sentiments and violence. However as Cohen (2010), states the deaths of non LGBTQ people of color are deeply connected to the deaths, suicides, violence, and victimization experienced by LGBTQ identified individuals because, “young folks of color operate in the world as queer subjects, the targets of radical normalizing projects intent on pathologizing across the dimensions of race, class, gender, and sexuality. By normalizing their degradation, marginalization, and invisibility, it becomes something to which we no longer pay attention (Cohen, 2010, p.128).” This dissertation takes up specifically paying attention to that, exploring what is lost in losing the knowledge bodies like mine share and hold, how the disappearing of Blackqueer bodies, knowledges, and culture signifies a type of cultural education, and the tools necessary to combat this pervasive and normalized form of violence.

Research Questions

1. In what ways do Black youth experience violence?
   a. How are these manifestations also “queer?”
2. How can narrative and performance be utilized to provide a more complex telling to understand how Black youth experience violence?

   a. In particular how can the author’s narrative be utilized to illuminate the relationships of Blackness, queerness, and violence?

**Purpose of Study**

*Staging [In]visible Subjects: BlackQueer Bodies, Social Death and Performance* utilizes performance\(^3\), specifically poetry and playwriting as well as personal narrative to explore the interrelationships of Blackness, queerness, violence, and death. Three central arguments are articulated, (i) the need to expand conceptualizations of Blackness and queerness by integrating the two, (ii) the utility of performance situated in the everyday to provide snapshots of individuals and communities located at the margin of the margin, while also illustrating new possibilities for social justice and modes of political action and organizing, and (iii) the need for an expansive interdisciplinary approach to educational research. I explore each of these, through the integration of critically reflective autobiographical narrative historically situated within and against contemporary culture, popular culture, as well as the biographical accounts of other marginalized youth.

\(^3\)It is important to note that I utilize art and performance interchangeably throughout this document. The specificity of the term is particular to disciplinary distinctions, whereas in the field of Education, in particular, Arts Based Research is a type of qualitative research with methodologies that engage in the creative arts “in order to address social research questions in *holistic* and *engaged* ways in which *theory and practice are intertwined* (Leavy, 2009, p. ix).” However, my primary introduction to this type of research came through the practice of doing theatre, and under the guidance of my advisor trained in Performance Studies. As a field Performance Studies approaches to research defines performance as constituting, “forms of cultural staging—conscious, heightened, reflexive, framed, contained—within a limited time span of action from plays to carnivals, from poetry to prose, from weddings to funerals, from jokes to storytelling and more... (Madison, 2014, p. viii).” Both approaches are committed to disrupting traditional research paradigms, in an effort to create a more socially just world, overlapping not only in aim but also in methodological approaches despite differences in nomenclature.
Significance of Study

By drawing upon the arts, as well as personal narrative, this project, creates an alternative archive, which supplements the official archive\(^4\) that often marginalizes and/or erases Blackqueer peoples’ lives, stories, culture and societal contributions. Such an archive, builds upon the imperative of Black Performance Theory (BPT), to illuminate how, “BPT becomes an oppositional move within a matrix of disciplining powers reigning over the black body (Madison, 2014, p. vii).”

Furthermore this project builds upon race based queer scholarship, making connections between traditional queer theory and a more intersectional theory grounded in the lives of people of color (Ferguson 2004; Muñoz 2005). As Cohen (2004), states we know, “very little about the differences in the relative power of, for example, middle-class White gay men and poor heterosexual Black women and men (Cohen, 2004, p.29).” Placing my Blackqueer body in conversation with other Blackqueer bodies, this project carves out a space to recuperate the invisibility of queer subjects of color (Ferguson, 2004; Gumbs, 2010; Johnson & Henderson 2005; Muñoz, 1999, 2005).

Lastly, this project demonstrates how narrative and arts informed inquiries, when focused on both race and queerness, necessarily expands blind spots in more traditional forms of

\(^4\)In *Zong!* poet and legal scholar M. NourbeSe Phillips (2011), utilizes a creative archive, poetry, as a means to tell the story of the African lives lost upon the Dutch slave ship (1781), which is erased by the official archive of the court proceedings which settled insurance disputes rather than attending to the lost of human life. The usage of such archives has been a tactic often utilized by Black activists and artists, for example Audre Lorde’s (1990) *Need: A Chorale for Black Women’s Voices* and James Baldwin’s (1985), *Evidence of Things Not Seen*, and SOLHOT’s (2010), *The Mixtape* acts as correctives to negative and/or absent depictions of Black life in general and Black girls/women’s lives in particular. It is important then to think about the usefulness of the creative given the current imperative created by news coverage, legal documents and proceedings (i.e. the official archive) which either distort or erase Blackqueer lives, or normalize their degradation.
educational research. Current educational policies (e.g. Race to the Top) over reliance on numbers as the benchmark and guide for educational practices continue to fail historically disenfranchised students furthering wealth and educational gaps (Brown and Clift, 2010; Gerstl-Pepin & Woodside-Jiron, 2005; Krieg 2011). This particular approach to policy in its focus on academic standards neglects to embrace marginalized students cultural capital or to foster within students necessary critical thinking skills (Bernstein, 2013; Carter, 2005; Rose, 1990). Further, such approaches, inadvertently subvert the social justice and liberatory capacities of education (Freire, 1970, 1973; hooks, 1990b; Weems, 2001).

The relationship of art, education, and social justice is reflected within the scholarship of educational philosophers Dewey (1934) and Greene (1977, 1995), cultural critics and educators, Brown, Carducci & Kuby (2014), Eisner (2009, 2006, 2003), Freire (1970, 1973), Holloway & Krensky (2001), hooks (1995b), Lea & Sims (2008), Quinn (2006), Quinn, Ploof, & Hochtritt (2012); and scholar/artists Boal (1985), Brown (2013), Jordan (1995, 1985), and Weems (2001). Weems (2001) particularly advocates for the development of an educational system, which students of color experience “an imagination-intellectual development grounded in the parallel value of their cultures, and the struggle for positive social change (p. 2).” Furthermore, Weems (2001) views the cultivation of creativity and imagination as essential to the intellectual maturation of students, as well as a key component in creating an educational system guided by social justice. Thus, performance provides an opportunity to democratize educational practices, by highlighting the voice and experiential knowledge of those often dismissed by institutions of power, and rarely consulted to address policy or community concerns. In turning our attention to the space carved out by performance particularly within Blackqueer communities, this
dissertation provides valuable insights for educators to consider the ways violence intersects with queer identity not solely based upon sexuality.

**Using Queer of Color Critique and Black Performance Theory to Orient the BlackQueer Body**

The Blackqueer body, stands as a site to think about Blackness and queerness differently, to create a different orientation. I use orientation here, as a way to think about how we turn to, or turn away from particular objects, and consequently the ways we then direct our attention and energy (Ahmed, 2006). As Ahmed (2006), notes orientations, provide directions, which serve as instructions “about ‘where,’ but they are also about ‘how’ and ‘what’: directions take us somewhere by the very requirements that we follow a line that is drawn in advance (p. 16).”

Receiving directions, to be oriented, is not simply an individual matter, but also pertains to the way collective direction is given, received, and performed as by a nation or imagined community (Ahmed 2006). I begin here with orienting ourselves towards the Blackqueer body, because of the ways we refuse to turn to one another. Turning away is evidenced in the oppositional/negative reactions (Barbaro, 2012; Demby, 2012; Quinn Hensel, 2012) regarding the NAACP’s 2012 announcement endorsing same sex marriage, and committing to, “fight against any effort to write discrimination against the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community into law (Corley, 2012).” Here it is clear, that groups of individuals, either who

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5Of importance is some of the language utilized in disagreement. I highlight a quote from the Reverend Keith Ratliff, who immediately resigned his position as a national board member once the declaration was made. During a rally at the Iowa Statehouse, Ratliff was quoted stating, that "deviant behavior is not the same thing as being denied the right to vote because of the color of one's skin." His usage of deviant, as well as his framing of access to rights and privileges which divorces how one’s queerness (deviancy) works in tandem with one’s blackness to disenfranchise individuals further illustrates the faultiness of this logic, and how differential valuation occurs.
themselves were Black, or who espoused a commitment to equality, actively turned away from either other Black persons, or from equality.

Further underscoring the ways we turn away from one another are responses to hate crimes, which involve the intersections of race, gender expression/non-conformity, and perceived sexual orientation. Take for example Mark Carson, a 32-year old openly Black gay male, or Sakia Gunn a 15-year-old, left of center Black lesbian⁶. Violence against either White gay males, or Black presumed heterosexual men, are given substantive energy, as illustrated through the immediate protests, vigils, or memorials enacted in their memory (CNN Library 2014; Smith 2012) to news media coverage, and other print or multimedia materials meant to document their stories. However, when similar acts of violence are enacted against (Black) lesbian bodies, or Black female bodies little to no attention is generated (Brown, forthcoming, Fogg-Davis, 2006; Lorde, 1990; Monroe, 2013; Ritchie, 2006). The fact that few may know of either Mark or Sakia highlights the ways we do not attend to the death and violence against particular Black or queer bodies (Goff, 2013; Moore, 2013a). As Moore (2013a), notes, those “within a crossing where sexual identities, gender expressions, and racial markers not only meet but are thoroughly entangled,” often fail to be assumed as those to which anti-hate and discrimination laws are intended to protect as in the case of the, Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act.

Orientations then are not simply directives about where to go, but also illustrate and confer social investment, value, and attention (Ahmed 2006). Thus, the directions in which we

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⁶On May 17, 2013, Mark Carson was shot and killed at point blank range in Greenwich Village, NY after an altercation in which gay slurs were hurled at Carson and his friends (See Moore 2013a; Paddock & Siemaszko 2013; Slattery, Badia & Kemp 2013). May 2003, in Newark, NJ, Sakia Gunn was stabbed and bled to death after refusing the street harassment of Richard McCullough.
turn to, confer subjecthood, and illustrate who is not only allowed to be a subject, but ultimately who is also allowed to be a valued subject (Ahmed, 2006; Butler, 1997; Cacho, 2011; Holland, 2000).

This text although concerned with how we orient ourselves in relationship to Blackqueer violence and death, is not simply another meditation on violence and death, which sees Black and queer bodies as already tragic (Cacho, 2007). While I highlight the death, violence, and tragedy experienced by Blackqueer individuals, it is not my only focus. I also do not assume that to be Blackqueer means a life devoid of happiness, love, and complexity. Moore (2013b), in thinking through how to write about the complexity of Black life, that is not fixated on death, and trauma, asks,

What do I lose, or gain, by returning to the darkness only to sit within the expanse of its obscurity and not its splendor? What traces are carried, or left behind, when a black life is shortsightedly imagined and narrativized as a unitary force subject to the conditions of cultural trauma and structural violences and not a miscellany of sorts that animates the interconnectedness of subjection and resistance, death and life, beauty and truth?

Seeking to acknowledge and understand the structural forces of death and violence, while still valuing the lives and stories of Blackqueer people is a necessary tension within my work. I take up the questions as posed by Moore (2013b) which seeks an “interconnectedness of subjection and resistance, death and life, beauty and truth” or as expressed differently by Cacho (2007) doesn’t seek to figure out the collective story of how we die, at the risk of “silencing the story of how we live (Cacho, 2007, 197).”

In order to provide a different orientation, of complex visioning and turning towards Blackqueer people, contributions, and value, I draw upon both queer of color critique and Black Performance Theory as theoretical frames. Centering the individual, and the individual in relationship to the collective, as well as the iterative nature and repercussions of cultural
performances; both frames in different ways advance a "‘body politic,’ that neither reduces identity to a monolithic whole based on an essentialist notion of race or gender, nor elides issues of materiality in which the body becomes the site of trauma (e.g., the site at which racist, sexists, and homophobic violence is enacted) (Johnson & Henderson, 2005, 10).”

**Queer of Color Critique.** Queer of Color Critique (QOC), as articulated by Hong and Ferguson (2011), is a field of inquiry which is committed to producing a comparative race analytics, which does not, “suppress the internally contradictory and heterogeneous nature of new social formations [but] centers these contradictions and heterogeneities as a political practice and intellectual methodology (p.22).” As a field, QOC narrates itself as emerging from women of color feminism instead of white Euro and American centered gay/lesbian/queer theory (Hong & Ferguson, 2011). Defined initially by Ferguson (2004), queer of color critique, “interrogates social formations as the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class with particular interest in how those formations correspond with and diverge from nationalist ideals and practices (p. 149).” In its analysis, QOC, assumes that approaches to the cultural studies of race, class, gender, and sexuality are segregated, resulting in the “monocausal protocols” which can only consider a particular subjectivity at the expense of another (Crenshaw, 1991; Ferguson, 2005). These “monocausal protocols” in their exclusive approach, also reproduce accounts of marginalized subjects, which give precedence to those within the group who are more privileged, in which Blackness may be only thought of to equal maleness, or femininity to only equal white women, etc. (Crenshaw, 1991; Muñoz, 1999; Ferguson, 2005).

I come to queer of color critique as is suggested in its own genealogical indebtedness, through women of color feminism, followed by Black queer theory. Shortly, I will discuss how Black queer theory has also been useful for framing the Blackqueer body, however I find it
important to mention the foundation to all of my thinking regarding the relationships of
Blackness and queerness begins with women of color feminist scholarship. Both queer of color
critique and Black queer theory, utilize, are indebted to, and in conversation with women of color
feminisms (Hong & Ferguson, 2011; Johnsons & Henderson, 2006). My introduction to thinking
about the ways race, sexuality, gender, and other forms of difference are created in relationship
to one another, and always operating simultaneously, is informed by women of color feminist,

Identified as a genealogical offshoot of queer theory, I want to take a moment to explore
how Black queer theory has also been instrumental in framing the Blackqueer body (Johnson &
Henderson, 2006). Black queer theory allows for an articulation of race within my project, and
specifically Blackness thereby acknowledging the historical, racialized, and culturally specificity
imbued in the marker, “Black,” while also acknowledging and pushing against sexual
practice/desire as the primary marker of queerness (Cohen, 2010; Johnson & Henderson, 2005).
Black queer theory, allows me to think through how race, that is Blackness produces queerness. I
use “Black” throughout this text to refer to a racial, cultural, historical, and imaginative
collective shared by people of African descent (Gill, 2012). I use queer throughout this text to
reference the radical political potential of the word and its fundamental deployment as not only
challenging heteronormativity (Ferguson, 2004) but also recognizes and encourages the fluidity
and movement of people’s sexual lives (Cohen, 1997; Ferguson, 2004; Gumbs, 2010). Moreover,
I deploy queer as a means to describe a politics of sexuality, which is not based upon sexual
practice but rather a critical relationship to existing sexual and social norms, recognizing
particular political, economic, social geographies and communities which transcend space and
time (Cohen, 1997; Gumbs, 2010; Halberstam, 2005).
Black Queer Theory can be summarized as a project, which blends theories, methodologies, and analyses of Black studies and queer studies (Johnson & Henderson, 2005). As an interdisciplinary project Black Queer Theory, in its fusing the social sciences and humanities, strives towards a liberatory project which usurps monolithic identity formation, and strategies based on these formations to imbricate, race, class, gender, and sexuality (Johnson & Henderson, 2005). Gill (2012), states “Black queer presence is intended to insistently foreground the material reality, quotidian experiences, and cultural products of Black queer peoples (p. 33).”

As an intervention Black Queer Theory focuses on the lives and struggles of Black queer individuals in order to illuminate Black queer resiliency, survival, and (re)imagine life-enhancing possibilities to challenge the status quo of heteronormativity and other systems of oppression. A necessary foundation, Black Queer Theory, lays the foundation for thinking about the intersections of Blackness and queerness. However, I find Queer of Color Critique useful in extending this approach to take into consideration, the difference within and across Blackness. I specifically find Queer of Color Critique useful in its comparative race analytics approach, which seeks to understand how racialized communities, “have always policed and preserved difference between those who are able to conform to categories of normativity, respectability, and value, and those who are forcibly excluded from such categories (Hong & Ferguson, 2011, p. 2).”

**Black Performance Theory.** Another useful theoretical frame for this project is Black Performance Theory, which through performance explores the contours of Blackness in its complexities, how it is reproduced, expressed, lived, and disciplined as a signification of culture, collective experience and an embodied singular physical manifestation and material reality. Black Performance Theory (BPT), “shows us how subjects and subjectivities animate Blackness across landscapes that are all spectacularly excessive in the cause and effects of African
dislocation (Madison, 2014, p. vi). Moving beyond the mimetic or theatrical, performance theory serves as a framework within this project to provide concrete applications, aesthetics, politics, and ways of comprehending how human beings fundamentally make culture, affect power, and reinvent their ways of being in the world (Madison and Hamera, 2006). Performance, within these projects provides a “tactics of intervention” offering both the discursive and material space of alternative struggles (Conquergood, 2002, p. 152). Situated in the everyday cultural milieu of Black life performance provides an entryway to theorize and make manifest lived experience. In particular, performance within this project recognizes the ways in which Black art holds central the lives, livelihood, knowledges, needs, and culture of Black people (hooks, 1995b).

A discursive space uniting theory and praxis, contesting rigid notions of identity and community boundaries while exploring the richness of what is and what can be, performance as a method of inquiry, offers an entryway into the narratives of marginalized individuals/communities (Carlson, 1996; Denzin, 2003, hooks, 1990, Johnson, 2006, Madison & Hamera, 2006). Within performance lies not only the ability to visibly make salient and therefore confront racialized, gendered, and sexed corporal cartographies (see McKittrick & Woods, 2007) but also a hope for more than theorized but rather transformative, and subversive enactments of social justice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, Spry, 2001). I use Queer of Color Critique, and Black Performance Theory as a means to center the lives of Blackqueer individuals and subsequently their artistic works thus attending to the life stories, histories (re-imagined, or excavated from dominant cultures omission), struggles, and needs.

Methodology

This project utilizes autoethnography and in particular performance autoethnography as its primary methodologies to collect, analyze and animate the research data. Autoethnography, is
defined as a type of ethnographic research which recognizes, “self (auto), collective/nation
(ethno) and writing (graphy),” providing an opportunity for more than reflexive autobiographical
research, but rather a platform for transforming the ways in which culture can be represented,
distorted, or even silenced (McClaurin, 1998, p. 68). Further highlighting the components of
autoethnography embedded in the very word itself Hughes, Pennington, and Makris (2012) state,
that the term auto is commonly utilized within the academy when the author “presents critical
reflections and interpretations of personal experience (p. 209).” As a type of ethnographic
research, autoethnography is a “critical self-study in which the researcher takes an active,
scientific, and systematic view of personal experience in relation to cultural groups identified by
the researcher as similar to the self (i.e., us) or as others who differ from the self (i.e., them)
(Hughes, Pennington & Makris, 2012, p. 209).”

As a genre of qualitative inquiry, autoethnography in its various forms has evolved in its
usage, understanding, and deployment. Therefore any appropriate and comprehensive
understanding and definition of autoethnography would include other studies which have
similarly situated terms—e.g. narratives of self (Richardson, 1994), personal experience
narratives (Denzin, 1989), self-stories (Denzin, 1989), first person accounts (Ellis, 1998), writing
stories (Richardson, 1997); auto-observation (Adler & Adler, 1994); literary tales (Van Maanen,
1988); critical autobiography (Church, 1995), self-ethnography (Van Maanen, 1995), personal
writing (DeVault, 1997), reflexive ethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 1996), confessional tales (Van
Maanen, 1988), narrative ethnography (Tedlock, 1991), interpretive biography (Denzin, 1989),
autobiographical ethnography (Reed & Danahay, 1997). Within this complex array of names and
concepts what has remained constant is the usage of the methodology to understand the self in
relationship to the cultures inhabited by the self.
In coming into my own autoethnographic practice, I have chosen to identify the type of autoethnography I do as, auto\ethnography. Primarily, aligning myself with other Black woman scholars who tend to utilize the backslash as a way to signify and testify to the collective embedded within the individual (Boylorn, 2013b; Mary Weems personal communication May 9, 2012). Central to shaping my understanding of my work as auto\ethnography, was the 8th International Congress for Qualitative Inquiry, panel entitled, “The Poetics, Politics and Praxis of Producing Black Feminist and Womanist Auto/ethnography.” Panelists, Maritza Quinones, Cynthia B. Dillard, Irma McClaurin, Mary E. Weems, Aisha Durham and Robin Boylorn, each moved me to tears as they articulated the power, and praxis of autoethnography. Robin Boylorn, declared that she came to auto\ethnography because she needed a space to call out her name, to speak back to the misrepresentations of Black rural Southern women, to find herself and persons like her—other Black rural Southern women—celebrated. Within that room, Mary E. Weems reminded us about the necessity of funk, as music, culture, and experience in a body marked Black and therefore wrong and that the funk was something to hold on to and celebrate. She also declared, “Forget about everything else except about how GOOD it is to be Black (Mary Weems personal communication May 9, 2012.” Here I mattered, and so did the folks I cared about the most. Auto\ethnography articulated a politic committed to more than the lone autoethnographer, but the autoethnographer in community, collaboratively writing a text, speaking with and to a communities experiences, reflecting them back to that community and illuminating the lived experience, needs, and desires of an ignored people to the rest of society.

Knowing that the type of auto\ethnography I embark upon is always reflective of and intricately bound in community, pushes me towards what Reed-Danahay (2009) identifies as “critical autoethnography,” which focuses less on the “self of the researcher” but rather “captures
more of the reflexive approach” which seeks to examine and understand institutional practices (p. 31). Furthermore, as Alexander (2011), denotes, my usage of the backslash is to signify that I do not do “‘traditional ethnography’ per se (p. 98).” This is I am not interested in, nor do I participate in the ethnographic enterprise of studying the “Other.” My marginalized identities (i.e. my race, sexuality, and class) locate me at the periphery of dominant society, and because of my “insider” status within the communities I affiliate with and choose to study, juxtaposed against my privileged status as a researcher creates a false dichotomy of insider/outsider. I recognize the tenuous relationship between myself and the communities I speak to and about within my work, moreover, I acknowledge that some may interpret my intention to recognize the collective within the individual as a means to speak for the collective. However, this is not the case, as Jones (1997) articulates, the autobiography of marginalized peoples can often serve as a collective biography to give name to the “the experiences of many through the experience of one (Jones, 1997, p. 51).” Moreover, and indicative of auto\ethnography, by offering up my life experience as a means of insertion not to speak for an entire community, but to speak to our experiences, it is my hope that other Black and queer persons will find moments of resonance and recognition within my narrative (Boylorn, 2013b). Further to make experience visible, as a means to interrogate, critique, and understand social structures in order to imagine new ways of being, I also incorporate performance within my approach to doing auto/ethnography.

Understanding the self in relationship to other selves, entails more work than simple reflections of journal entries, and deep introspective work but also including others situating the self. To that end data was collected within this auto\ethnographic project through the following steps: (i) identifying and narrowing a topic (ii) collecting primary and secondary resources, performing archival collections (e.g. journal entries, artifacts, etc.), (iv) labeling, classifying,
trimming, and expanding data—coding, (v) analyzing and interpreting data, (vi) constructing an interpretive autoethnographic text—writing up the data as a performance autoethnography. Moving data into a script the creation of a performance autoethnography for me entailed the following steps: (i) juxtaposition—placing the multiple data text in conversation with one another, (ii) incorporating music and movement, (iii) staging and performing the script (iv) revising the text. As a caveat, the assumed linear process outlined above, does not adequately describe the non-linear process involved in creating a performance autoethnographic text. I want to underscore here again that I utilize “art” and “performance” interchangeably in this document. What I am specifically highlighting in regards to performance autoethnography as the methodology of this dissertation, is both how the performing arts (i.e., theatre, music, etc.) and performative text (i.e., poetry) are fused with auto/ethnography to create a layered textual and embodied form of data and analysis.

**Project Contributions**

My project has three major contributions (i) expanding existing knowledge in the fields of Education, (Black) Queer Studies and Performance Studies on Blackqueer youth experiences (ii) bridges theories across the aforementioned fields illustrating how each provides interdisciplinary complements to the other to advance what we know about Blackqueer youth, and (iii) adds to qualitative methods, illustrating the usefulness of performance auto/ethnography in Education, as well as creating an original method of Blended Scripting. In expanding existing knowledge in the fields of Education, (Black) Queer Studies my project illustrates how Black youth despite their sexuality are co-constructed within and outside of schooling spaces as queer subjects. Specifically, my research in centering white, male, heterosexual bodies and experiences, turns our attention to those individuals and communities pathologized across the
dimensions of race, gender, class, and sexuality. This is particularly salient, given recent turns in each field. For instance in Education, anti-bullying curricula has become a major interest after several LGBT youth suicides in 2009. The focus of this curriculum falls short, of attending to the complexity of LGBTQ identities and those “queered” bodies which are still the targets of such violence despite ascribed same gender loving affiliation or affinity (Pritchard 2013).

Moreover, my project demonstrates the complexities of Black and queer youth experiences moving beyond harm frames (Tuck 2009) to complex agential forms of Blackqueer life. This is illustrated in the ways in which love, loss, and failure as themes, which arise from my data become useful analytics to understand Black queer survival and brilliance (Gumbs 2010). By turning to the Blackqueer body I offer it as a site of possibility, cultural archive, and location for understanding culture, and in particular a means to make sense of the current violence against Blackqueer bodies and the subsequent diffuse reactions to this violence.

In unveiling these relationships, my project also builds upon the theoretical work of (Black) queer studies, Performance Studies and women of color feminisms in Education. Specifically, my project builds upon a turn in educational research to take seriously the ways Queer of Color Critique specifically, and queer theory more broadly can enhance educational research (Brockenbrough 2013, 2015; McCready 2010, 2013). For example, my research highlights the ways that Blackness and queerness intersect, and builds upon a growing body of literature across disciplines which illustrates the ways that constructions of Blackness have been foundational to understanding queerness within America. By situating Blackness as a foundational site to understand queerness, this study also contributes to Queer Studies, and specifically the growing body of work within Queer of Color Critique, which understands the relationships between sexuality, difference, and race not as descriptions of identity categories,
but rather as comparative analytics. Thus, my dissertation provides educators and educational researchers pathways to expanding educational research, curricula and practices in more inclusive ways.

As an interdisciplinary project, the third contribution of this dissertation is a methodological contribution. This contribution is multifaceted in that as a performance auto/ethnography, my project expands autoethnographic literature, both in regards to the field itself as well as in relationship to Education. Autoethnography is growing in relevance and prevalence within the field of Education, and my dissertation contributes to this growing body of literature illustrating the utility of the method within the field. Engaging with auto/ethnography, illuminates the usefulness of the methodology to educational research to show and capture complex lived experience. As a project which uses performance my project illustrates the relevance of the field of Performance Studies to Education, and adds to the literature within the field of Performance Studies that understands education—i.e., learning and knowledge preservation, formation—as integral to and necessitated by embodied experience. This becomes increasingly important to the field of Education, in that it sheds light on an oft-underexplored area within the field. Largely concerned with schooling experiences of students at all levels, the field of Education has yet to adequately explore education outside of or in relationship to schooling processes, thus overlooking the knowledge embodied by students from marginalized backgrounds, as well as the ways that spaces outside of schools teach, foster, and represent sites of critical educational practice and creation.

Additionally, my project its creation of an original methodology, Blended Scripting, contributes to Qualitative research methodologies broadly, and specifically Arts-Based Inquiry within Education as well as Performance Studies. A performance based methodology Blended
Scripting highlights the methodological possibilities of engaging with performance and how it opens up opportunities to create presence and value. By creating presence I am referencing how performance allows for those who are no longer present with us due to premature death and violence to still be remembered and sensed. In doing so, such efforts reaffirm the sacred value of human life, and in particular Blackqueer life. Further my engagement with performance, contributes to scholarly research which centers the role of the arts to explore issues of identity, narrate and uncover the stories, lives, and needs of marginalized communities and individuals. Lastly, by engaging performance my dissertation also illustrates how engagement with the arts provides an avenue for critique, redress, and knowledge formation, often inaccessible in traditional forms of research.

**Summary of Chapters**

Creativity fuels much of the text within this dissertation. My traversing between various text—the text of my life captured in poems, journal entries, photos, memorabilia, personal communications, against and with the text of other Blackqueer people—as outlined through an official archive of text, and my own reimagings and artistic engagements with this archive—serves a twofold purpose. One, as previously stated a means to supplement the official archive which disappears these stories, communities, and individuals, and in doing so provide another entryway into theorizing Blackqueer lives and experiences in their complexities. Two, to illustrate the creative as a mode knowledge production (Brown, 2014). The latter, an undervalued practice within academe, but the very sinew of this dissertation and similar studies which seek to bridge the lived experiences of marginalized communities, with theoretical frames, disciplinary and disciplined ways of knowing which elide the everyday knowingness of these communities lives. In shuttling between the personal/political, spectacular/mundane, collective/individual, and
official/creative archives, each chapter title reflects a line from a part of the data, as a springboard into a multitude of issues unearthed within the practice of engaging with the data. This further signals, the centrality of performance to each chapter.

Chapter One “Body of Blackness Wrapped in Rainbows.” Theorizing the BlackQueer Body, lays out the foundation for what delineates the Blackqueer body/subject within my dissertation. Specifically, I attend to expanding conceptualizations of Blackness and queerness, which, integrates the two, by illustrating how historically Blackness within a US context has operated within/as a queer spatial, comparing and contrasting the similarities anti-Black and homo/trans-antagonisms. I also illustrate how these antagonisms are relational, and counterproductive to freedom given that the separation of Black and queer issues results in a hierarchy of politics in which differential value is ascribed to those Black persons and communities who cannot and/or choose not to lead normative lives of value. Lastly, I explore how the Black Arts Movement and Black and queer communities engagement with performance, influence my ways of thinking through Blackness and queerness.

Chapter Two, Genealogies of Autoethnography: Mapping Qualitative Researchers and My Personal Turn Towards A Methodology is a methodological literature review, which accomplishes two goals, to define and discuss autoethnography as a methodology within qualitative inquiry, and to illustrate my own deployment of the methodology. Within the first half of the chapter, I highlight key tensions, debates, core tenets, of autoethnography as well as its emergence and relationship to the field of education. Within the second half of the chapter I offer insight into the process of how I build on and expand previous scholarship on autoethnography, highlighting the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of my project, intellectual maturation and journey, as well as my unique deployment of autoethnography. In
particular this chapter focuses on how I analyze my data, outlining my particular usage of theatre-based techniques to “dramatize” my data. This chapter also functions as a “how-to” dramatize data, as well as utilize a particular dramatic technique of juxtaposition I call “blended scripting.”

Chapter Three, Homeplace: Autoethnographic Tellings and Theorizing from the Margins, is divided between personal narrative, and theorizing the analytics of love, loss, and failure within my project. The first half of the chapter, which is structured as personal narrative does not follow a linear progression. I also utilize pseudonyms to protect the actual identity of the individuals mentioned. The second half of the chapter offers a non-comprehensive review of the literature regarding love, loss, and failure. To do so, I offer performative exemplars of each theme, as an entryway to understanding how love, loss, and failure operate within the lives of Blackqueer individuals, and what each of these analytics demand in return.

Chapter Four, Tell It: A Contemporary Chorale for Black Youth Voices, is a performance text with particular homage to Audre Lorde’s Need, thus highlighting the voices, stories, triumphs and in particular tragedies experienced by Black/queer youth. Moreover, this performance in telling the stories of black/queer youth whose positionalities—Black, queer, female, male, poor, etc. make them particularly vulnerable to death (see Gilmore, 2007)—identifies and critiques those individual agents, systems, and structures antithetical to improving the life chances and life opportunities of Black youth.

Chapter Five, Dear Solhot: “And so we must...,” is a critical reflection on my engagement with Saving Our Lives, Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT)—a black girl celebration collective and practice which engages in art making practices as political, sacred, educational, and necessary liberatory practices. Within this chapter I chart the vital lessons this space has offered me in my
own performance practice, and in thinking about Blackqueerness. This chapter centers around poignant personal vignettes located in my engagement with the knowledge created by Black girl genius illustrating the types of paradigm shifts their presence made in both the practice of making art and in thinking about the intersections of Blackness, queerness, and violence. Seldom given credit as knowledge producers, or allowed to take up critical space which does not paint them as the problem to be fixed, Black women/girls, this chapter closes in a personal letter to SOLHOT (organizers) to honor the relationships built, sacred space created, knowledge created, and the messiness of collective organizing across difference.

Chapter Six, “Where Pink Triangles Can’t Bleed Black Ink:” The Power and Potential of Performance Auto/ethnography explores my particular practice of Blended Scripting, which juxtaposes popular discourses/texts, official reports/traditional archives, and the personal to explore the creative and affective terrain when all of these texts interact through performance. Further this chapter looks at how Blended Scripting utilizes poetry and techniques of theatre to create a sacred space, which remembers Blackqueer bodies and stories often reduced to illegibility or unimportance through official documentation. As an exploration of the utility of performance to honor and remember Blackqueer bodies, and in particular Blackqueer youthful bodies, within this chapter, I create theory from my own lived experience and original creative works, to illuminate how performance, and namely theatre along with personal narrative can offer humanizing and complex stories about Blackqueer youth for the purposes of social justice. This chapter, points to ways to supplement traditional archives, which reduce the presences, importance, contributions, and value of Blackqueer lives. I also point to other archives, which have been useful in my own research, as a way to highlight other archives, which might prove useful for researchers.
I close with a non-fiction tale in the spirit of Black feminist artists, cultural critics, storytellers, truth speakers, and creative theorists to offer a critique of educational research practices, and further underscore the value and necessity of performance, and taking seriously Blackqueer people’s lives and contributions. In the spirit of Toni Cade Bambara, James Baldwin, Kiese Laymon, and June Jordan, I utilize wit, play, and critique as offered in the retelling of a story to explore the possibility of corrective justice. Particular attention is given to the need for the creative as a generative site of knowledge production, and a need to value Blackqueer bodies as reflected through the story.
The Scene/Seen #1

“If you can’t love yourself, how in the hell you gonna love somebody else, can I get an Amen up in here.” Amen! These are the words that close out every episode of RuPaul’s Drag Race, one of the few shows I religiously watch now-a-days. Me and Mama Ru, as I like to call her, go way back. Back before I knew I was a Black boy who loved other Black boys. Back before Lily and I would have to confront this truth. Back before the years of abandonment, distrust, silence and hurt which shaded my relationship with KK.

The year is 1992. I am 7. RuPaul’s, “Super model (You Better Work)” plays on KK’s television set. I can still hear the lyrics now, “You better work, turn to the left, now turn to the right...” I was enthralled by this amazon of a woman, and as I bopped my head to the beat and sang the words out like an anthem; this is the fondest memory I have of time spent with my father. Sometimes, May’s house would transform into our own runway, Puddin and I use to strut down the long, winding hallway to the opening theme song of “It’s Showtime at the Apollo.” As if we were in fact walking down the grand walkway of the Apollo Theatre, we wanted to be just like the Showtime dancers, all dressed up in feather boas matching headdress and sequined feather leotard. I never knew who Puddin was immolating, whether it was the guys or the girls, back then I did not give those things much thought. We were simply having fun. And with each high-kick, shimmy of the shoulders, and twists of “my imagination,” as May would say, me in my chubby, less graceful male body, mimicking the Apollo female dancers, was a sight to behold every Saturday night. It was clear we were different. I was different.

My difference, like my fascination with femininity and Mama Ru go way back, so when she exploded onto my father’s television screen with long legs, blonde hair, a red dress, and the words “you betta werk,” it only made sense that this was a song I loved. It was a mantra to hold
onto. Sitting in KK’s house, a place, I seldom visited, I was elated, entertained, and safe in this celluloid fantasy. The brief distraction of Mama Ru, shielded me from the reality that this was not actually his house, but the woman he was currently seeing at the time, the woman who had replaced my mother.

The video stops. The fantasy is over. Reality creeps back in as Lily picks my sister and I up. We argue about RuPaul being a real woman. Red, “I’m telling you that’s not no woman.” I mean what did I know? It wouldn’t be until much later that concepts like gender, or drag queens, or playing gender, or gay men, or faggies or sissy boys, or “twinks” like Red would call them would make sense to me. But why did any of this matter? She was beautiful, the lyrics were catchy, and she told me to “werk.” I decided that on the matter of RuPaul, being a woman or not (which clearly she was), didn’t matter. Slightly confused, wanting to trust my mother but having no way to know for sure, I decided that I was right. She just did not know music like I did. Did she even watch MTV like me?

Lily and I continued this, dance of her recognizing my difference while still loving me tenderly enough for me to know that boys can do girl things and still be boys. A truth I cling on to even now. But there were some things she just would not stand for. Lily refused to teach me to plait my sister’s Imani doll’s hair. So I taught myself. Underhanded. It was ok for me to play with dolls, to wear my great grandmothers hats and wigs, to play hand-games with Puddin and her friends. It was even acceptable for me be uninterested in sports and sing soprano. Just do not be a, “twinky.”

Another truth, I have had to wrestle with, in coming to myself. Lily’s tone, was crisp over the crowds excitement, and the warm Spring Baltimore air. There he was, sashaying down the street. I guess Lily never noticed my loose hips, or saw the way Puddin and I performed every
Saturday night. Or, perhaps she had noticed, like Black mothers do, watching and waiting.

Baltimore on days like this made us proud. Each year, we would attend some parade, or festival. And, today was a special treat because Lily had time off to take us. “Look at that twinky!” Lily says. “Who,” I ask, “him” she says and points. Her admiration for his fervor and finesse but disdain for his effeminate nature signaled, that you can be you as long as that you isn’t a “twinky.” Am I?
Chapter 1 “Body of Blackness Wrapped in Rainbows”: Theorizing the BlackQueer

Body

Problem Definition #1

I’m tired…

Tired of havin to splain to you,

No, rather validate to you my existence

All of this

Body of Blackness

Wrapped in rainbows

A strange prisoner in these ivory towers

See I know you won’t quite be able to understand this liminal splendor that is but my life

But yet I keep a tryin

And devoid of words

Of a phraseology, and language which would have you to better understand

To see who I really am

I offer you instead my life—body, soul and mind

So you might better know me,

So you might better know you

So we might better know one another…
The poem above captures many of the issues explored within this chapter. Specifically this poem illustrates the type of erasure experienced in being both Black and queer. This poem, when coupled with the Scene/Seen #1 illustrates my experiences of feeling out of place, and in doing so centers dislocation unveiling the affective terrain consequently created by it. To be without a place as Ahmed (2006) discusses, is to be without direction, a sense of place, or home, in that, “some spaces extend certain bodies and simply do not leave room for others (p. 11).” The poem illustrates this disorientation, what I feel as my body is unwelcomed within certain spaces, or only parts of me are asked to show up, my Blackness divorced from my queerness, my intellect separated from the creative nature which nourishes it, my maleness but not my feminist politics, my diversity and not the embodied experience of that diversity. This is what it means to be disoriented, “a way of describing the feelings that gather when we lose our sense of who it is that we are (Ahmed, 2006, p. 20).” However this disorientation is not all my own, but the dizzying side-effects of a society which fails to orient itself in ways that make room for complexity, particularly when that complexity is understood as deviant and devalued (see Butler, 1993; Cacho, 2007, 2011). How then do we orient ourselves towards the Blackqueer body, towards bodies like mine? The answer, as the poem gestures towards is to offer, “My life—body, mind, and soul”. That is to offer a body, the Blackqueer body in its complexities as proof enough and as an entryway to understanding and connection. A means to understand the issues experienced by those who are Blackqueer and to then provide a deeper understanding of self for those who are not.

Alluded to in the Introduction of this dissertation the aim of this project is to orient ourselves towards the Blackqueer subject. In order to do so I take up the following questions
within this chapter: What is the Blackqueer body, and why does it matter? What are the discursive outlines, which give shape to this corpus, its material realities? And who is a part of this imaginary collective, giving shape to its experience, politics, aesthetics, and desires? Specifically this chapter traces the contours of what I am describing as the Blackqueer body—a concept to 1) describe the experiences, trauma, and desires captured within this imagined collective 2) to provide a physical corpus in order to envision a site at which injury and hope exists (as the foci and consequences of material realities, as well as an individual who has agency and desire).

This chapter is not meant to serve as an exhaustive review of relevant literature, but rather traces the texts, which have influenced my thinking about the Blackqueer body. In order to do so I focus on several key texts that explores the multiple meanings of Blackness and queerness, and my particular use of each term. I then move to illustrate the ways that Blackness has historically been queer. Lastly, I take a turn towards the Black Arts Movement, and its significance to my project. In doing so this last turn illustrates how Blackness and queerness configure into the making of art and culture offering my particular entryway and framing into thinking about what it means to be Black and queer.

**Blackness, Queerness, and The Black Body**

I use “Black” throughout this text to refer to a racial, cultural, historical, and imaginative collective shared by people of African descent (Gill, 2012). I am uncertain as to what precisely makes one Black, and within my project I am also unwilling to clarify it as a very specific and overly determined existence. However, what I am referencing within the term as I deploy it is a way to think about the experience of Blackness within a US specific context. How Black skin is viewed and then differentially treated based upon other markers of difference like one’s
sexuality, gender, class, ethnicity, nationality or citizenship status. Surely there are differences, and these differences matter. However, for the purposes of my project I am most interested in the embodied experience of Blackness, whether self-identified or projected upon an individual.

I use queer throughout this text to reference the radical political potential of the word and its fundamental deployment as not only challenging heteronormativity (Ferguson, 2004) but also recognizes and encourages the fluidity and movement of people’s sexual lives (Cohen, 1997; Ferguson, 2004; Gumbs, 2010). Further, I deploy queer as a means to describe a politics of sexuality, which is not based upon sexual practice but rather a critical relationship to existing sexual and social norms, recognizing particular political, economic, social geographies and communities which transcend space and time (Cohen, 1997; Gumbs, 2010; Halberstam, 2005). Moreover, I deploy queer within my work as queer of color theorists and scholar Roderick Ferguson (2004), suggests as a “negation.” In his analysis of literary and scholarly text created by women of color, Ferguson illuminates in particular how Black lesbian feminist engaged the gendered and sexual heterogeneity of African American culture through a process of negation. As he describes it this process involves creating new political and epistemic practices rooted in racialized, gendered and sexualized (non-heteronormative) understandings, which offered alternatives to existing social movements. Further as Ferguson (2004) states, “Devising such practices meant resuscitating nonnormative difference as the horizon of epistemological critique, aesthetic innovation, and political practice” (p. 126).

Although Ferguson (2004) articulates queer in a way that recuperates queerness from an oft times albeit white, male, middle class theoretical deployment and system of analysis I have chosen not to engage in this recuperation per se, and instead acknowledge a deployment of queer which has been useful for my own work. I, as Black queer theorists and literary scholar/artist
Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2010) concurs, utilize the word queer throughout this text as a means to describe a politics of sexuality. This politic is not based upon sexual practice but rather a critical relationship to existing sexual and social norms, recognizing particular political, economic, and social geographies and communities which transcend space and time (see Halberstam, 2005; Somerville, 2007). Survival against the odds—against heteronormative, racist, sexist odds—anchors these communities, demanding a future of possibilities despite the horizons of death they continue to face (Gumbs, 2010).

Further, the way that Blackness has been imagined, and treated within the US has existed within a queer time and place to borrow from Halberstam (2005). That is to say there are ways in which Blackness as a signifier and identity as well as a mode of culture, community building, and way of living and surviving for Black people within the US, has required the “Queer uses of time and space develop[ed], at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction” (Halberstam, 2005, p.1). That is not to flatten the multiple meanings and experiences as to what it means to be Black in the United States, as if all forms of embodied Blackness, or all individuals who have identified and/or been identified as Black have consciously and always lived their lives in oppositional ways. This is not so, as the politics of respectability among Black communities has been well documented (see Carby, 1987; Cohen, 1999; Collins, 2000) as well as conservative pushes for more normalized modes of living and acceptability within Black communities (see Lubiano, 1992; Moynihan, 1965). However, what I wish to draw our attention to are ways to expand queerness, and subsequently Blackness, if we consider how sentiments of anti-Blackness which disbarred Black communities and individuals from accessing certain privileges consequently queered Blackness. Moreover, it is important to also think about how to Blacken queerness, that is to highlight the productive ways that
racialized experience, and particularly Blackness, offers important ways to think about, “queerness as an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices which detach queerness from sexual identity” (Halberstam, 2005, p. 1).

In moving forward, it is important to note that my entryway into understanding and theorizing Blackness, the Black body, and therefore the Blackqueer body is in and through reading and writing. I utilize reading and writing as access points to delineate the Black diasporic body. Delineating this body, requires attending to the injury inflicted upon this body, as well as the desires articulated by those imagined to belong and are claimed by this body. Further, I use reading, and writing as a means to reflect my own injury and desires those I hoard in silence, have forgotten, or will through this journey find the courage to speak as a Blackqueer man (Bambara, 1999; Lorde, 1980; Young, 2006).

**Defining Blackness Through the Black Body, and Black Flesh**

Hershini Bhana Young (2006), in *Haunting Capital: Memory, Text and the Black Diasporic Body* traces the collective Black body, through “injury, memory, ghosts, and the novel” (p. 1). In offering these particular paths to understanding the make up of this body, Young (2006) approaches the Black body as a diasporic entity. As such, the Black body, delineating from the African diaspora is a “collective remembering body (Young, 2006, p. 2),” which stretches, “from coast to coast, from South Carolina to the Kongo, from Guadalupe to Paris, from South Africa to New York, and it is unwieldy, awkward, and continually falling apart” (Young, 2006, p. 2). Positing the Black body as diasporic, transnational, and a storehouse of memories, Young (2006) offers important insights into theorizing Blackness. By situating Blackness as a body, Young (2006) draws our attention to the physicality and frailty of bodies. And in doing so, illuminates the very site at which the consequences of being marked as Black is
operationalized—the body. It is the body, whether individuated or collective, that incurs what Young (2006) notes as racial injury, in that the Black body, “is a body that bears the brunt of history a body in need of redress” (p. 2).

This body, its physical manifestation marked by Black skin (Fanon, 1967; Young, 2010), is the unfree subject (Spillers, 1987). Hortense Spillers (1987), Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe makes this explicitly clear. Denoting the difference between body and flesh, Spillers (1987) uses metaphor as a means to delineate the body as a captive subject position and the flesh as the liberated subject. Further, as Spillers (1987), references this body/flesh split in relationship to enslaved Africans, places the flesh as a precursor to the body, “In that sense, that ‘before the ‘body’ there is the ‘flesh,’ that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography” (p. 67). Here the works of Toni Morrison (2007) and Essex Hemphill (1986) prove particularly useful to illustrate this difference. Moreover, I think each of these literary works, speak to important ways to understand the Black body/flesh, in/as sites of injury and healing, assault and hope, desire and even liberation. To explore the double meaning imbued in Black skin, as flesh and body, I briefly highlight the literary work of Toni Morrison and Essex Hemphill.

Within Morrison’s (2007), Beloved the character Baby Suggs Holy sermon in the Clearing has been utilized before as a way to illustrate the difference between flesh/body (see Holland, 2000). In a similar fashion, I would like to use the sermon as a means to not only illustrate differences between the flesh/body, but as a way to continue to conceptualize the Black body. Baby Suggs, states,

in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don’t love your eyes; they’d just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. [...]You got to love it, you! And no, they ain’t in love with
your mouth. Yonder, out there, they will see it broken and break it again. What you say out of it they will not heed. What you scream from it they do not hear. [...] No, they don’t love your mouth. You got to love it. This is flesh I’m talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. (Morrison, 2007, p. 103-104).

What I want to highlight here is the interplay between the words Baby Suggs uses. She draws our attention to flesh, directing those in attendance, to “love” their flesh. Emblematic of the usage of the pulpit and/or sacred spaces within Black culture, this private yet public moment exists as a counterpublic moment (Warner, 2002). This moment calls to question the public, whereas we as readers become spectators, witnesses, and participants alongside the African American community gathered in the Clearing. Perhaps, we are those out there “yonder” who do not love Black flesh (even if it is our own) and would desire to “flay it” (p. 103).” Perhaps, we are those also responsible, out “yonder” who are content with the unfree Black body, desiring to see it “broken and break it again” (p. 104). Surely whiteness in this moment is indicted, and yet Baby Suggs is clear that the Black body is under assault out there, beyond the Clearing, beyond a space in which Black flesh is taught/told to be loved and celebrated, allowed to be free.

As Holland (2000), states, “The correlation between Baby Sugg’s idea of the flesh and Spillers’s conceptualization is uncanny [...] Morrison employs this body/flesh principle to create an interface between ways of becoming and the “word,” making the state of self-actualization a serious possibility (p. 58).” Attending to the body/flesh split, Baby Suggs, reminds us of the ways that Black flesh when controlled, comes with bodily harm, “Yonder they flay it” (Morrison, 2007, p. 104). Here we are reminded of the frailty of the body, the need for the body to be healed in order to liberate the flesh, complimenting Young’s (2006) description of the black diasporic body, “in need of redress “(p. 2)” Further, this body/flesh split as articulated through Baby Suggs illustrates how the marker of Black skin (Young, 2010), that is, the body, is the very seen/scene at which harm occurs, further reiterating the need for healing. Healing that is
articulated by the self, in community, with the core premise of love. The closing of Baby Suggs sermon, reiterates this, as she states, “This is flesh I’m talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved” (Morrison, 2007, p. 104).

Against this backdrop are the usages of the Black body towards liberation as illustrated through Essex Hemphill’s (1986), poem, “For my Own Protection.” Hemphill (1986), begins the poem with the words, “I want to start an organization to save my life” (p. 174). Immediately as readers we begin in a very different place in comparison to Baby Suggs sermon in the Clearing. Tired of all of the countless, organizations to save “whales, snails, dogs, cats Chrysler and Nixon,” Hemphill (1986), believes that “the lives of Black men are priceless and can be saved,” underscoring his desire for an organization dedicated to the cause. Hemphill (1986), and Morrison (2007), both seek the same things, means to save Black people. However, were they differentiate, is in Hemphill’s (1986), desire to place the Black body—the instrument controlled and in danger—as the very thing utilized to also save and liberate it. He states, “

If a human chain be formed  
around nuclear missile sites,  
then surely Black men can form  
human chains around Anacostia, Harlem  
South Africa, Wall Street, Hollywood  
each other (Hemphill, 1986, p. 174).

Within the poem, it is clear, that Hemphill (1986), is concerned with saving Black men, given his own subject position as a Black gay HIV positive man. However, throughout the poem, it is clear that his usage of placing Black bodies in harms way, around Black (urban) communities, is also indicative of a similar collective desire expressed within Beloved. Further, in placing, “human chains” around the sites necessary to heal, save, and liberate Black people, Hemphill (1986), illustrates what gay civil rights activist Byard Rustin, meant when he stated that, “The only weapon we have is our bodies, and we need to tuck them in places so wheels don’t turn.”
Theorizing the Black body, within the body/flesh split as articulated by Spillers (1987) although useful, should not limit understandings of the body as simply a receptacle of injury. As illustrated by Hemphill (1986), the body can be used in service to free the flesh, underscoring the need to make visible and theorize the Black body as an imagined corpus existing between a bodily bound and harmed representation, and the fleshly, unruly, free, corpus.

Until now, I have outlined the Black body, as an imagined diasporic collective body, situated simultaneously between a controlled, and free subject. Within this liminal place, I have also highlighted the need for healing. This healing serves as a necessary step in order to reorient ourselves toward another to see our complexity. In turning inward, I find it especially important to understand the ways that value is conferred upon certain sorts of Black bodies is made in and through the devaluation of other sorts of Black bodies. In particular, I believe this differentiation often takes place on the backs of Blackqueer subjects. The immediate following sections begin to explore the overlaps of Blackness, queerness, and value.

**Upon the Ocean Did We Meet: Imagining the Oceanic Crosscurrents of Blackness and Queerness**

Before I begin teasing out relationships of value, Blackness, and queerness. I want to first set a stage in which these relationships unfold. The ocean, the place where flesh, earth, wind, salt, commerce, memory, history and the imagination all converge. It is upon the ocean in which we are able to trace diasporic patterns of human movement. It is the ocean that holds the stories of the transformation of free flesh into unfree bodies. Because the ocean stands as a pivotal scene/seen at which the Blackqueer body materializes and vanishes all at once, I want to take us here. As M. Jacqui Alexander (2005) notes, water holds memory. Water is the place in which histories converge, submerge, disappear, and reappear. Upon the ocean is where histories of
diasporic Blackness, become diffuse, where queerness is questionable, and an inability at times to trace any particular place of origin, or home, and yet water holds memory.

Memory, as Harvey Young (2010) notes, is crucial as a means to trace the shape of the Black body and the experiences shared by this imagined collective. Furthering the work of Young (2006), Young (2010), offers the practice of critical memory as important to, name, locate, and spotlight assaults against the Black body within both public and private settings. This further allows for the calling out of those responsible for the harm, demonstrating the potential of political agency, Black memory actualizes; and in doing so, also illuminating the ubiquitous and systematic nature of abuse against Black bodies. Reliant upon individual memory, critical memory is, the act of reflecting upon and sharing recollections of embodied black experience. It does not presume that black bodies have exactly the same memories, yet assists the process of identifying connections across black bodies and acknowledges that related histories of discrimination, violence, and migration result in similar experiences. Critical memory invites consideration of past practices that have affected the lives and shaped the experiences of black folk. It looks back in time, from a present-day perspective, and not only accounts for the evolution in culture but also enables an imagining of what life would be like had things been different” (Young, 2010, p. 19–20).

Alienation, separation, and division are the consequences of forgetfulness as Alexander (2005), bears to mind. Critical memory intervenes against these mechanisms. In tracing the forced separation of people through the violence of empire, Alexander (2005) calls into question, “the loss that issues from enforced alienation and segregations of different kinds” (p. 2), and how this loss manifests in our ability to see various points of connectivity (Alexander, 2005). Further, Alexander (2005), illumines how the cultural amnesia created by domination, leads to alienation, invisibility, and the subsequent devaluation of and loss of particular knowledge and bodies. Offering up the importance of memory, Sharon Holland (2000) states “Forgetfulness must be called out of the margin between worlds, and that space must be filled eventually with words,
both spoken and written” (p. 53). As “a part of the nastiness and meanness of African American existence that is a living death,” (p. 53) forgetfulness serves several purposes, a necessary ingredient to maintain the status quo, relegating particular bodies, knowledge, people and communities to imaginative and material spaces which require their death and demise, and to disconnect these marginalized communities from their own histories, knowledge, and power. Further forgetfulness, allows for the creation of divisions between marginalized communities thwarting collective action for change rooted in an understanding of shared borders of oppression.

As Alexander (2005) illuminates marginalized communities often forget their shared borders of history and experience, “a collective forgetting so deep that we have forgotten that we have forgotten” (p. 14). This forgetting manifests in multiple ways that are antithetical to the survival of marginalized communities. And as Cynthia Dillard (2012), highlights this forgetfulness is seductive for African ascendant people. Seduction in this sense is as other scholar, artists, and thinkers have highlighted as those “irresistible moments when we have been enticed away from ourselves, led away from our duties, and have accepted others’ principles or notions of identity and proper conduct as our own (Dillard, 2012, p. 15). Serving as an antidote to this forgetting, Dillard (2012) offers cultural memory and Alexander (2005), the idea of crossing (memory) as a necessary component. Cultural memory, akin to Young’s (2008) critical memory oscillates between the past, present, and future, gleaning for what is useful of the past to the present and future, imaging new possibilities. Memory thus becomes a crucial component for understanding Blackness and the Black body. Building upon this insight, as offered up by Holland (2000), Young (2000), and Alexander (2005), Young, (2008) offers critical memory as a site of imaginative rediscovery, to remember ourselves. This, as Dillard (2012), highlights is
necessary, “in order to heal, to put the pieces back together again, we must learn to remembers the things that we’ve learned to forget (p. ix).” As has been the argument of this dissertation, I believe one of the things we have forgotten, is the interrelationship of Blackness and queerness, thus I offer memory as a means to provide a shape to the Black body, and of specific use to my project the Blackqueer body. Through my own body and memory, in conjunction with others, I offer here a map of the Blackqueer body, the abuses it suffers, and means of redress.

Returning, then to the ocean. If water holds memory, then, “This wateriness is metaphor, and history too. The brown-skinned, fluid-bodied experiences now called blackness and queerness surfaced in intercontinental, maritime contacts hundreds of years ago: in the seventeenth century, in the Atlantic Ocean (Tinsley, 2008, p. 191).” As Tinsley (2008), illustrates, the ocean serves as one site, not necessarily an origin to trace the intersections of Blackness and queerness. These intersections unfold in the same-sex relationships, which occurred between Europeans and Africans within slave ships, and particularly within the queer relationships, which also emerged due to the Atlantic slave trade (Tinsley, 2008). Tinsley (2008), illustrates these queer relations as they emerge in understanding the etymology of the word mati, which in Creole means “my girl,” but literally it means mate, as in shipmate—she who survived the Middle Passage with me (Tinsley, 2008, p. 2).” An interesting point of connection between Blackness and queerness, here the Atlantic serves as a mediating point. What we see here within the word mati as Tinsley (2008) points out centers around desire, power, and value. And although at times same sex desire is understood as queer desire, I insist instead to read the queerness of the desire represented here in several important ways. Let us to return back to Spillers (1987), because the Atlantic slave trade and thus the Atlantic ocean sets the seen/scene at which we can begin to map ways to understanding the Black body as a queer site, as the
Blackqueer body. This is in part as Tinsley lays out regarding same sex desire. But, it is also true in the ways that Black bodies as captured bodies were consequently reduced “to a thing” (Spillers, 1987, p. 67). Here, queerness represents a resistance to the “thing making” process that the Atlantic slave trade represents (Spillers, 1987). Rather, African women and men resisted the commodification of their captured bodies by, “feeling and feeling for their co-occupants on these ships” (Tinsley, 2008, p. 192). This resistance to commodification further reveals relationships of power and intimacy. And it is these relationships of power and intimacy as Keguro Macharia (2014) notes, which illuminate particular ways to think through queer, while being attentive to the “intimacy-making and intimacy-destroying histories of blackness.” What these histories reveal, unfolding on the Atlantic, through the nefarious relationships of Black bodies, labor, surplus, economics and value are the ways that Blackness and Black sexuality have been non-normative and at times anti-normative (see Macharia, 2014; Spillers, 1987).

Further, the Atlantic Ocean serves as a threshold of crossing. Here, I am building on Tinsley’s (2008) work, and gesturing towards the notion that neither the Atlantic Ocean nor slave ships serve as points of origin for Black queerness. Rather, the Atlantic as the scene/seen of the Blackqueer body, represents a crossing to borrow from Alexander (2005), and Tinsley in quoting anthropologists Kale Fajardo a “crosscurrent.” That is to say that what is symbolized in the movement of peoples, history, memory, water, salt, and commerce are diffuse, contentious, and opaque reflections of Black life, and Blackqueer experience in particular (Alexander, 2005; Tinsley, 2008). Put another way, crosscurrents, map Blackqueerness through the complex and fluid possibilities which are navigated through the “enslaved, and African, brutality and desire, genocide and resistance (Tinsley, 2008, p. 192).” The importance of doing this as Alexander (2005), gestures towards is that crossings, recognize this sort of obfuscated history, a juncture to
see the Blackqueer body and intervene in the cultural amnesia created by domination, leading to alienation, invisibility, and the subsequent devaluation of and loss of particular bodies and knowledge. Alexander (2005), offers crossings as a necessary, and ongoing, imperative, “of making the world intelligible to ourselves (p.6).” Crossings not only force invisible subjects to the fore, but also make visible the productive points of connection shared by marginalized subjects. Thus the Atlantic provides useful metaphors and analytical tools to think through Blackness and queerness. Chief among these, as has been the concern of my project, are the ways to better understand, uncover and recognize borders of shared histories, struggles, and similar treatments experienced by and within marginalized communities, but in particular the relationship of Blackness to queerness.

**Separate But Equal: Black Subjectivity, Normativity and the Devalued**

If the Atlantic sets the stage for relationships of Blackness to queerness then those same relationships became more pronounced and diffuse as race became codified by law and interwoven into the cultural fabric of US society. These relationships as the Atlantic slave trade illuminates, are steeped in relationships to power, and thus also relationships of value. This value has also proven to be predicated upon one’s proximity to normativity, an attribute denied Black skin. Illustrating this is the Supreme Court case of Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896). In 1892, Homer Plessy challenged Louisiana state law that required separate accommodations for white and colored passengers (Our Documents, 2014; Somerville, 2000). Plessy of mixed race descent boarded a train car and took a seat in a section designated for “whites only.” Refusing to move, Plessy was arrested and what followed were a series of trials which sought to challenge the constitutionality of the Louisiana state law requiring railroad companies within the state to provide separate but equal accommodations for white and “colored races” (Somerville, 2000, p.
1). What resulted in the series of trials and appeals were not only the Supreme Court’s upholding of the segregationist Louisiana law, but also the now infamous pronouncement of “separate but equal (see Our Documents 2014; Somerville, 2000).” Further what resulted as queer and feminist theorists Siobhan Somerville notes was a “legalized system of segregation [...] articulating it in exclusively racial terms, the imagined division between ‘black’ and ‘white’ bodies (Somerville, 2000, p. 1).”

If, “the formation of notions of heterosexuality and homosexuality emerged in the United States through (and not merely parallel to) a discourse saturated with assumptions about the racialization of bodies,” then I argue that these formations also establish a site in which to trace a nations nascent understandings of queer (ness)—the aberrant, devalued, Other (Somerville, 2000, p. 4). In fact, following Somerville, I argue that what history has revealed if one were to survey legal documents and the subsequent discourse and effects carried out on racialized bodies created categories, and hierarchies of valued and valueless citizens. As ethnic studies scholar Lisa Cacho notes, “the United States, human value, legally universalized as normative, is made legible in relation to the deviant, the non-American, the nonnormative, and the recalcitrant: the legally repudiated ‘others’ of U.S. value” (Cacho, 2011, p.27). Cacho’s observations of the creation of valued and valueless subjects, extends much of Somerville’s (2000) analysis of the intersections of race/racism and homosexuality/homophobia. What I find particularly useful between both of these studies, is their ability to illustrate through legal documents, and a situating of culture historically within the US, how markers of difference, and chiefly race have been utilized as a means to marginalize. Moreover Cacho (2007; 2011), through the usage of comparative race analytics, illustrates Somerville’s analysis of how processes of racialization informed and shaped
understandings of sexuality, and in effect also queering our understandings of race/racialized bodies and communities.

The doctrine of “separate and equal,” not only resulted in legalized segregation, but further entrenched ideologies which equated Black skin with being less than, abnormal, and in consequence resigned to a non-citizen like status. As Holland (2000) articulates, America’s national identity is made in and through the “invisibility of blackness (p. 38)” and the dispensability of black bodies and by extension as have been my own argument queer bodies. American citizens have value, and are able to live, those who do not live are a buffer and scapegoat for citizens to remain ignorant “of the inevitable”—death (Holland, 2000, p. 38). To remain ignorant “of the inevitable” is not just about physical death, but also about the risk of social death, which threatens all citizens in distinctly different ways. Blackqueer bodies, those with a great deal of distance from white, male, heterosexual, middle class performances and privilege, experience the effects of social death and violence precisely because of their second class citizenship as imagined by the nation.

Further, Hong & Ferguson (2011) help illuminate, these categories of difference, are in and of themselves structured around “constructions of norms and value” (Hong & Ferguson, 2011, p. 14). For instance, Beal’s (1970) essay “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female” illustrates the ways in which race and gender are neither essentialized nor biological categories but rather relationships and processes of valuation and devaluation (see also Hong & Ferguson, 2011). In particular, Beal demonstrates how capitalism, racism, and patriarchy produce categories of normativity. And that these categories are virtually denied Black bodies. This denial takes place both in life, as it does in death. For instance, as Holland (2000) notes, “the dead are put on trial for their sins of the flesh and held up as a constant warning to us (especially
in the rhetoric of disease prevention) to live a clean, healthy life” (p. 30). What is important to note here is how markers of difference—Blackness and queerness—are a part of the discourse of citizenship and value. Not only are Blackqueer bodies held up as warnings to others, as well as to those who are Blackqueer, but their bodies provide the nation and those with value a readily accessible scapegoat. Exhumed black and queer bodies are never rationalized to support their living but only their death, e.g., testing to see the traces of alcohol or drugs within Trayvon Martin and Renisha McBride’s body’s, which frame these bodies as not-innocent, problematic, lawless, and therefore justly deserving death or at the very least, not living like the rest of us law-abiding citizens.

To be marked by Black skin, and to have one’s culture be marked as less than, has always upheld anti-Black sentiment and similarly intersects with disdain for queerness. Which, effects the sorts of rights, questions and ways of living queer subjects demand and are afforded. To be clear these queer desires are not those hailed by progressives, mainstream LGBT rights organizations, which currently prioritizes marriage equality, or major race-based social justice initiatives that continue to mobilize in ways that seldom accompany gains for the racialized poor, female, and young. Rather at the periphery of these initiatives and movements, and perhaps in the nexus of each are critical choices and hopes demanding of us practices which, at the very least, do not devalue the lives, choices, and practices of Sakia Gunn or Trayvon Martin and perhaps at best hold them both and equally so, sacred and worthy our attention (not surveillance or correction). In moving through relationships of Blackness to queerness, I want to now take a turn towards the realm of performance which further highlights these linkages.
Blackness, Queerness, and The Black Arts Movement

I have come to know the interconnectedness and inseparable nature of Blackness and queerness most notably documented through the works and lives of Blackqueer authors, poets, and activists like that of Audre Lorde, June Jordan, James Baldwin and Essex Hemphill. I have also come to know the potential and power of performance to make visible and value the lives of marginalized people. Useful to my project are the ways that Black Performance Theory (BPT) demonstrates how Blackqueerness is constituted in and revealed through performance (Madison, 2014; DeFrantz and Gonzalez, 2014). Further as Madison (2014) states,

If performance constitutes forms of cultural staging—conscious, heightened, reflexive, framed, contained---within a limited time span of action from plays to carnivals, from poetry to prose...if performativity marks identity through the habitus of repetitive enactments, reiteration of stylized norms, and inherited gestural conventions...the performative is the culmination of both in that it does something to make a material, physical, and situational difference—then BPT speaks to why all this matters to blackness and to contested identities. (Madison, 2014, p. viii)

Building upon this insight, and body of work, then this too matters to Blackqueerness—a contested identity. Contested because as I write this the body count of Blackqueer bodies victimized by state sanctioned violence continues to grow⁷ while disconnection between the systems of violence which place these Black and queer bodies in particular harm continue to go under theorized and unexamined. Yet, response to this in ways which do not parcel out markers of difference can be read in through, and at opposition to Black performance. Thus the remaining section of this chapter illustrates this to display and explore the relationships of Blackness, queerness, and performance, mainly in the relationships of Black liberation movements and the subsequent artistic productions.

⁷Here I am thinking about the recent funeral of 18 year old Michael Brown Jr., an unarmed Black teenager shot in Ferguson, Missouri; the police brutality experienced by Arizona State University professor Ersula Ore an African American woman; and the unsolved murder of a Black transwoman Mia Henderson, of Baltimore, MD.
Performance as a method of inquiry, a tool to give name to the lived experience of marginalized individuals/communities and then birth a new world order towards liberation, equality, humanness and life sustaining practices has long been utilized by Black, Third World, queer women and men throughout history (hooks, 1990; 1995b; Johnson, 2006; Madison & Hamera, 2006). From Audre Lorde’s poems, to Robbie McCauley’s Sally’s Rape, to contemporary works by individuals and collectives like SOLHOT (Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths), WeLevitate, Urban Bush Women, E. Patrick Johnson, Bill T. Jones, and Anna DeVare Smith and countless others, performance continues to be a discursive space uniting theory and praxis, contesting rigid notions of identity and community boundaries while exploring the richness of what is and what can be (Brown, 2014; Carlson, 1996, Denzin, 2003, hooks, 1990, Johnson, 2006, Madison & Hamera, 2006). Furthermore, as Johnson (2006) asserts, Black performance lies at the interstices of Black political life and art, providing the lynchpin which sustains and galvanizes Black art and acts of resistance. Furthermore, hooks (1995b) asserts that Black performance operates within two modes—one ritualistic as a part of culture building and the other manipulative out of necessity for survival in an oppressive world. As a vehicle, performance was one of the few autonomous spaces in which Black people were able to transgress boundaries meant to dehumanize their experiences, and it is also within this space that liberatory consciousness was learned, created, practiced and passed down from generation to generation (hooks, 1995b, Johnson, 2006).

Serving as a pivotal moment which illuminates the capacity of Black art to our present, is that of the Black Arts Movement (BAM). Emerging during the late 1960’s and early 1970’s the Black Arts Movement, “was the explicit fusion of culture and politics” (Iton, 2008, p. 86). Larry Neal (1989) suggested that the Black Arts Movement was, “...the aesthetic and spiritual sister of
the Black Power concept” (p. 62). As the sister to the Black Power movement, BAM envisioned “an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of black America” (Neal, 1989, p. 62). Within this period Black artists and activists utilized their lives and performative works (i.e., poetry, plays, etc.) as a means to educate, and speak back to larger oppressive societal structures which sought to dehumanize and diminish the life possibilities and life chances of Black communities and individuals.

In particular we see artist and performers such as Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, June Jordan, Larry Neal, and others utilize their art as a weapon to speak back to and against oppression (see also Carbado, McBride & Weise, 2002; Iton 2008; Neal, 1989). As Richard Iton (2008), notes Amiri Baraka’s “Black Art,” poem became a template that influenced many of the aforementioned artists, and others during this time period. Within the poem Baraka (1979), states, “We want a black poem. And a/Black World./Let the world be a Black Poem/And Let All Black People Speak This Poem/Silently/or LOUD” (1966). Baraka’s poem filled with violent phrases of protest, in which he pens, “we want "poems that kill."
/Assassin poems, Poems that shoot guns./Poems that wrestle cops into alleys/and take their weapons leaving them dead,” signaled a reorganization of the current world structures which were antithetical to Black survival. The art of the Black Arts Movement, and in particular poetry, served as action put into motion via performance (Johnson, 2006).

However, it is also within this grossly nationalistic movement that we see a Black creative expression which politicized agency against racism at the expense of the “Other” within (Carbado, McBride & Weise, 2002; Johnson, 2006; Harris, 2005). These artists, and the art/performance of this time represented “blackness”, entrapping it within identity politics whereas performers struggled over the most effective and/or “proper” performances to deploy
against racism (Johnson, 2006). The sort of violence Baraka called for in “Black Art” in its nationalist overtones, was emblematic of the Black Power Movement’s tendency to suppress, ignore, deny, or out rightly refuse to acknowledge the complexity of Blackness and how it intersected with gender and sexuality (Carbado, McBride & Weise, 2002; Harris, 2005; Hemphill, 1991; Iton, 2008).

However, within other liberationist movements of this time we begin to see a shift from privileging race at the denigration of other members of the Black community who are both Black, female, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered (LGBT), middle class, differently abled, etc. to include these non-essentialized views of Blackness (Harris, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Mahone, 1994). It was actually through the emergence of female, queer, and Othered Black artist that we see the boundaries of Blackness expanded while still retaining the same principles of a Black performative politic of critique, redress, resistance, and liberation. As Mahone (1994) asserts, Black playwrights, particularly queer and women playwrights ventured past and pushed our imaginations beyond linear, and traditional dramatic conventions. Within her book, Moon Marked and Touched by Sun, Mahone (1994), accurately describes the work of performance artist as visionaries who

confront our pain and carry us beyond it to that simple turn of thought, that dramatic spiraling up which releases one from the prison of forgetfulness. Omissions are admitted, distortions are corrected and sometimes by the mere act of speech—naming—balance is restored (Mahone, 1994).

Laying the groundwork for an aesthetic which turned our gazes not only towards Black life, culture, but to also value it, the Black Arts Movement can be seen as instrumental to shaping the work of other Black artists after this period working within this same tradition.

Inherent in the works of Black lesbian and gay identified artists is a building upon the momentum of “the social protest models [...] which empowered black lesbian, gay, and bisexual
writers to incorporate comparably radical themes of race, gender, and sexuality into their works (Carbado, McBride & Weise, 2002, p. 135).” These artists took up the spirit of BAM to attend to the life stories, histories (re-imagined, or excavated from dominant cultures omission), struggles, and needs of the Black gay and lesbian community. At its core these works, held sacred the lives of Black LGBTQ individuals, with a spiritual fervor (see Carbado, McBride, & Weise, 2002; Beam, 2008; Boykin, 1996, 2012; Harris, 2005; Hemphill, 1991; Riggs, 2007). A tenuously fraught history marked with alienation and longing the relationship of BAM to current Blackqueer literary works and genius is arguably undeniable; however fraught, the structural constraints of racism, sexism, homophobia, and heterosexism then, as it does now, created an imperative desire of longing (Gumbs, 2010). Although not always articulated as a precise desire for one another, there exists a need. As Gumbs (2010) states,

Sometimes we kill each other off into irrelevance for the sake of our own cohesion. Limits appear to provide clarity, even when it means amputating the barely living bodies whose sacrificial status make our inquiry necessary. We are neighbors, if not housemates, if not soulmates sharing organs. (see? We were never meant to survive)...But we want each other…The excellence, the fullness of our critical practice comes, I think, from our willingness to live in this meeting space (Gumbs, 2010, p. 2)

Living in this meeting space is the testament of the artistry, and theorizing of Black life, and culture, created by (and for) Black lesbian women and gay men. As E. Lynn Harris (2005) states within his edited volume collection of Black gay men’s writing, “Of course any strides toward openness and sexual candor in the 1980’s are directly linked to the political and cultural breakthroughs of the African American civil rights, feminist, and gay liberation movements (pp. xiii-xiv).” A later collection of artistic work and critical essays written by Black gay men, Harris’ (2005) work adds to the rich legacy of Black queer artistry and protest. However, “I would lie if I did not also speak of loss (Lorde, 1980, p. 14).” What Harris’ (2005) anthology makes apparent, and each and every anthology written by, for, and about, Black queer survival is that many of us
did not survive\(^8\). And this survival was not about a mere biological existence, a physical presence, but also about the quality of our daily living. What the Black Arts Movement set into motion, refueled by the fire and insight of feminist, gay, and lesbian liberation movements, Black gay and lesbian artists put forth in blueprints, which might enhance and insure our Blackqueer survival. And this is and has always always\(^9\) been what is at stake, our very literal survival.

The linkages of BAM to the later works of Blackqueer artist is one which is a history of text written upon and across our bodies. And bodies, bodies like ours, the Blackqueer body, refuse linear logics of connectivity. How can we, if loss and rememory are integral components? To make these connections, one must account for the gaps in sinew created by bullet wounds, the phantom limbs created from excavating cancerous growths, and the memory of the viral pandemic of the 80’s, all the makeup of arterial plaque suffocating the intergenerational flow of blood, nutrients, anti-bodies of knowledge, necessary for our survival. Yet with such a body, the

\(^{8}\text{Here I am referencing about The Black Woman an Anthology (1970) edited by Toni Cade Bambara, This Bridge Called my Back (1981) edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology edited by Joseph A. Beam; Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men (1991) edited by Essex Hemphill, Black Like Us: A Century of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual African American Fiction (2002) edited by Devon W. Carbado, Dwight A. McBride and Donald Weise, For Colored Boys Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Still Not Enough: Coming of Age, Coming Out, and Coming Home (2012) edited by Keith Boykin. Many of the editors or contributors to these works died prematurely, from a combination of health issues consisting of cancer or AIDS related complications. Much of the work within each anthology also foregrounds this reality, holding the memory of those loved but no longer physically present. And surviving in print, the fact that some text are no longer in print, circulation, or have only done so through extraordinary efforts further illustrates how the work and memory of Blackqueer individuals barely survives.}\n
\(^{9}\text{See Gumbs (2010), discussion on June Jordan’s keynote address at the Mayor’s Summit on Breast Cancer in San Francisco in November 1966. Analyzing Jordan’s keynote, Gumbs (2010), provides insights into the repetition of “always always.” Concluding that in its intentionality, it is the people we love who are living and here, and those we love who are here but not living.}\n
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Blackqueer body, has always been much more than what has happened to it, made us ill, disposable, and our very existence an unlikely possibility.

The structural forces, which perpetuated inequality within the lives of Black folk within the US, and severely diminishes their life chances and life opportunities through legalized to extralegal practices, called for modes of survival which necessarily stood in stark contrast to if not opposition to (white) normative ways of living. Moreover, Black responses to slavery, segregation, Jim Crow, red zoning, COINTELPRO, and a constant state of abuse, neglect, and mistreatment have also been queered responses. Where, “queer means ‘I am not supposed to exist,’ but I do (Gumbs, 2010, p. 76).” The emphasis on thriving on a here and now, of knowing the constant and inevitability of death, is noted in the lyrics of the late Tupac Shakur (1993),

And in the end it seems I'm headin for the pen
I try and find my friends, but they're blowin in the wind
Last night my buddy lost his whole family
It's gonna take the man in me to conquer this insanity
It seems the rain'll never let up
I try to keep my head up, and still keep from gettin wet up
You know it's funny when it rains it pours
They got money for wars, but can't feed the poor
Say there ain't no hope for the youth and the truth is
It ain't no hope for the future
And then they wonder why we crazy
I blame my mother, for turning my brother into a crack baby
We ain't meant to survive, cause it's a setup
And even if you're fed up
Ya got to keep your head up

Taken from Shakur’s (1993), hit “Keep Ya Head Up,” Shakur’s lyrics are one of several responses of Blacks to Black life overlapping with Halberstam’s (2005) notions of queer time and place, and Muñoz (2009) emphasis on queer futurity. By focusing on the here and now Shakur (1993), highlights what Halberstam (2005) notes as queer time, which focuses on the here and now due to a constantly diminishing future. Moreover, Shakur (1993), in his lyrics
describe “the threat of no future [which] hovers overhead like a storm cloud.” Despite this reality, Shakur (1993), also does the work of illustrating queerness as potential, “a longing that propels us onward [...] that lets us feel that this world is not enough (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1). Shakur (1993), does not stand alone in writing, thinking, and dreaming about Blackness in queer ways, ways which are critical of the past/present, focus on living with death and hope for futures better than the here and now. For example Audre Lorde’s (1978) Litany for Survival, also illustrates this when she states,

For those of us who live at the shoreline
standing upon the constant edges of decision
crucial and alone
for those of us who cannot indulge
the passing dreams of choice
who love in doorways coming and going
in the hours between dawns
looking inward and outward
at once before and after
seeking a now that can breed
futures
like bread in our children's mouths
so their dreams will not reflect
the death of ours:

And stretching back even further, Paul Laurence Dunbar when he pens *Sympathy* (1899), stating

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart’s deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—
I know why the caged bird sings!

further delineates a longstanding tradition among Black people in the US which configure into queer utopic desires, usages of time and place, (Halberstam, 2005, Gumbs, 2010, Muñoz, 2009). Further, what these passages highlight I would suggest is perhaps neither continuity nor intergenerational dialogues per se, but rather *intergenerative* practices of Blackqueer aesthetics,
politics, protest, and art. Intergenerative, in the sense as Gumbs (2010), describes practices which
decenter ideas of normative (re)production, and generational distinctions, but rather, “something
present between us that exceeds the time and space within which we (don’t) encounter each other
(p. 64).”

That something between us is also a story of networks of care, both in the physical and
literary sense. This is what is evidenced when, Lorde (1980) within the Cancer Journals, states,
“I say the love of women healed me (p. 39),” and when Hemphill (1991), means when he says
that, “Brother to Brother is evidence that we can love, accept, and support one another in our
constructions of family (p. xxix).” Brother to Brother the unfinished work of Joseph Beam who
assembled the first Black gay anthology of its sort, In the Life, would not have come to fruition
without networks of care. These networks nourished the project, and in particular Hemphill as
the editor, down to Barbara Smith, providing “an “invaluable education” on the technical aspects
of publishing a book of this magnitude, to “delicious fried chicken, and conversations” provided
by Mr. and Mrs. Beam (Beam’s parents) while Hemphill stayed with them to finalize the book.

Within the introduction of Brother to Brother, these networks of care become
pronounced and presence the absent Beam. Moreover the spiritual and intellectual labor, which
produced the anthology, illustrates the types of connections, which elide linearly flattened
accounts. To draw distinct lines of connectivity would miss these networks. It would also miss
the intergenerative force, which allows for us to see the presence of those absent both literally
and literarily; a type of presence, which persisted in spite of, and through the Black Arts
Movement, to our present day.
Conclusion

In form and practice anti-Black and anti-queer violence necessitates tactics of survival which transcend time and space. Practices archived in and through bodies, both in the material and figurative sense. In mapping the contours of the Blackqueer body I offered, in part, my own body. In addition, I have mapped the historical treatment of this body and artistic practices as sites to see, understand, and imagine contours of the Blackqueer body.

This chapter in unifying Blackness and queerness, does so, so as not to miss the bodies and causes which are left out of current political practices, and imaginings regarding what are “Black issues” or “LGBT issues.” These single-identity politics, and narratives miss the connections of anti-Black and anti-queer violence; the ways that these forces work in tandem to disappear us, and how that systemic disappearance requires our consent to camps which disconnect our causes, and us from one another, our collective knowledge, and shared efforts towards survival.

I want to end where we began this chapter, and return now back to my own body, and the bodies of those no longer here who ground my understanding of the Blackqueer body, e.g., Tyrone Williams, Percy Day, Sakia Gunn, Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover and countless others. For those bodies of “Blackness, wrapped in rainbows,” what happens when rainbows are clearly not enough to sustain ourselves?10 We owe it to ourselves to create promises of survival, which do

10Here I am referencing, Keith Boykin’s (2012), For Colored Boys Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Still Not Enough: Coming of Age, Coming Out, and Coming Home. In title, and articulated by Boykin (2012), For Colored Boys is homage to Ntozake Shange’s (1975) for colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf. It is also about our current moment, and the differential treatment of Blackqueerness to harm, and violence, within our society. As evidenced in the reaction to Black gay suicides, and violence in which “Sadly, these suicides did not generate much attention in the mainstream media or action in the larger community (Boykin, 2012, p. xiii).” Moreover, as Boykin (2012) points out, For Colored
not require the death of some, or even ourselves. Pathways, which see our shared borders, our
need for one another, and that allow us to see each other. We owe it to ourselves to see that to be
Black and alive has been, and especially now is a very queer sort of living. And we owe it to
ourselves to sit with the legacies and knowledge of Black queer ancestors, which point to
creative strategies for our survival. Chief among these strategies, are the usage of the creative,
which the next chapter explores looking at the methodology of autoethnography. In particular the
next chapter outlines my engagement with performance autoethnography, providing the tenets of
the method, my own unique deployment, and the ways I engage with and analyze my data.

_Boys_ illustrates, that the “LGBT’s community promise of rainbow, was clearly not enough for
many to sustain themselves (p. xiii).”
The Scene/Seen 2

Journal Entry #2: Untitled

“God has truly blessed you…He has truly blessed you…remember those days back at Hilton, yes. And you always had that inner drive …always had that inner drive. Remember how you use to write…Just keep doing what your doing and I’ll keep praying for you and for God to keep you safe [Durell].” (personal communication, April, 2012)

And as tears streamed down my face I remembered
3210 North Piedmont Avenue
Ms. Ross who taught me I could sing
Ms. Stewart who taught me I could lead who saw my potential and pushed me forward
Ms. Green—Gifted and Talented Teacher who taught me
O-p-t-i-m-i-s-m
That my glass was ALWAYS half full it was just a matter of perception
Ms. Young and Diggs and Robinson and Yates who fed me and taught me that there are just some things you cannot get away with—like talking at lunch with your head down after the lights had been turned off
THEY KNEW my name
THEY KNEW ALL of our names and would call us out…
And I remembered Ms. Marcus who shared her native ancestry with us—living—walking—proof that history did not die
And Ms. Sandifer and
Mr. Bethea and Mr. Bennett some of the first strong Black men I knew
And Ms. Rice who did not mind my infatuation of playing in Black girls naturally blonde hair
And Mrs. Hutchinson who taught me to stand up VERTICALLY—not horizontally
And Ms. Bloom who read to me and who fed my hunger for knowledge
And Ms. Davis—kind and sweet who bent rules to allow me to stay and grow
And then there was Ms. Burwell who fed me, and clothed me, and groomed me, and nurtured me, and prayed for me, and loved me, and affirmed my spirit and who SAW ME as I was then who I could be now…
A lawyer
A preacher
A politician
The first Black President
a SOMEBODY
and I remembered
And I cried
And I remembered a poor little Black Boy from the wrong side of the tracks positioned in just the right places
ALWAYS—inquisitive—with drive—writing—laughing—writing—growing—grateful—I remember—grateful—remembering—grateful
Chapter 2 Genealogies of Autoethnography: Mapping Qualitative Researchers and My Personal Turn Toward A Methodology

Turning to Autoethnography: An Introduction

I came to autoethnography “to save my name,” not only my name, and my personal identity but also those who I share a collective experience with to make our lived experiences visible (Robin Boylorn, personal communication, May 9, 2012). My coming to autoethnography describes “a space for a turn, a change, a reconsideration” of how I think about research, relationships, and my own narrative (Holman Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013, p. 21). I found within the turn to autoethnography, an opportunity to make visible lived experience, so as to not erase bodies, histories, and memories mapped upon the landscape of social difference.

This chapter maps various genealogies of autoethnography, noting the “turns” within the field of Qualitative research, and specifically the discipline of Education towards autoethnography. Additionally by offering key text, experiences, and interactions, which were integral to my development as a scholar, this chapter charts my own turn towards autoethnography and how I integrate performance in my approach. An emergent field, autoethnography provides a means to situate the researcher as a part of a culture troubling the dichotomy between insider/outsider and blurs boundaries between the social sciences and humanities. In doing so, autoethnography offers a means to create more humanistic approaches and accounts of research, requiring researchers to be critically self-reflexive. When coupled with performance, autoethnography becomes embodied research, placing at the center identity, relationships of power, and the power of the creative to capture lived experience and propose possibilities of redress.
This chapter is divided into two sections. Within the first half of this chapter, I define ethnography, and autoethnography as a methodology within qualitative inquiry. Particular attention is given towards outlining the core tenets, key tensions and debates regarding issues of legitimacy, praxis, and representation within autoethnography. I also highlight autoethnography’s emerging relationship to the field of education. The second half of this chapter demonstrates my approach to autoethnography. In particular, a review of literature on performance methods within autoethnography is offered, demonstrating my departure from traditional deployments, highlighting the methodology and how data is analyzed within this project. Lastly this chapter closes with an example of how data is analyzed and displayed within my project, a precursor to the following chapter, which provides a performance autoethnography text.

**Ethnographic Roots: Recognizing Autoethnography’s Roots**

With deep roots in the field of Anthropology, autoethnography extends Anthropology’s traditional ethnographic focus on the empirical study of human culture, to center the researcher as an integral and primary site of cultural inquiry challenging dichotomous notions of the self/other within empirical research traditions (Hughes, Pennington & Makris, 2012; Reed-Danahay, 1997). Reed-Danahay (2009), in her article “Anthropologists, Education, and Autoethnography,” traces the development of autoethnography from ethnographic research within Anthropology noting that autoethnography has come to, not only include “autobiographical narratives about the doing of ethnography or being an ethnographer,” but can also refer to a researcher doing ethnography within their own society as a “native,” “who write with an ethnographic sensibility about their own cultural milieu (pp. 30–31).”

Illustrating the “native” researcher, and noted, as one of the earliest autoethnographic
manuscripts, Kenyatta’s (1962), account, of the Kikuyu an indigenous nation in Kenya initially received praise and admiration, however critiques of his work emphasized his limited triangulation of sources and disconfirming sources of evidence, as well as an irresponsible interweaving of personal narrative with scientific inquiry (Hughes, Pennington & Makris, 2012). Each of these critiques illustrate post-positivist,

Concerns about the situatedness of the knower, the context of discovery, and the relation of the knower to the subjects of her inquiry are demons at the door of positivist science. The production of “legitimate” knowledge begins with slamming the door shut. (McCorkel & Myers, 2003, p. 200).

highlighting the enduring tensions of autoethnographic work—representation and the legitimation of knowledge. Indicative of a positivist framework, when viewing autoethnography through such a lens certain works “fail” to meet academic standards of rigor, and/or are consigned to the realm of fiction and creative enterprises (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Lionnet-McCumber, 1993).

In mapping the turn to autoethnography within the field of qualitative inquiry, it is important to understand the operating research paradigms, and issues laden in researchers epistemologies and methodologies. It is for this reason that I highlight here, ethnography to underscore how the issues of legitimacy, praxis and representation regarding autoethnography represent unresolved issues, and productive cleavages within approaches to ethnography. Returning to issues of legitimacy (see McCorkel & Myer, 2003), ethnography’s distinctive research method, participant-observation field work, privileges the body as a site of knowing illuminating academic biases towards “objective” knowledge as finite, concrete, measurable, and rational (Conquergood, 2002). The emphasis on the body as a situated site of knowledge, produced other tensions within the field challenging scriptocentric ways of knowing, gendered ways of knowing the world, as well as acknowledging and confronting the legacies of
imperialism and colonization (Conquergood, 1991, 2002; Minh-ha, 1989, Rosaldo, 1989). These challenges within the field of qualitative research in general, but specifically in relationship to how social science researchers approached ethnography, demanded an increased reflexivity of researchers, a rethinking of boundaries and borders and more complex ways to display the nuances of human culture, interactions, and field work. Insistence on reflexivity forced researchers to confront issues of power, legitimation, and authenticity spurning questions about who can create knowledge, for whom, about whom, and on whose behalf (Conquergood, 1991, Conquergood, 2002, Denzin & Lincoln, 2008)? Such questions shifted rigid notions of boundaries and borders creating more dynamic ways to conceptualize the exchanges and creation of knowledge as crisscrossing bridges of porous ever changing, “membranes” in which culture is equally exchanged (Conquergood, 1991, 2002; Rosaldo, 1989).

**Defining Autoethnography**

According to McClaurin (1998), autoethnography, is defined as a type of ethnographic research which recognizes, “self (auto), collective/nation (ethno) and writing (graphy),” providing an opportunity for more than reflexive autobiographical research, but rather a platform for transforming the ways in which culture can be represented, distorted, or even silenced (McClaurin, 1998, p. 68). Further highlighting the components of autoethnography embedded in the very word itself, Hughes, Pennington, and Makris (2012) state, that the term *auto* is commonly utilized within the academy when the author “presents critical reflections and interpretations of personal experience (p.209).” As a type of ethnographic research, autoethnography is a “critical self-study in which the researcher takes an active, scientific, and systematic view of personal experience in relation to cultural groups identified by the researcher.
as similar to the self (i.e., us) or as others who differ from the self (i.e., them) (Hughes, Pennington & Makris, 2012, p. 209).”

Ellis & Bochner (2000) note, autoethnography is a process of toggling between focusing on the outward world of social and cultural aspects of the ethnographer’s personal experience, while looking inward to expose a vulnerable self, shaped by culture and at times resistant to cultural interpretations placed upon the self (Deck, 1990; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Reed-Danahay, 1997). As the researcher participates in this exercise of toggling back and forth between the self, and the cultures inhabited by the self, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, in which action, emotion, embodiment, and reflexivity, are placed in relationship to institutional stories affected by history, social structures, and culture (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The act of revelation which occurs through this dialectic, is almost always written in first-person voice, ranging in a variety of forms—e.g. short stories, poetry, photographic essays, social science prose, etc. (see Ellis & Bochner, 2000, Lorde, 1982, Hurston, 1942).

As a genre of qualitative inquiry, autoethnography in its various forms has evolved in its usage, understanding, and deployment. Therefore any appropriate and comprehensive understanding and definition of autoethnography would include other studies which have similarly situated terms—e.g. narratives of self (Richardson, 1994), personal experience narratives (Denzin, 1989), self-stories (Denzin, 1989), first person accounts (Ellis, 1998), writing stories (Richardson, 1997); auto-observation (Adler & Adler, 1994); literary tales (Van Maanen, 1988); critical autobiography (Church, 1995), self-ethnography (Van Maanen, 1995), personal writing (DeVault, 1997), reflexive ethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 1996), confessional tales (Van Maanen, 1988), narrative ethnography (Tedlock, 1991), interpretive biography (Denzin, 1989), autobiographical ethnography (Reed & Danahay, 1997). Within this complex array of names and
concepts what has remained constant is the usage of the methodology to understand the self in relationship to the cultures inhabited by the self.

Reiterating autoethnographies reliance on personal narrative (autobiography) and “ethnographic practice,” Ellis and Bochner (2000), define autoethnography as “autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation (p. 742).” Deeply embedded within most definitions of autoethnography, is its indebtedness to ethnography, therefore understanding autoethnography as an extension of Geertz’s (1973) description of thick description as a means to describe and therefore embody behaviors to give audience a tangible experiential instance to understand the meaning of particular expressions, and the political significance of these gestures within a larger cultural context (see also Alexander, 2011).

Autoethnography, as previously stated integrates a varied focus on the “research process (graphy), on culture (ethno), and on self (auto) (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 740).” Demonstrating these three foci, and highlighting one of the key definitions of autoethnography guiding my project, is Alexander’s (2011), articulation that,

Autoethnography is always about cultures of experience; the presenter uses individual experience as a means of engaging a public discussion or discourse of the particular happenstance of experience, and others are always interpolated into that experience; either for immediate conversation or reflective engagement on their own processes of sense making. (p. 100)

The second guiding definition for my project is Tami Spry’s definition of autoethnography as “a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts (Spry, 2001, p. 710). Here Spry, gets to the heart of the matter, autoethnography as a process in which the self is situated within and critiques social context. I would also like to note Spry (2001), highlights the
distinction between personal writing and personal writing which is autoethnographic. The distinguishing feature as previously discussed is the usage of one’s personal story to “examine and/or critique cultural experiences (Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis, 2013, p. 22).” The following section outlines the core tenets of autoethnography, distinguishing it from other types of personal narrative work.

**Core Tenets**

Autoethnographic research in its various iterations and representations within various disciplines still foregrounds a particular set of practices. Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis (2013), identify these practices as the purpose of autoethnography. These practices, as articulated within the *Handbook of Autoethnography* (2013), were not clearly articulated and bound within one book, edited volume, or journal article when I began my graduate studies. However, many of the tenets were expressed in a variety of literature, which spoke to my interests as a human being to utilize research as a vehicle for justice, which honored my life experience and made room for those from my communities of accountability and affinity. Citing, “(1) disrupting norms of research practice and representation; (2) working from insider knowledge; (3) maneuvering through pain, confusion, anger and uncertainty and making life better; (4) breaking silence/(re)claiming voice and ‘writing to right’ (Bolen 2012); and (5) making work accessible (p. 32),” as the purpose of autoethnographic research, I offer each here as a core tenet of autoethnographic research.

**Disrupting norms of research practice and representation.** Autoethnography is a means to place the individuals and society’s culture in an intimate conversation in a constant state of flux and movement, “between story and context, writer and reader, crisis and denouement (Holman Jones, 2008, p. 207).” As a methodology autoethnography seeks to account for personal
experience within research and to illustrate the importance of how personal accounts can help further our understandings of culture (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013). At its core, autoethnography, and therefore autoethnographic writing is transgressive, resisting “Grand Theorizing,” and the façade of objective research that decontextualizes subjects and searches for singular truth (Denzin, 1997; Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Spry, 2001). Furthermore, in disrupting norms of research practice and representation, autoethnography holds at its core a commitment to radical democratic politics, a space to create dialogue and debate to instigate, facilitate, and shape social change (Holman Jones, 2008; Reinelt, 1998).

**Working from insider knowledge.** In that autoethnography represents both a methodology and a text of diverse interdisciplinary praxes with roots tracing to the postmodern “crisis of representation” in anthropological writing (see Behar & Gordon, 1995; Clifford, 1988; Conquergood, 1985, 1998; Geertz, 1973, 1988; Turner, 1982, 1987) it also represents a “radical reaction to realists agendas in ethnography and sociology which privileges” the researcher over the subject, method over the subject matter, and commitments to validity, truth, and generalizability (Denzin, 1997; Spry, 2001). Further disrupting research norms and forms of representation, working from insider knowledge allows for the researcher to utilize her/his experience to create nuance and detailed accounts of particular cultural phenomena to foster an understanding of those experiences (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013). Moreover, working from such positionality allows the autoethnographer to “articulate aspects of cultural life traditional research methods leave out or cannot access (Holman Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013, p. 34).” Ultimately, working from insider knowledge calls for reflexivity and demands a presence of risk-taking, in being vulnerable in order to create a palpable emotional experience which
connects and make clear distinctions between other ways of knowing, being, and acting in the world (Bochner, 2001; Ellis, 1995; Spry, 2001).

**Maneuvering through pain, confusion, anger and uncertainty and making life better.**

Placing the researcher’s subjectivity squarely as a site of analysis, autoethnography foregrounds personal narrative. Autoethnographic work as an invitation into lived experience is therefore a project interested in embodiment in a totalizing sense (Holman Jones, 2008). Spry (2001) discusses this interest in her autoethnographic research when she states,

> I began writing and performing autoethnography, concentrating on the body as the site from which the story is generated, thus beginning the methodological praxis of reintegrating my body and mind into my scholarship (p. 708).

Spry’s (2001), work underscores autoethnography’s commitment to invoke the “corporeal, sensuous, and political nature of experience rather than collapse text into embodiment or politics into language (Holman Jones, 2008, p. 211).” By seeking to understand the construction of physical bodies, while simultaneously demanding presence within ones work—a consciousness of oneself and their own body and political implications—autoethnography places at its core a valuation of the body, and embodiment in a totalizing sense in an effort to make the researchers lived experience useful for others (Johnson, 2003a, 2003b; Jones, 1997; McKittrick & Woods, 2007; Spry, 2001).

Furthermore, the vivid personal narratives offered by autoethnographic researchers, oftentimes revisit traumas inclusive of but not limited to loss, illness, or systemic violence as experienced by the researcher. Autoethnographic writing manifests as a vehicle for researchers to write through such traumatic experiences and the accompanying emotions. Such writing, allows the researcher to not only process their painful, confusing, and angering, cultural experiences but
also allows them to offer hope, and tools for others experiencing similar life events to understand and navigate their own experience (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013).

**Breaking silence/(re)claiming voice and “writing to right.”** Meeting the social justice call of qualitative research within this historic moment of inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), breaking silence/(re)claiming voice and “writing to right” (Bolen, 2012), allows for autoethnographers to speak on sensitive subjects, reinsert marginalized and silenced voices back into contemporary conversations, policies, and research and more importantly by doing so to create social change (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013). Furthermore, autoethnography is informed by research on oral and personal narratives which inscribe the body as a central site of meaning making, while also maintaining the bodies sociopolitical situatedness (Alexander, 2002; Dailey, 1998; Jones, 1997; Pelias, 1999; Spry, 2001). Personal narrative gives shape to social relations, “because such relations are multiple, polysemic, complexly interconnected, and contradictory, it can do so only in unstable and destabilizing ways for narrator and audience . . . a story of the body told through the body which makes cultural conflict concrete (Langellier, 1999, p. 208).” By opening the space for personal narrative, autoethnography makes salient lived experience, and is grounded in and through bodies—a theory of flesh (see also Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983). Furthermore by making bodies visible, and locating the body as a means for generating knowledge the researcher engages in an intentionally self-reflexive practice. As Spry (2001) states:

> When the body is erased in the process(ing) of scholarship, knowledge situated within the body is unavailable. Enfleshed knowledge is restricted by linguistic patterns of positivist dualism—mind/body, objective/subjective—that fix the body as an entity incapable of literacy (p. 724).

This has particular implications for marginalized communities, and women, allowing autoethnography to become a liberatory and exploratory means of conducting research.
Coaxing the body from the shadows of academe and consciously integrating it into the process and production of knowledge requires that researchers view knowledge in the context of the body from which it is generated. Spry (2001), reminds us that in doing autoethnographic work we “must be ready to walk the talk of [our] scholarship by putting [our] politically marked body on the lines of the printed text. This kind of embodied methodology is—and should feel—risky (p. 725),” but serves as a worthy and necessary endeavor in manifesting social change.

Making work accessible. Lastly, autoethnographic research purposes to make research, and its accompanying write up to be accessible to a wider audience beyond academia (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013). In its deliberate parading of the body autoethnography’s, commitment to disrupting norms, and reclamation of voice, allows for autoethnographers to engage in an intentional process of communication (Conquergood, 1991, 2000, 2002). This communication is representative of a dynamic—dialogic communication—between the autoethnographer and her/his society, communities of affinity, and accountability. The aim to make research more accessible by autoethnographers, recognizes these relationships and highlights how autoethnography should not be demonstrative of an isolated project, field, study, or way of understanding the world but rather an intimate tale highlighting the interstices of the personal interacting with her/his society interpreting and critiquing political institutions, global histories, social phenomena for the purposes of social justice and uncovering the inhabited worlds of marginalized communities and individuals.

Making work accessible is accomplished through the autoethnographers intentional decision to not only recognize that the autoethnographer is never alone, but to speak to a diverse audience, free of jargon and discipline specific terms. In order to do so, autoethnographers utilize more accessible language, borrowing from a variety of literary and aesthetic practices (e.g.,
storytelling, performance, visual art, dance, film, performance, and multimedia projects).

Furthermore as Holman Jones, Adams & Ellis (2013), state, “Not only do these practices make research more accessible—and, we believe, more valuable in that more than just a select few can engage particular works—but they also help satisfy some autoethnographers’ commitment to cultural critique and social justice (p. 37).”

**Key Tensions & Debates: Legitimacy, Praxis, & Issues of Representation**

During the end of what is known as the “Golden Age” of qualitative research and moving forward and beyond the era known as “The Crisis of Representation” autoethnography as a means of critical inquiry began to emerge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Holman Jones, 2008; Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013; Spry, 2001). What arose from these periods within the field of qualitative research, were three different yet related crises for researchers to consider—representation, legitimation, and praxis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Holman Jones, 2008; Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis 2013). At the core of these crises were two assumptions: (i) qualitative researchers would no longer directly capture lived experience—representation; and (ii) a need to reconsider traditional criteria for evaluating and interpreting qualitative research—legitimation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The crisis of representation called to question how experience is created and relayed within social text as written by the researcher, problematizing the linkages between experience and text. The crisis of legitimation asked qualitative researchers to reconsider issues of validity, generalizability, and reliability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Lastly, the crisis of representation and legitimation helped to shape the crisis of praxis that is if it is possible to effect change in the world if society is only and always a text?

These crises represented critical ruptures within the field of Qualitative Research, and researchers took to task exploring, decoding, intervening, and challenging these issues in a
variety of means. What noticeably emerged in response to these issues were new ways of conducting, and writing research as evidenced by experimental ethnographic writing (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). Other responses included blurring the boundaries between the social sciences and the humanities, by experimenting with “novel forms of expressing lived experience, including literary, poetic, autobiographical, multivoiced, conversational, critical, visual, performative, and co-constructed representations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 27).” Despite the need to include a more humanistic, emotional, critically reflexive, and embodied text, within qualitative research, scholarly writing which sought to incorporate these factors was often devalued by researchers with more traditional understandings and commitments to either qualitative or quantitative research methods (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013). Further inquiry into how the contemporary field of qualitative research, and in particular autoethnography has managed these crises is explored in the immediately following section.

**Autoethnography and Education: Key Tensions & Debates**

Within the field of Education, autoethnography has recently begun to be utilized as a method of inquiry by educational researchers (see Alexander, 2011, 2006b, 2002; Anderson, 2006; Delamont, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Hughes, Pennington, & Makris, 2012). In fact, autoethnography has emerged as a tool for educational researchers within the United States to address self-reflexive questions like, “How might my experiences of race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, education, and/or religion inform my approaches to curriculum and pedagogy (Hughes, Pennington, & Makris, 2012, p. 210)?” However, despite its increased usage, among educational researchers autoethnography is still met with a level of resistance. As discussed within the previous section, this resistance is due to a perceived absence of methodological rigor, as well as discrepancies that delegitimize this form of research. Indicative of the rejection of
autoethnographic research methods and representation within the field of education is the
minimal dissemination of autoethnographic research within the top first-tier, blind peer-reviewed
educational journals—e.g. Educational Researcher, Review of Educational Research, and
Review of Research in Education (Hughes, Pennington, & Makris, 2012). Researchers, authors,
and supporters of autoethnographic research, have reported resistance when trying to publish
autoethnographic research in many of the aforementioned journals and other tier one journals
(Delamont, 2007; Holt, 2003; Hughes, Pennington, & Makris, 2012; Sparkes, 2000).

Educational researchers, Hughes, Pennington, and Makris (2012), in their article
“Translating Autoethnography Across the AERA Standards: Toward Understanding
Autoethnographic Scholarship as Empirical Research,” illuminate the resistance within the field
of Education to accept and legitimize autoethnographic research. As the authors highlight, the
resistance of educational researchers to embrace this genre of research hinges on skepticism
regarding the rigor and empirical nature of autoethnographic research. Furthermore as Hughes,
Pennington, and Makris (2012) denote recent educational standards set forth by the Council of
the American Educational Research Association further problematize publishing pathways for
autoethnographic researchers in Education.

In June, 2006, The American Educational Research Association (AERA) Task Force on
Reporting of Research Methods in AERA Publications drafted standards for council
consideration, eventually resulting in a publication within the Educational Researcher journal.
Duran et al. (2006), the authors of the aforementioned publication, offered the following
reporting standard areas, “problem formulation; design and logic of the study; sources of
evidence; measurement and classification; analysis and interpretation; generalization; ethics in
reporting; and title, abstract, and headings (p. 33).” With two principles in mind, that the research
be *warranted* and *transparent*, Duran et al. (2006) detail a set of standards to be applied to educational research grounded in the “empirical traditions of the social sciences (p. 33).”

Furthermore, Duran et al. (2006), state that these guidelines:

> [...] cover, but are not limited to, what are commonly called qualitative and quantitative methods. Other forms of scholarship equally important to education research include reviews of research; theoretical, conceptual, or methodological essays; critiques of research traditions and practices; and scholarship more grounded in the humanities (e.g., history, philosophy, literary analysis, arts-based inquiry). The latter forms of scholarship are beyond the scope of this document. (Duran et al., 2006, p. 33)

I highlight here the focus of Duran et al. (2006), in that their standards currently serve as the primary means to evaluate educational research for publication, particularly within and across tier-one education journals. Moreover, the standards laid out by Duran et al. (2006), serve as the primary document utilized by Hughes, Pennington and Makris (2012), to advocate for “opening the method to a broader audience of AERA’s empirical researchers and to open readers to a deeper understanding of and widened respect for autoethnography as an empirical endeavor (p. 211).” Unfortunately, Hughes, Pennington, and Makris efforts to translate autoethnography across AERA standards for empirical research creates a mismatch for evaluating and accepting autoethnographic research within educational research methods. Despite their intention to focus on “what autoethnography can do rather than what autoethnography must do,” and to create an alternative rubric to evaluate autoethnographic research for educational researchers, editors, and reviewers, Hughes, Pennington and Makris further advance “autoethnography’s postmodern perspective as a subservient resuscitation of more positivist/post-positivist traditions (Hughes, Pennington & Makris, 2012, p. 211).”

The insufficiency of the AERA standards to assess the quality of, and therefore legitimate autoethnographic research within educational research is highlighted by the aforementioned quote in which Duran et al. (2006) foreclose their standards applicability to forms of scholarship
beyond the scope of the document, i.e., “scholarship more grounded in the humanities (e.g.,
history, philosophy, literary analysis, arts-based inquiry; p. 33).” This is further complicated as
indicated by Duncan (2004), Holt (2003), and Sparkes (2000), given the novelty of certain forms
of research within newer, and more traditionally rooted disciplines and practices (e.g., physical
education pedagogy).

Despite their attempts to translate the AERA standards across autoethnographic research,
Hughes, Pennington & Makris instead transpose a range of traditional epistemological standards
and foundations ill-suited for autoethnographic inquiry (see Holman Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013;
Sparkes, 2000). Instead of asking educational researchers to change how they view and
understand autoethnography, the suggestions put forth by Hughes, Pennington & Makris, while
“translating” autoethnographic research across AERA standards, puts the onus on
autoethnographic researchers, particularly within the field of education to legitimize their
research. Which as Robin Boylorn and Stacy Holman Jones state, autoethnographic researchers
in this moment are beyond questions of legitimation, autoethnography is a legitimate form of
research, and has been for a while, therefore requiring the legitimation of the research
methodology and genre on the naysayers and those who do not understand, value, or out rightly
seek to delegitimize autoethnographic research (personal communication, May 18, 2013).

In spite of the field of Education’s reluctance to acknowledge autoethnographic research
as a viable and legitimate tool for creating knowledge about educational experiences, pedagogies,
and a way to think through educational disparities and policies, I take solace in the possibilities
of educational autoethnographies, which have been published. These include, but are not limited
to, Alexander’s (2006b) examination of the intersections of race, gender, masculinity, and
sexuality within the classroom, offering performance and autoethnography as a type of
pedagogical tool, Chang and Boyd’s (2011) edited volume of essays which interrogate the spiritual practices of higher education professionals and how they integrate spirituality in teaching, research, administration, and advising, Meneley and Young’s (2005) exploration and critique of the institutional practices of universities, Nathan’s (2005) contemporary understanding of undergraduate life, as well as the creation of community within campus life, Ortner’s (2005) illumination of the intersections of social class, mobility, capitalism, and narratives of “success” within a New Jersey high school, Pennington’s (2007) analysis of the effects of racial identity on teacher education, and Romo’s (2005), critique of Chicano experiences in education, through a Chicano researcher’s lens. The breadth of this work, speaks to the utility of autoethnographic research, to call attention to transparency of the researchers methods, as well as her/his positionality thereby not only challenging traditional ways of doing and representing research but providing new insights into a variety of educational issues (see Alexander, 2006b; Delamont, 2007; Hughes, 2008; Pennington, 2007).

Auto\ethnography versus Autoethnography: Defining My Critical Departure

In coming into my own autoethnographic practice, I have chosen to identify the type of autoethnography I do as, auto\ethnography. Primarily, aligning myself with other Black woman scholars who tend to utilize the backslash as a way to signify and testify to the collective embedded within the individual (Boylorn, 2013b; Mary Weems, personal communication, May 9, 2012). Central to shaping my understanding of my work as auto\ethnography, was the 8th International Congress for Qualitative Inquiry, panel entitled, “The Poetics, Politics and Praxis of Producing Black Feminist and Womanist Auto/ethnography.” Panelists, Maritza Quinones, Cynthia B. Dillard, Irma McClaurin, Mary E. Weems, Aisha Durham and Robin Boylorn, each moved me to tears as they articulated the power, and praxis of autoethnography. Robin Boylorn,
declared that she came to auto\ethnography because she needed a space call out her name, to speak back to the misrepresentations of Black rural Southern women, to find herself and persons like her—other Black rural Southern women—celebrated. Within that room, Mary E. Weems reminded us about the necessity of funk, as music, culture, and experience in a body marked Black and therefore wrong and that the funk was something to hold on to and celebrate. She also declared, “Forget about everything else except about how GOOD it is to be Black (Mary Weems, personal communication, May 9, 2012.” Here I mattered, and so did the folks I cared about the most. Auto\ethnography articulated a politic committed to more than the lone autoethnographer, but the autoethnographer in a community, collaboratively writing a text, speaking with and to a community’s experiences, reflecting them back to that community and illuminating the lived experience, needs, and desires of an ignored people to the rest of society.

Knowing that the type of auto\ethnography I embark upon is always reflective of and intricately bound in community, pushes me towards what Reed-Danahay (2009) identifies as “critical autoethnography,” which focuses less on the “self of the researcher” but rather “captures more of the reflexive approach” which seeks to examine and understand institutional practices (p. 31). Furthermore, as Alexander (2011), denotes, my usage of the backslash is to signify that I do not do “‘traditional ethnography’ per se (p.98).” This is I am not interested in, nor do I participate in the ethnographic enterprise of studying the “Other.” My marginalized identities (i.e., my race, sexuality, and class) locate me at the periphery of dominant society, and because of my “insider” status within the communities I affiliate with and choose to study, juxtaposed against my privileged status as a researcher creates a false dichotomy of insider/outsider. I recognize the tenuous relationship between myself and the communities I speak to and about within my work, moreover, I acknowledge that some may interpret my intention to recognize the
collective within the individual as a means to speak for the collective. However, this is not the case, as Jones (1997) articulates, the autobiography of marginalized peoples can often serve as a collective biography to give name to the “the experiences of many through the experience of one (Jones, 1997, p. 51).” Moreover, and indicative of auto\ethnography, by offering up my life experience as a means of insertion not to speak for an entire community, but to speak to our experiences, it is my hope that other Black/queer persons will find moments of resonance and recognition within my narrative (Boylorn, 2013b). Further to make experience visible, as a means to interrogate, critique, and understand social structures in order to imagine new ways of being, I turn to performance. The immediate following section defines performance, key tensions and debates, and defines my particular methodology of performance auto\ethnography.

**Defining Performance: A Field, Theory, Method, and Practice**

Performance, both as a method of inquiry, expression and as a disciplinary field has been since its inception a contested field (Carlson, 1996; Jackson, 2006; Johnson, 2006; Madison & Hamera, 2006). As Madison and Hamera (2006) note, performance on multiple levels “means” and “does” different things for and with different people. Resisting totalizing definitions, performance is often referred to as a “contested concept” because as a concept utilized by practitioners it includes method, event, and practice. In that performance is a contested field with multiple deployments, and definitions, I offer definitional terms, thematic enactments of performance, as well as explore contested territory, key concepts, and debates within the field.

**Performance Is…Moving Definitions.** To define performance is to be in constant movement, neither here nor there, and ultimately nestled in a variety of spaces. Jon McKenzie (2001) notes that a distinguishing characteristic of performance studies, as an academic enterprise is that, it self-consciously positions itself as “liminal”—between two states of being
(e.g., between theater and ritual), and belonging to neither (see also Schechner, 1985; Turner, 1982, 1986). Furthermore, because this liminal position is often understood as a space for transgression and resistance, many performance studies scholars have come to consider social activism as a defining characteristic of the field itself (Bilal, 2004). However, despite the multifaceted nature of the field, the terminology *performance, performative, performativity, performance art/performing arts, performance event, performance text, performative writing* must all be defined in order to have a working vocabulary for the field.

*Performance* can be thought of as an act, “one involving the display of skills, the other also involving display, but less of particular skills than of a recognized and culturally coded pattern of behavior (Carlson, 1996, pp. 4–5).” As Denzin (2003) states, performance can be utilized within a singular or plural context. Performance, in the singular context, works as an organizing concept for cultural phenomena which lay outside of commonly held ideas of performance art. Whereas, performance in the plural context, refers to events that are usefully understood as performance, illustrating the politics of culture (Denzin, 2003). To perform therefore, exists within a liminal space, the performance of culture and everyday life for the individual. Succinctly put, performance is, “a doing and a thing done” (Diamond, 1996, p. 1). Moreover, as Diana Taylor (2003), states:

Performance, on the one level constitutes the object/process of analysis in performance studies, that is, the many practices and events—dance, theatre, ritual, political rallies, funerals—that involves theatrical, rehearsed, or conventional/event appropriate behaviors. On another level, performance also constitutes the methodological lens that enables scholars to analyze events as performance. (Taylor, 2003, p. 3)

The aforementioned quote highlights the utilization of performance both as a subject and method of analysis (Hamra & Conquergood, 2006). Furthermore, as Hamra and Conquergood, (2006), suggest, “both approaches to performance—as subject of, and method of, analysis—emerge in
four overarching and interrelated themes... (p. 420).” The four themes, which, emerge, illustrate performance in/as: (i) the production of history; (ii) the deployment of institutional power; (iii) the production of identity; and (iv) as technologies of resistance (Hamera & Conquergood, 2006). My project moves through each of the four themes. Illustrated through the juxtaposition of Tyrone’s Williams story, against that of Carl Hoover, and my own lived experience, performance in the telling of these separate yet intersecting identities and stories reveals culture, institutional power, illuminates subjugated histories and illustrates how identities are performed. Additionally, in attuning to the injustices faced by Black and queer individuals and communities, performance within this text manifests as a tool of/for resistance.

Performance in/as the production of history is not only concerned with the intersections of performance, politics and history, but also with the recovery of lost histories (see Conquergood, 2000; Johnson, 2006). In particular, performance studies scholars have been instrumental in restoring excluded and/or marginalized histories into discourse, as well as larger disciplinary conversations (Hamera & Conquergood, 2006). This reinsertion, and reclamation, has also been utilized as a way to draw attention to the need for “disciplinary self-reflexivity” (Hamera & Conquergood, 2006, p. 420).

Performance in/as the deployment of institutional power recognizes the performative dimensions of institutional power in both historical and contemporary analyses done by performance studies scholars (Hamera & Conquergood, 2006). This dimension of performance practice exemplifies the field’s active identification of and then challenge to institutional practices of bias and inequality. Particularly manifestations of this practice include but are not limited to challenges to scriptocentric biases within the discipline specifically, but widely as a production of scholarship and way of knowing (Conquergood, 1998). Challenges to
institutionalized practices towards print, are not the only ways in which performance challenges hegemony, but rather also in critiquing the ways in which power operationalizes based upon identity both at the micro and macro level (Conquergood, 1998; Hamera & Conquergood, 2006; Jones, 1997).

*Performance in/as the production of identity* illustrates the ways in which identity is performed, as well as how identity is a type of performance in and of itself. Here it is useful, to define the *performative* as well as *performativity*, before continuing a discussion of the emergent themes of performance. The performative as defined by Hamera & Conquergood (2006), is “a type of utterance that does something; its effect coincides with its use (Hamera & Conquergood, 2006, p. 422). Plainly stated, the performative is the way a performance is enacted, e.g., how people play their gender (Denzin, 2003). Furthermore a performative is both a product and agent of the social and political environment in which it circulates, reinforced through repetition (Hamera & Conquergood, 2008). Gender and sexuality were initially understood and theorized as performatives (Butler, 1990). Performativity is the making and doing of a particular thing, and a way to explore the demarcations and “apparent” (in) stability of identity categories (Butler, 1990, 1993a, 1993b; Denzin 2003; Pollock, 1998). Central to understanding how identity is performed, is Judith Butler’s work, which illuminates how every performance is an imitation, a form of mimesis (Butler, 1993a, 1993b). Performativity under this guise not only functions as a cultural convention, value, and signifier inscribed upon the body but also helps us to understand how particular actions mark identity, emphasizing performativity as repetition or citational (Hamera & Madison, 2006). Furthermore, by understanding performativity as repetition or citational illumines how identity categories are not inherent or biologically determined, but are socially determined by cultural norms of demarcation (Hamera & Madison, 2006, p. xviii).
Again, here the work of Butler (1993b) becomes important in recognizing identity performances as failed attempts to duplicate, an imagined norm, and therefore authentic notion of what it means, “to be something.” The idea of imitative failed attempts to actualize a gendered/sexed identity can be illustrated through the following quote:

[…] the ‘reality’ of heterosexual identities is performatively constituted through an imitation that sets itself up as the origin and the ground of all imitations. In other words, heterosexuality is always in the process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmatic idealization of itself—and failing…Indeed, in its efforts to naturalize itself as the original, heterosexuality must be understood as a compulsive and compulsory repetition that can only produce the effect of its own originality; in other words, compulsory heterosexual identities, those ontologically consolidated phantasms of ‘man’ and ‘woman,’ are theatrically produced effects that post as grounds, origins, the normative measure of the real (Butler, 1993b, p. 313)

Understanding these attempts, and the cultural sense making/interpretation they signify, is extended in the work of Kristen Langellier (1999). Her work particularly highlights the ways in which performativity is dynamic, and that it is the “interconnected triad of identity, experience, and social relations—encompassing the admixture of class, race, sex, geography, religion, and so forth (Hamera & Madison, 2006, p. xix).” Grasping the performative and how performativity works is not only necessary to the work done by performance studies scholars, but is highlighted within the third emergent theme of performance in/as the production of identity. Here the works of Muñoz (2006, 1999), Johnson (2005, 2003b), Johnson & Henderson (2005) and Riggs (1995) become useful. Each of the aforementioned interrogates the complex constructions of identity particularly between queer and queer of color communities. Muñoz (1999) offers disidentification—the making/doing of hybrid identities—as a way to understand the creation of queer of color identities. By offering the work of Cuban American lesbian performance artist Alina Troyano as a body of work, Muñoz highlights how Troyano’s work operationalizes performativity therefore “refus[ing] the stability of simple performative repetitions of
majoritarian identity categories (Hamera & Conquergood, 2006, p. 422).” Muñoz (2006) continues to excavate the radical possibilities of performativity in his, Stages: Queers, Punks and the Utopian Performative, as he questions the radical possibilities of staging utopia. Moreover, as he reflects upon performance and performativity, he posits utopia as the stage (Muñoz, 2006). That is to say that the stage offers the possibility of futurity, which is made even more salient for Muñoz as he reflects on how, “This mapping of hope and affect on a white wall brings me back to the various shows were I rehearsed and planned a future self, one that is not quite here but always in process, always becoming, emerging in difference (Muñoz, 2006, p. 19).” This idea, of the constant state of evolving, and movement towards a horizon is revealed not only in Marlon Riggs’s (1995), Black is...Black Ain’t, but in the work of Johnson (2003a, 2005) which reflects on this film. Riggs’s through his interrogation of Blackness—as a racial category, cultural signifier, and self-prescribed/culturally ascribed identity marker influenced by other identity categories—as well as Johnson’s (2003a, 2005) identification of performativity within Riggs’s film explores the potential of performance and performativity. Johnson (2003a), states:

Riggs’s film implicitly employs performativity to suggest that we dismantle hierarchies that privilege particular black positionalities at the expense of others; that we recognize that darker hue does not give us any more cultural capital or claim to blackness than do a dashiki, braids, or a southern accent. Masculinity is no more a signifier of blackness than femininity; heterosexuality is no blacker than gayness; and poverty makes one no more authentically black than a house in the suburbs. (Johnson, 2003a, p. 40)

Moreover, Johnson (2005), offers insights as to how performance and performativity is working not only within the film and the images, narratives offered by director Marlon Riggs, but in how Riggs’s body is the very site of enactment as well. Drawing our attention to performance and performativity as “being” and “becoming” respectively (Johnson, 2005, p. 145). Johnson (2005), situates “being,” “as a site of infinite signification as well as bodily and material presence,” it is embodied blackness where history, discourse, and flesh intertwine (p. 145). “Becoming,”
signifies the historical materiality, and is illustrated through Riggs’s body, as the “black, gay, HIV—infected, male body,” which is simultaneously present yet absent. This simultaneity, exists because as the film progresses, so does the AIDS virus within Riggs, leading to his death and inability to finish the film. However, within the frame, Riggs’s body is made to rematerialize, to be present, even in the absence of his material being. This constant making, and unmaking of identity as illustrated through Riggs’s body juxtaposed against discourse, and the positionality of the viewer illustrates the political intersections of performance and identity, performativity, as well as how performatives can be potentially liberatory.

**Performance in/as technologies of resistance** demarcates the final and fourth emergent theme of performance and it is here that I wish to define other key definitional terms. These terms include: performance art/performing arts, performance text, performance event, and performative writing. Each are important in understanding how performance is mobilized as resistance. *Performance art*, as defined by Carlson (1996), is what makes the performance arts performative. Carlson (1996) suggest that the performing arts, classic art forms which combine raw talent with specialized training—theatre, dance, etc.—are made performative in that as art each requires the physical presence of trained or skilled human beings whose demonstration of their skill is the performance. Furthermore, performance art as mobilized today is art that “[…] does not subscribe to the tradition of High Culture. It is revolutionary art. It reclaims the radical political identity of the artist as social critic (Denzin, 2003; McCall, 2000).” *Performance texts* are text which display, describe and therefore theorize, these include but are not limited to dramatic texts, poems, plays, “natural texts”—transcriptions of everyday conversations), staged performances, improvisational readings, spoken word, and ethnodramas (Denzin, 2003; Saldaña, 2003, 2005, 2008). Moreover, a *performative event* refers to an interpretive event involving
actors, stages/staging, scripts, stories, and interaction (Burke, 1969). Lastly, *performative writing*, therefore is writing which refuses to make the “easy and equally false distinction between performance and text, performance and performativity, performativity and print textuality” (Pollock, 1998, p. 40). Furthermore, performative writing, is writing which seeks to make meaning, through the very act of writing however resisting the academic tendency of privileging of text/textuality (Conquergood, 1998, 2000; Denzin, 2003, Pollock, 1998; Richardson, 2002; Richardson & Pierre, 2008).

Through the multiple deployments of performance, performance art, performative writing, and performative text, performance in/as technology of resistance is made salient. Key elements of performance in/as technology of resistance consist of: (i) improvisational and tactical techniques; (ii) redeployment of conventional theatre techniques for the particularities of the artist/purpose/event; and (iii) speaking back to power through performance in overt, covert, or subtle ways (Hamera & Conquergood, 2006). The emergent themes of performance as previously outlined within this section of the chapter not only categorize the work of performance, but also serve as a reminder for the possibilities practiced, imagined, theorized, and uncovered through the field of performance studies (Conquergood, 2002).

**Debates and Tensions Within the Field**

Performance is a form of embodied knowledge and theorizing that challenges the academy’s print bias. While intellectual rigor has long been measured in terms of linguistic acuity and print productivity that reinforces the dominant culture’s deep meaning, performance is suspect because of its ephemeral, emotional, and physical nature. (Jones, 1997, p. 53)

Joni Jones (1997), as quoted above, highlights one of the tensions, which exists within performance studies, namely the second-class citizenry status of performance (art/events) not only within the academy but also by scholars within the field (Jones 1997). Even a year later,
Conquergood (1998) illuminates how the academy as well as performance studies scholars’ privilege textualism and therefore Eurocentric ways of knowing and understanding. He also notes that within that year, there had been much work within the field, however there still existed at that time an “antitheatrical prejudice (Barish, 1981; Conquergood, 1998, p. 25).” Furthermore, Conquergood (1998) recognized performance to be at a precipice, where those who were interested in privileging action, agency, and transformation could meet and flourish (see also Barish, 1981). Despite the increased legitimation of the field, many scholars who do performance art, and allow performative events to be their scholarship and theory, are met with resistance and skepticism. This tension is not simply about doing performance (art), but at its core challenges the very political, epistemic, action, agency, and social justice commitments of the field (Conquergood, 1998; Jones, 1997).

Manifestations of these tensions are made evident in the ways performance artistry is recognized within the academy. As Jones (1997) states,

Performance is not as readily reproducible and can never be copied with the same veracity as a book or essay…You can’t pass a performance around the country for peer review, and videos of performance negate the presentness that is performance, thereby becoming a new art form unto themselves. Because performance has not fit neatly into the academy’s methods of evaluation, performance has been given second-class status within the academy. Each time performance occurs within academically sanctioned events, it is a reminder of the limited ways in which success is earned in the academy and of the narrow definitions of academic theory. (Jones, 1997, pp. 54–55)

Despite the growth of inclusion of performance within academic conferences, the blurring of boundaries, which may occur as panels are (re)configured to include performance artistry, academic currency still lies in the realm of print.

Surveying the Sage Handbook of Performance Studies by D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera (2008), and Johnny Saldaña’s (2005), Ethnodrama: An Anthology of Reality Theatre, one would note glaring differences in the bodies of work represented within each text. Many of
these text, seldom include staged performative events, or theory that is theorized from the performance art/moment itself as created by the “scholar” (Jones 1997).

This tension, “to act” or “not to act,” and what forms of representation are adequate representations of performance scholarship are deeply rooted in the formation of the field itself. Turner (1986), in coining the term “homo performans” claims and recognizes humanity as performer, a culture-inventing, self-defining, self-transforming, social performing creature. This opened up possibilities in research, thus performance-centered research was intended to take its subject matter and method to be the body, its experiences situated in time, place, and history (Conquergood, 2006). However, despite this promise, Bowman and Bowman (2006) illustrate how the field in its desire to demarcate itself from other fields has perpetuated a myth about itself. As Bowman and Bowman (2006), states, “Performance studies is heavily invested in the mythology of the “antidiscipline” and flaunts its eccentricities as if flaunting eccentricity were something peculiar…” (p. 217). In many ways the most commonly cited texts referred to as a means of charting the field, Schechner (1985, 1988, 1992), and Conquergood (1985, 1995, 2006) wrestle with in form, intention, and action the ways in which scholarly inquiry within the field should manifest (Bowman & Bowman, 2006); namely, whether performance studies scholarship would appear in the form of scholarly essays or theatrical performances (Bowman & Bowman 2006). Conquergood (1995, 1998, 2002) repeatedly advocated for performance (art) to be seen as a scholarly form of representation, despite the lack of this reflection within his own scholarly work (Bowman & Bowman 2006). And as previously stated, much of the work that passes as performance scholarship manifests itself in the form of scholarly essays (Bowman & Bowman, 2006). That is not to say that the field has not produced experimental texts (see Diversi & Moreira, 2009; Ellis, 2009; Phelan, 1992; Pollock, 1998; Saldaña, 2005) or scholars who do
performance (art; see Alexander 2002; Johnson 2003b; Jones 1997), however there exists a division in labor, appreciation, and reward within the field.

Within the previous sections of this chapter, I have mapped both my personal, as well as the field of Qualitative Inquiry’s turn towards autoethnography. In particular I have offered the core tenets and key issues within the methodology, attending to the specific ways autoethnography has been scrutinized and utilized within the discipline of Education. Further, I have distinguished between autoethnography and auto\ethnography, with the latter illustrating a politic committed to recognizing the collective embedded within the individual. Having discussed my methodological approach—performance auto\ethnography—as well as the theoretical underpinnings of my project the immediate following sections provide my research design and demonstrate how I analyze my data.

**Performance Auto\ethnography**

Representing the discursive performing body on the page requires an enfleshed methodology, and surely, an expansion of form in academic writing. Embodied writing must be able to reflect the corporeal and material presence of the body that generated the text in performance. Emancipating the body from its erasure in academic scholarship would, necessarily, affect stylistic form. (Spry, 2001, pg. 726)

Seeking to create scholarship, which makes manifest material realities and therefore the bodies, stories, and voices of marginalized individuals to be juxtaposed against our own hegemonic constructed imaginaries of the Other—I turn to performance. Borrowing largely from the arts (i.e., poetry, theatre), I am interested in auto\ethnographic texts, which are, “performance text…turning inward waiting to be staged (Denzin, 19997, p. 199).” Useful to understanding performance auto\ethnography as I define it, is Spry’s (2001) definition of performance autoethnography, as the
‘autobiographic impulse’ and the ‘ethnographic moment’ represented through movement and critical self-reflexive discourse in performance, articulating the intersections of peoples and culture through the inner sanctions of the always migratory identity. (Spry, 2001, 706)

Performance autoethnography, as defined by Spry (2001) centers identity, allowing for an entryway to make manifest within research the body—signified by and signifying on race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.—forcing us to not only wrestle with both meta and counter narratives (see Denzin, 2003) but with statistics made flesh (Jones, 1997). Further, performance offers a discursive space uniting theory and praxis, contesting rigid notions of identity and community boundaries while exploring the richness of what is and what can be, offering an opportunity for researchers, and educational researchers and practitioners in particular to think critically, reflexively, and creatively about issues of concern within the field (Carlson, 1996; Denzin, 2003; hooks, 1990; Johnson, 2006; Madison & Hamera, 2006; Weems, 2001). Performance methodology allows for the activation of imagination, to not only center lived reality but to access a laboratory, which allows for all in attendance to participate equally.

Collecting and Analyzing My Auto\ethnographic Data

Although, it is possible to do an autoethnographic project without drawing from the arts, and/or seeking to create a live enactment of data collected and analyzed, this is not the type of auto\ethnographic project I am interested in doing, and it is how I differentiate my project from more traditional autoethnographic projects. Within the previous sections of this chapter, I have defined autoethnography, the tensions and debates regarding the method, its application to the field of Education, as well as my own interdisciplinary approach towards doing performance auto\ethnography. Having laid the foundation for what is autoethnography, and my own application of it to my research, I now turn to describing my research design. The sections,
which ensure will describe in detail my process in creating a performance auto\ethnographic text inclusive of the creative processes and core concepts which inform the creation of the text.

**What Counts as Data**

Auto\ethnography, like any other methodology employs particular techniques to create a research design, collect and analyze data. Chang (2008) notes that in doing autoethnography, “Auto/ethnographers utilize their personal experiences as primary data, the richness of autobiographical narratives and autobiographical insights is valued and intentionally integrated in the research process and product unlike conventional ethnography (p. 49).” Although Chang (2008) outlines data as related to tangible artifacts from the individuals life, it is here that I wish to argue that data within an auto\ethnographic project is not limited to textual forms of data. If data is defined in the simplest forms as the information analyzed within a research project, then this information can be inclusive of a myriad of sources and forms. These forms include, but are not limited to, scriptocentric text generated by the researcher in the form of field notes, journals, interview transcripts, external sources of official documents, personal writings by others and published literature on the subject matter as well as non-textual data—multimedia, artifacts, audio-recording, graphic images, etc. (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010; Chang, 2008; Norris, 2009). It is also important to recognize less tangibly measured forms of data (e.g., emotion, embodiment, etc.).

As previously stated autoethnography relies on an embodied methodology (Spry, 2001), which in the exploration of the self and the cultures the self-inhabits requires an excavation of emotion. Ellis & Bochner (2000) remind us that, “[…] honest autoethnographic exploration generates a lot of fears and doubts—and emotional pain […] Then there’s the vulnerability of revealing yourself… (p. 738).” Highlighting the emotional journey of an autoethnographic
project, as part and parcel to the method of doing autoethnography it is important to recognize this as an equally valid, and necessary data source when conducting an autoethnography. To that end, the primary sources of data for this project include but are not limited to, poems, journal entries, and personal communications/correspondences, collected over the last twenty years. Other forms of data within this project include popular media, scholarly print sources, and newspaper articles.

**Data Collection**

What is important to understand in collecting, and analyzing auto\ethnographic data are the questions and phenomena the individual is interested in uncovering. Wall (2006) illuminates that collecting data within an autoethnographic project includes the usage of snapshots, artifacts/documents, metaphor, and psychological and literal journeys as techniques for reflecting on and conveying a bricolage of feelings, experiences, emotions, and behaviors that portray a more complete view of life and the self (Muncey, 2005; Wall, 2006). Therefore, understanding the self in relationship to other selves may entail more work than simple reflections of journal entries, and deep introspective work but also including others situating the self. To that end data was collected within this auto\ethnographic project through the following steps: (i) identifying and narrowing a topic; (ii) collecting primary and secondary resources; (iii) performing archival collections (e.g. journal entries, artifacts, etc.); (iv) labeling, classifying, trimming, and expanding data—coding; (v) analyzing and interpreting data; (vi) constructing an interpretive autoethnographic text—writing up the data as a performance auto\ethnography. It is important to note that my data collection, not only involved the assemblage of, and consequent review of my own archive, but also the inclusion of other external sources of data which corresponded to my personal archive offering historical context. Finally, equally important to my data collection is
the utilization of past and recent events, a means to engage in reflexivity and to acknowledge personal and collective memory as important sources of information in my research process.

**Data Analysis**

Once the data for my autoethnographic project had been collected, and coded the process of analyzing and interpreting data took place. For auto\ethnography what this entails is making sense of the fragmented bits of information presented in the various sources of data. Moreover, my challenge was to transform bits of my autobiographical data into a culturally meaningful and sensible text (Chang, 2008). As Chang (2008), states “instead of merely describing what happened in your life, you try to explain how fragments of memories may be strung together to explain your cultural tenets and relationship with others in society (Chang, 2008, p. 126).” It is important to note here, that Chang’s (2008), understanding of the analysis and interpretation of data reifies more positivist notions of data measurement and analysis, in the aversion noted in the quote: “In this sense, autoethnographic data analysis and interpretation distinguish their final product from other self-narrative, autobiographical writings that concentrate on storytelling.” Chang’s “in this sense” refers to the intentional sense-making process, which does not rely on a final product, which mirrors a self-narrative, or “storytelling,” negating that these processes can be and often times are involved also in self-narratives and storytelling. In that, my approach to auto\ethnography demands a publicly performative presence, creating an embodied and enlivened text is integral to the project itself. The immediate following section discusses in detail how I “dramatize” my data in order to create a performance auto\ethnography text.

**Blended Scripting: Creating A Performance Auto\ethnography Text from Auto\ethnographic Research**
Within the previous sections of this chapter I have defined and discussed auto\(\)ethnography, as well as my application and departure from traditional autoethnography. Having laid the foundation for what is auto\(\)ethnography, and my own application of it to my research, I now turn to describing how I “dramatize” data. The sections, which follow describe in detail my process in creating a performance auto\(\)ethnographic text inclusive of the creative processes and core concepts, which inform the creation of the text.

When creating a performance auto\(\)ethnography, I rely on a process of what I call *Blended Scripting*. What I mean by the term *blended scripting*, is the juxtaposition of data (i.e., personal narrative, poetry, journal entries, personal communication, etc.) against other text (e.g., narratives, fiction, electronic/print media sources, music, etc.). Integral to my process of blended scripting is my usage of poetry as well as my utilization of theatre techniques. Much of my data is generated from, and analyzed through poetry, from previously written poems, as well as poems written during the auto/ethnographic process made manifest as new data. To that end, a large portion of how I create a performance auto\(\)ethnographic text is predicated upon the choreopoem as created and described by Shange (1977). The specific ways in which I draw from Shange’s structure of the choreopoem will be interspersed within the subsequent paragraphs.

The idea of blended scripting is to put into the data collection and write-up a means to constantly reflect culture, the culture of self, and self within society and then turn each of these back on the other so as to maintain a constant dialogue within the data collection and write-up. Furthermore, the process of blended scripting, assumes that the researcher has already, identified a research topic, created research questions, collected data, coded, interpreted, and analyzed the data and is finally ready to write up the data. Moreover, blended scripting, assumes the possibility of artistic license in the write up of the data, manifesting as a script, incorporating
dramatic structures like the creation of “characters,” organizational units (scenes/movements), staging and stage directions, etc.

Moving data into a script the creation of a performance auto\ethnography for me entails the following steps: (i) juxtaposition—placing the multiple data text in conversation with one another; (ii) incorporating music and movement; (iii) staging and performing the script; (iv) revising the text. As a caveat, the assumed linear process outlined above, does not adequately describe the non-linear process involved in creating a performance autoethnographic text. At any point in the process, revisions could be made, staging might re-occur, music might be edited, or text newly juxtaposed, therefore the aforementioned steps serve as a framework, rather than a prescriptive. Furthermore, it is important to note that prior to juxtaposing text, a clear thematic organization, and structure would have been given to the arrangements of various (data) text to be performed. Many theses text in the form of poems would not be seen as separate and distinct points of data, but seen as part of a whole, giving form to a single statement—a choreopoem (Shange, 1977). Integral to my thematic organization and departure from traditional theatre techniques is the idea of the continuity of text, seeing the data of one’s life as a “movement” rather than a “scene.” The idea of dynamic continuity—movement—rather than a rigid opening and closing—scene/act— holds true to the form of the choreopoem. Shange (1977), in describing how she created for colored girls, notes that she no longer viewed each poem as an individual unit but rather each culminating to make a single statement, a choreopoem. Once a structure and flow has been established, it is possible to begin to juxtapose text.

**Juxtaposition**

By juxtaposition I mean to consider, the possibilities of overlapping speech, creating fragments or phrase completions, mirrored text, as well as the usage of monologue/dialogue.
Setting to music and movement, is another means of offering a different data source, which was integral to the research process, or has become artistically useful to uncover relationships made through the interpretation of the data. Moreover, and in staying true to the form of the choreopoem, which is the combination of poetry, movement, and music, each of these become central structures, and “characters” in the overall development of the performance autoethnographic text. To think of music and movement as central characters to the overall production of the text is not a new concept or idea, regarding the importance of music in particular with regards to Black culture and performance. Gilroy (1993) highlights how music communicates in a way beyond scriptocentric ideas of text and textuality within marginalized communities, but particularly within Black diasporic communities. Singing, dancing, and other gestures all combine to tell another equally yet important story to the text being recited, read, and/or performed on the stage. To illustrate my usage of juxtaposition, and the process of blended scripting, I offer excerpts from Chapter 4 Tell It: A Contemporary Chorale for Black Youth Voices. Tell It: A Contemporary Chorale for Black Youth Voices, is an exemplar of my auto/ethnographic practice illustrating how I move from autoethnography to performance auto/ethnography placing my personal narrative in conversation with the cultures I inhabit. Moreover, Tell It highlights the voices, stories, triumphs and tragedies experienced by Black youth in particular whose positionalities—Black, queer, female, male, poor, etc.—make them particularly vulnerable to death (see Gilmore, 2007). Within Tell It, blended scripting, is integral to the composition of turning the data — journal entries, poems or other written artifacts—into a performance auto/ethnographic text, dramatic techniques were employed, namely framing, juxtaposition, and the usage of polyvocality. Polyvocality as noted by Castagno (2001), emphasizes the usage of multiple language strategies and sources utilized within a play in which
characters and narratives within the script contain diverse interest of objectives as expressed in different speech forms. Furthermore, polyvocality resists the notion of a single or dominant point of view in a narrative, thereby supplanting the single or privileged authorial voice (Castagno, 2001). With this focus in mind, polyvocality is achieved by splitting my own biographical history/voice—as told through journal entries, and poems and other written artifacts—amongst the various other characters. By splitting my voice into speaking parts I allow for each speaker to bring a gendered presence and personal style of speaking to the text.

Moreover, through the usage of various media clips other voices, and thus narratives enter my own biographical history, this is where worlds collide, where the “I” singular becomes the “I” plural. As noted by Denzin (2003) the performance event does not take place on a stage per se; the invisible “fourth wall” that usually separates performers and audience does not exist, because all parties to the performance are also performers. By allowing others to share in my experience through their own personal histories whether on stage, in the audience, or through a media clip heard throughout the performance piece, Tell It “puts into words the world of experiences, actions, and words that are, could be, and will be spoken (Denzin, 2003).”

_Framing_ typically refers to the usage of sound, setting, lighting, or metadramatic technique used to set the stage for a theatrical dramatic event, and/or highlight a particular event (Castagno, 2001). _Juxtaposition_ refers to utilizing similar text, genres, sounds, etc. and placing them alongside one another or in relationship to the other (Castagno, 2001). An example of framing, juxtaposition, and polyvocality is highlighted in the following excerpt, which has been slightly altered from its original form:
<All cast members enter stage, with candles, creating a memorial at the corner of Anywhere USA and The Forgotten Avenue. Consider non-traditional items, what should be memorialized should be of importance not only to cast but to youth—items which resonate familial/family remembrances. >

V7 (male voice): Mama don’t cry

There wasn’t nothin you did wrong
This life choice as you so call it
Was if we believe choosing is involved…mine

Mama don’t cry
You didn’t raise no sissy twinkie for a man
You weren’t ill equipped
Nor robbed me of anything cause circumstances required that only women’s hands would steer this one
Mama don’t you cry

V3: Mama don’t you cry

V8: A very well known person in the gay community of Puerto Rico, and very loved. Jorge was found on the site of an isolated road in the city of Cayey.

V3: Mama don’t you cry

V8: He was partially burned, decapitated, and dismembered, both arms, both legs, and the torso.

Framing is illustrated within the aforementioned text through the stage directions, which sets the stage to highlight the story being told within that particular moment. The two different texts, which are juxtaposed, are that of a poem, originally titled “Mama Don’t Cry,” against that of various news reports about the death of Jorge Steven Lopez Mercado. Lastly, polyvocality is achieved through the multiple characters narratives/voices, which are being told and utilized within the moment. For me, sound is an integral “character” to the overall development of a performance auto\ethnographic text which is amplified once enacted as a live performance on stage.
Conclusion

Within this chapter I have provided a literature review of autoethnography as a methodology. This literature served as a *telling* of autoethnography, offering readers a working definition of autoethnography/autoethnographic practices, as well as outlining current, concerns, questions, issues within the genre, particularly as it relates to the field of Education. I have also provided a brief review of literature defining performance, key tensions/debates, and my particular deployment of performance auto\ethnography. Lastly, within this chapter I have also provided details regarding my data collection and analysis process, offering an exemplar of “dramatized data.” The next chapter, Chapter 4, Tell It: A Contemporary Chorale for Black Youth Voices, is an exemplar of my auto\ethnographic practice illustrating how I move from autoethnography to performance auto\ethnography placing my personal narrative in conversation with the cultures I inhabit.
The Scene/Seen #3

Without Sanctuary

We are not safe
Black boys
In
Skinny jeans
Heels and high tops
Walkin from *that* club
Can you see it....

Not safe
Butch girls
Who look like
Well you know
Not girls
Fem lipstick girls
Only into girls
Or the occasional
I'll dip
To offer you a night you'll always remember
We are not safe
And I walk these streets
Knowing
Tonight might be my

last dance
The last chance for romance
The last chance for love

I am not safe
Not on these streets
Not in Greenwich Village
Or Boystown
Or Baltimore
Or Chocolate City
Or in the ATL
Or at Sizzle
Or at pride
Or my neighborhood block
Black boys lovin black boys
Black girls lovin black girls
Lovin ourselves
Fiercely
Boldly
Proudly
Haphazardly
In back alleys
Dimly lit corners
In doorways coming and going
At family reunions
And cookouts
And your weddings
Some nights
Some days
I don't know
If I'll make it home
But
at least
I know love....
Picnicking In Greenwich Village

A man was lynched yesterday
Strung up by his designer boots
Tank top shirt
and cut off shorts
Just another casualty of nigger hating faggot violence

And I'm wondering where are the rainbow flags on the NAACP headquarters today?
Or the black power fist in solidarity from the Human Rights Campaign,
cause we human right?
Historic reminders of silence
Yelling out to us that we've travelled this road before
Traded in nigger taunts for ya fuckin faggot!
No more false accusations of raping white women

A man was lynched yesterday...
For walkin while Black
I mean walkin while gay
I mean walkin while lovin the skin he's in
A man was lynched yesterday
Strung up by a rainbow
Seems like Southern trees and Northern concrete still bear strange fruit

I said a man was lynched yesterday
A nigger was lynched yesterday
A faggot was lynched yesterday
I mean a nigger faggot was lynched yesterday
A picnic happened

• In memory of Mark Carson
Untitled

I want to know each of your names
Attach a life
To the flesh hanging
Put a face
And a story
And memories
The good kind ya know
Like maybe somethin bout
How we use to crack slick together
Stir up trouble whenever we got together
Or remember that time you and so and so
Were the talk of the block for who knows what now
I’d take knowing you were no count
Or quiet and shy
OR
Even a genius before your time
Just somethin to let me know
You were here
Were more than this
To do somethin
With, with
What they’ve done to you
I don’t want
Your death
To
Be
The
Last
Thing
I
Know
You
By

I hear that sometimes, if you listen real hard, the wind whispers memories we’ve forgotten
Ancestral calls
Speak
To
Me
Now….
Chapter 3 Homeplace: Autoethnographic Tellings and Theorizing from the Margins

Lily let me be exactly who I was. Red, a soft brown boy, with caramel red skin, who loved to read, play with flowers, and who told his father, “Either you are in my life or your aren’t.” That phone call. Hot salty tears streaming down my face, a broken heart filled with sadness, pain, and disappointment was my last childhood memory of KK.

It was the 3rd grade and we were having some sort of class celebration. KK had come to visit me at school. This was a surprise since he was rarely ever around and definitely never checked in on me at school. Like any 8 year old who is still learning to trust and love family, even in their inconsistency, I was excited to see him. Even more excited that my father was going to come back to school later that day and bring juice for everyone! This meant that I contributed two things to our party, a rare feat for our working class family. It was as if his contribution on this day trumped everything else he had never done, said he would do and failed to do. Lily always made garlic bread and my classmates always loved it which meant I loved bringing it! The day went on, the juice never came.

Sitting at the head of the table in our dining room, I am talking with KK on the phone. Through tears, I mutter the words, “Either you are in my life or your aren’t.” The phone call ends. KK wasn’t dependent, and my heart couldn't handle his false promises, revolving door visitations, missed birthdays with no phone call or cards, Christmases with no gifts. I didn’t want his absent presence, I wanted him. Anything short of that was unwelcomed and I told him so. Our next meaningful exchange wouldn’t happen again until I was 18 and a freshman in college.

* * *

KK’s presence in my life was like a memory half forgotten. He was always there, even if I did not want to admit it. Lingering, somewhere in the background. He’d show up around
Mother’s Day and Easter to help Rose sell artificial flower arrangements on various corners in Baltimore. This became a seasonal ritual to see him, Rose, and Tee. Lily and May always made sure our paths crossed. No matter how much these adults disliked each other, I and Puddin were carted off, typically in our Sunday’s best to see that side of the family. The exchanges were trite the typical with Rose and Tee, old Southern retired Christian folk,

“How ya derrin in school?”

“Straight A’s and a couple of B’s,” was my typical response.

“You hear that Rose, the boy sho smart”

“Here’s a couple of dollahs”

My favorite part of this song and dance was the money. Tee was my favorite and the one most likely to grease my palms. I did not care much for Rose. She was everything he was not, cold, stern, smart-mouthed, judgmental, and I knew she did not care for my mother. The feeling was mutual between the two and I was clear as to whose side I was on. I also felt that something in her eyes, the side-glance she would give me whenever we talked, the careful studying of me up and down, judged my pudgy softness. I was too soft to be any kin of hers. We tolerated one another, and the money always sweetened the deal.

The older I got the less I looked forward to their visits. I did not like playing nice, holding my tongue from telling Rose just how mean and nasty I thought she was and how I did not like how she treated my mother who was, in my opinion, the best thing that ever happened to her son. That exchange never happened, no matter my own anxieties we all played nice with one another and evaded the elephants in the room. Tee, KK, and I, three generations of men who had no language to speak to and relate to one another. What we understood best was, “here’s 20 dollars.” This was the only tongue we all shared. I appreciated the cash infusion Tee offered, it
felt like a peace offering on the behalf of his son—a small amends for Lily and May raising me without any help from KK.

* * *

Moon was my favorite uncle. Our family’s Red Foxx, with wide eyes and a Cheshire cat grin. He cussed like a sailor and could make you laugh so hard your cheeks and belly would hurt.

Sharing in the responsibility of raising Puddin and I, Moon would pick us up and drop us off for school, church and work. In his car, Cheech & Chong reigned supreme, right alongside Marvin Gaye, Jimi Hendrix, James Brown, and Kiss. A hardcore archivist and historian Moon’s house was filled with newspaper clippings, VHS, and cassette recordings of our history. In his archive I could find obituaries, special coverage articles about Baltimore City Public Schools, which horse won the race, a mixtape of classic rock, PBS documentaries which spanned the gambit of historical documentaries to nature series, and any mention of our family’s accomplishments like when our cousin who played football got mentioned in the local newspaper in a neighboring county.

The glue that helped keep our family connected Moon, without fail called everyone on their birthday. He knew of every death, and new birth in our family, the gossip of who was sleeping with who, about to be divorced, get married, retire, or how well the kids were doing in school. He kept track of KK, acting as a carrier pigeon relaying new numbers to the each of us. Filling him in on my accomplishments, letting me know which state he now resided. This work went largely unnoticed. Like his hard labor and declining health. Working on the railroad broke his lean towering football physique leaving him on disability. The aneurysm he suffered in his 40’s changed him. He did not cuss as much, which pleased May. He went from every other word
to now every two or three. From cursing as a complete thought to cursing as punctuation, a comma here, an exclamation there, and sometimes even a period.

Watching his health deteriorate bothered us all but we never said anything. We never asked him to eat less, never suggested he move around the house to get exercise in, never questioned why his life was reduced to the 10x8 square foot room he shared with CoCo, which included a mini-fridge, a bathroom, and a reaching aid to reach items which were not in arms reach. I did not ask why he showed up less frequently to family events, making guest appearances like a celebrity who you so desperately wanted to see.

Moon’s death was sudden and unexpected. He died of a massive heart attack. If poverty does not kill you, being Black always finds a way in the end to get you. The months before Moon departed I had committed to phoning him at least once a month. Although some things were harder for him to recall, he was still sharp. I thanked him for helping to raise me, told him I loved him. We never discussed why I stopped dating girls, which often feels like my families biggest kept secret. Most days I think about it as an odd negotiation of love and respect—we know, we just do not speak openly about it. And why would we need to since according to Queen, it was as plain as day at the age of 5?

Driving from Illinois to Maryland I thought about all these things. I was grateful for the time we had shared; yet angered that I never said anything to my uncle about his health. I watched him happily eat himself to death—but why?.

* * *

The funeral was over. This was the part I was dreading. May and I had not broken down yet. This was inevitable. As strong as we are, we also know our true strength lies in our release of grief, sadness, anger, and whatever else is hurting us. That I could handle. But the long
periods of time alone with KK— I dreaded. Even in death Moon was still spackling us back together. Moon was KK’s only brother-in-law, he never remarried despite the countless women he had other children with.

The first stretch of riding was easy. The cemetery was not that far away. We were still in that phase of mourning; prepping ourselves to be pall bearers. I was showing off my ability to drive. To follow the processional, dart yellow lights, help keep our processional unbroken. My father had never seen me drive before. We talked about the road, the traffic, how much Baltimore had changed. This was safe. Easy. Invited.

I parked the car. Got out and headed towards the burial site. As we approached the site, I could tell this was the presiding preacher’s first funeral. From my training as a youth minister, I remembered the Old Testament and New Testament verses we are supposed to recite as we lead the deceased to their final resting place. She did not have these memorized and stumbled on the words. KK, myself, two of my uncles friends, my youngest male cousin, and Mack hoisted the casket over the grave.

“Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” The moment was over. There were no flowers to lie on the casket. We could not afford them. No church organizations, social club affiliations, or coworkers sent anything. Moon had not worked in years, and he always blazed his own path. We were instructed to go to the repast. Before hitting the road again, I needed to see my mother—to hug her. Reassure us that everything would be ok. I paused. Frozen. June crying out loud, “He’s gone, he’s gone, he’s gone” the only words he could muster. This came from the same brother who was stoic, who never cried when receiving a beating, who did not wince when May passed. June had had two years of growing pains, of failing school, trying out drugs, being disrespectful to our parents, not living at home, of selling drugs but Moon had been there through all of that;
somehow reaching June in his darkness. He encouraged him with words I never knew had been
exchanged, money when he could. The father he longed for. Lily managed to move him from the
car, to her bosom.

“Now it’s up to you to carry on and apply everything he taught you. You’ve got to carry
him in your heart. He’ll always be there....”

Time passed, as she held him there a little longer, finding some tissue, she wiped his face, and
asked, “Do you wanna ride with your sister?”

Puddin and June share a special bond, they were a little rougher around the edges than
Tiny and me. A little more prone to push boundaries, act out, be blatantly defiant, get caught in a
lie, brilliant, able to score above any test given to them at school but never the straight A student.
This gave them a bond that I cannot share. They rode together.

My mother and I hugged. Silently. Two gasps of air exchanged. Wet shoulders from the
tears. “Ya’ll all I got now.” I knew what she meant. It was just my mother, no May, Moon, or
Blue, just Lily, or “May’s girl” as they call her. The only family she had left was the family she
had made. Sure she had cousins, and a few uncles and aunts but they were older, distant. We
were all she had. She and I both knew it.

* * *
I just wanted silence. This I could handle. This was the nature of our relationship. I also wanted
to begin again. Somewhere. Somewhere comfortable. On my terms. Not here on this long stretch
of highway. I had forgiven KK for his absence in my life, for his dependency on drugs, his
inability to be dependable. I wanted to know who I was. Who were my people? What else runs in
my blood? I needed to know and still do.

So here we were. No music. Silence so thick it hung. He took the first step.
Why don’t you be returnin my calls, man?

I get them, but...

I had written him a letter months ago. Put all of my emotions on paper. Admitted my anger, and frustration and longing. This was to be my olive branch. An end to the 27-year war. I never mailed the letter. I told him of it, but never sent it. 624 miles. Could I give it to him now? I did. It said what I could not. Explained my silence, my unreturned phone calls and text or the lack of immediacy in my response. He let loose a tear.

“I been waitin for a letter like this. So what do you want me to do now, son. Tell me so I can make it right...

There’s a lot you don’t know ‘bout what happened between me and your mom. I wanted to see you man. But you know with my addiction and all…”

He apologized for not being there. Apologized for the pain he knew he had caused me.

“You’re my only son I wanna get to know you…”

There was silence. I listened. Unsure as to how to respond. This was not what I had in mind.

“So are you gay?”

“Yes”, I reply.

“So why didn’t you never tell me. Why didn’t you tell me back when I asked you before. I’m your father and I’ll always love you, son. Always. Man. You seeing anybody?”

“Yea, he’s in New York”, a truth I hadn’t told Lily yet.

“Well I’d love to meet him one day.”

I pause, “I’m thinking bout breakin up with him.”

“Why?”

“I think I deserve better”
“Well son, you gotta do what’s best for you.

But why didn’t you ever tell me. You know your cousin Peaches and I use to kick it all the time and go to the gay clubs in Baltimore....Maybe we can go out one day. Ha, how would you like that you and your old man kickin it in the club....But why didn’t you tell me man, you’re my son , and I’ll always love you. Just be safe.”

* * *

The car had stopped, I was now at Moon’s house. This place held so many memories. This was the county. The “country” as we all called it. It was where I learned to pluck and snap string beans; where I also learned that two people can love each other and not live together since Aunt Genie and Uncle Sprigs lived in houses diagonal from one another, and never divorced. I do not know how long they had been married, but I know they lived apart for at least as long as I had been alive. This house, was Sprigs house, and was now Moon’s. Underneath their roof, where three generations, Antsy, his wife, and their two kids, along with Coco, Queen and her two dogs. So many things lived and died here.

Here we were two grown men trying to resuscitate our failed relationship. KK, like me, is a crier. I always thought I got this from my mother. Why was I crying so much? I had already forgiven him. The hurt and malice had been excavated. What else was left to activate so many tears? KK revealed to me that Tee had been absent in his life too. While Tee provided financially, he was never there emotionally. KK had hoped our relationship would and could be different. In his words I heard that although he could not be a traditional provider, he wanted to give me what he could, time, and compassion, and love. I heard in his words how he, like me, does not like pain, the sting of rejection, of not feeling good enough.

“That hurt son, that hurt and I was thinking does he hate me...like wow what did I
do to him to make him hate me.”

A slight pause, his voice breaks, the tears continue down his face.

“My own son won’t even return my calls...and I would use drugs to cope...and I’m being better now to not use. I don’t want you to hate me, that really hurt knowing I had hurt my son, my own flesh and blood so much that he would hate me. I’d never forgive myself knowing that…”

And it wasn’t that I had hated him. Not anymore. I don’t think I ever did. Just had learned to live my life without him for so long that I did not know how to let him in but I wanted to.

* * *

Folks were pulling up to the repast. Biggs and his wife pulled up alongside my parked car. “Is this it, anybody in there yet?” Embarrassment rushed over me, they were witnessing us cry. They had seen us in the car for what seemed like an eternity but was more like 40 minutes. I said, “Yes, I saw a couple folks go in already, we’ll be in soon.”

“So where do we go from here”, he asked?

“I don’t know”

“How about we communicate more? Please answer your phone son. Or we can text, whatever you’d like. It would just be good to hear from you.”

I reluctantly agreed and said I would do better.

“You know I love you son”

We went in the house, trying to do better than we had for the last 27 years.

Unpacking the Analytics of Love, Loss, and Failure

There are two moves, I make within my project. First, I move from the personal to the political. This is accomplished by offering my biography alongside other Blackqueer individuals,
providing a shape to our lived experience. In doing so I not only illuminate relationships of power and systems of oppression operating within our lives but survival, kinship, and audacity. Illustrated through the usage of narrative in the first half of this chapter is the wrestling with death and violence and the intimate and familial spaces in which it operates. The second move I make within my project is to offer love, loss, and failure as a lens to understand and address the lived experience of Blackqueer youth. To do so, I turn to performance, and in particular to the works of three Blackqueer literary authors. These three performative text, speak to each of the aforementioned themes. Asking myself when I think of love, when I think of loss, and when I think of failure, which performative texts immediately come to mind, helped me in selecting which text to serve as exemplars. I then inquired as to what these specific texts say about their corresponding theme? It is important to note that I am not attempting to provide a comprehensive review of the literature around each of the themes, but instead provide each exemplar as an entryway to begin to understand the analytics of love, loss, and failure. The second half of this chapter follows my exploration into each of these questions and their corresponding theme.

**Love as an analytic**

There is *always* something left to love. And if you ain’t learned that, you ain’t learned nothing. Have you cried for that boy today? I don’t mean for yourself and for the family ‘cause we lost the money. I mean for him: what he been through and what it done to him. Child, when do you think is the time to love somebody the most? When they done good and made things easy for everybody? Well then, you ain’t through learning—because that ain’t the time at all. It’s when he’s at his lowest and can’t believe in hisself—cause the world done whipped him so! When you starts measuring somebody, measure him right, child, measure him right. Make sure you done taken into account what hills and valleys he come through before he got to wherever he is. (Hansberry, 1958, p. 145)

I quote here at length the character of Lena Younger, affectionately called Mama in *A Raisin in the Sun* because this passage serves as a particular turning point in the play, and captures the aftermath of the raw emotions from the climax of the play. There are several other
examples of love operating within this play, however none of the other examples exemplify the complexity of love as this one. This passage in particular encapsulates the operation of love within my project, laying out three particular imperatives for understanding love as an analytic. These three imperatives are that love, i) creates value where there is believed to be none, ii) requires presence, and iii) demands a reflective assessment of circumstance.

Manalansan (2007), argues that love is an overused trope in queer discourses, asking why love is turned to and why now? Berlant (1998), Kipnis (2003), and Seidman (1990) also question our relationships and usage of love, love as romance, as emotion, cultural practice, and an expression of intimacy. Working against such logics, which question the relevancy of love to politics, I offer here the utility of love as illustrated through *A Raisin in the Sun*.

**Love creates value where there is believed to be none.** To illustrate how love creates value where there is believed to be none, I return to the quote at the beginning of this section. Quoted above are Lena Younger’s words of admonishment directed to her youngest daughter Beneatha. After learning that Walter, the eldest son, had squandered the family’s only surplus money on a questionable business venture, Beneatha despises her brother. To Beneatha he, “[... ] is not a man, [he] is nothing but a toothless rat (Hansberry, 1958, p. 144). In her frustration she goes on to ask, “Love him? There is nothing left to love (Hansberry, 1958, p. 145).” Lena responds, “There is *always* something left to love.”

Beneatha’s words have a particular relevancy in relationship to thinking about the disposability of Blackqueer bodies. These bodies represent those who are placed on the outside of the outside (Holland, 2007). That is to say Blackqueer bodies are not seen as central to mainstream Black politics, cultural life, and struggles, and neither are they central to current articulations of mainstream queer politics, cultural life, and struggle. As bodies that are
constantly devalued across multiple dimensions of marginality, Blackqueer people are often placed beyond the bounds of love; beyond the bounds of safety, protection, care, and attention. Simply put, Blackqueer bodies are not valued.

This project through the analytics of love holds the lives of Blackqueer people as intrinsically valuable. Love answers the question of assumed absence of value, and provides a counter narrative to the presumed deficit, morally wanting, depictions of Blackqueer individuals and communities (Cohen, 2010). The importance of love is as Hardt and Negri (2005), state that “We need to recover today this material and political sense of love, love as strong as death. This does not mean you cannot love your spouse, your mother, and your child. It only means that your love does not end there, that love serves as the basis for our political projects in common and the construction of a new society. Without this love, we are nothing (p. 352).” Love as a political tool, encompasses “a body of knowledges, arts, practices, and procedures for re-forming the self and the world (Sandoval, 2000, p. 4).” In turning to love as an analytic, love provides an antidote to the violence and death, which manifest in the lives of Blackqueer communities and youth in particular. This is itself a political project, and must be a necessary component of future political movements and struggles.

Love requires presence. Building on how love creates value, is the second imperative of this project. Love requires presence. To be present, would include openness to emotion, to empathize, and be held accountable to a community. The words of Lena Younger again illustrate this point, as she asks Beneatha,

Have you cried for that boy today? I don’t mean for yourself and for the family ‘cause we lost the money. I mean for him: what he been through and what it done to him. Child, when do you think is the time to love somebody the most? When they done good and made things easy for everybody? Well then, you ain’t through learning—because that ain’t the time at all. It’s when he’s at his lowest and can’t believe in hisself’ cause the world done whipped him so! (Hansberry, 1958, 145).”
To value another, is to acknowledge their life, presence and experience. It is to see them visibly and to be willing to commit to building relationships, which require that you show up. To be present means to acknowledge emotion.

“Have you cried for that boy today?” is relevant in thinking about the lives of Blackqueer youth who appear throughout this project. Have we individually and collectively cried for Tyrone Williams, Percy Day, Sakia Gunn, Jorge Steven Lopez Mercado, and countless others whose names do not make the 6 o’clock news, have legislative bills named in their honor or national campaigns created to save others who look like them from facing similar tragedies? This is the emotive presence love requires as signaled by Lena. To locate emotion within our political work, also requires the ability to seek empathetic connections and to be transformed by them. Such transformation holds one accountable to others beyond the self—community.

To be committed to community underscores Lena’s point in loving others when they are at their lowest, after the world has whipped them so. To make the necessary connections, which do not further berate and obliterate those already outside of love, safety, and care. Jordan (2002) reminds us that “the ultimate connection cannot be the enemy. The ultimate connection must be the need that we find between us. It is not only who you are, in other words, but what we can do for each other that will determine the connection (p. 219).” Love as an analytic, questions the intentions and consequences of political action, which fail to build radical coalitions rooted in connective alliances, which do not coalesce around hate, or concede to the provisional rights of some at the expense of others.

*Love demands a reflective assessment of circumstance.* The last imperative of love as an analytic is highlighted in the last words of Lena Younger, “When you starts measuring somebody, measure him right, child, measure him right. Make sure you done taken into account
what hills and valleys he come through before he got to wherever he is (Hansberry, 1958, p. 145).” Lena reminds us that love forces us to adequately take into consideration the circumstances, which have produced particular outcomes in an individual’s life. Her words illustrate the need to understand the material and discursive effects of violence and death within the communities and lives of Blackqueer youth. These are the hills and valleys Lena Younger references, the structural forces, which constrain and snuff out the life chances and life opportunities of Blackqueer communities and individuals.

To “measure him right” would require an intersectional approach in understanding the ways in which violence and death operate within the lives of Blackqueer youth. To measure right, would require an acknowledgment of the Blackqueer body as a site of trauma where racist, sexist, and homophobic violence is enacted (Johnson & Henderson, 2005). It would also recall how Blackqueer bodies are marked as deviant, and in such devalued (Cacho, 2007, Cohen, 2004). This measuring would also require reflexivity, to analyze the ways in which the self is implicated in this violence. Who do we hold accountable for “wrong” choices when “right” opportunities never arise (Cacho, 2007)? The acknowledgment of collusion provides an opportunity for action, to move beyond despair and to actively choose to affirm life. To measure right is to remember that is always love, “that will carry action into positive new places, that will carry your own nights and days beyond demoralization and away from suicide (Jordan, 2002, p. 269).” Love as an analytic within this text holds fast to this reminder, offering love, again, as an antidote to death.

**Loss as an analytic**

We need to talk about what we do to each other, no matter what pain and anger may be mined within those conversations.[...] We are too important to each other to waste ourselves in silence. “WE CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT OUR LIVES.” (Lorde, 1990, p.6)
The aforementioned quote is derived from Audre Lorde’s (1990), *Need: A Choral for Black Woman Voices*. *Need* initially a poem was first written by Lorde, in response to 12 Black women murdered within the Boston area over a four month time frame (Lorde, 1990). Lorde states that she wrote *Need* because she, “had to use the intensity of fury, frustration and fear [she] was feeling to create something that could help alter the reasons for what [she] felt (p. 3).” *Need* serves as an elegy—a lament for the dead—and a catalyst for dialogue and change. The physical loss of life, which haunts this text, is obvious. This is in part why the text serves as a primary means for writing through and thinking about loss. However, *Need* offers other means to think about loss which are important to this project in understanding the ways in which death and violence shape the lives of Black/queer youth. Encapsulated within the aforementioned quote, are two particular imperatives for understanding loss as an analytic. These two imperatives are that loss, *i*) requires speaking the unspeakable to give name and shape to the unknowable, *ii*) recognizes need.

**Speaking the unspeakable to give name and shape to the unknowable.** To illustrate how loss speaks the unspeakable to give name and shape to the unknowable, I return to the quote. Lorde (1990), states, “We need to talk about what we do to each other, no matter what pain and anger may be mined within those conversations (p. 6).” Lorde in invoking the need for conversation also opens up the space to give shape to, name, and recognize the complexity of feelings and relationships involved. Throughout the poem, Lorde centers the violence experienced by women of color at the hands of men of color, juxtaposing the states understanding of violence, “the police call it a crime of ‘passion’” against a more interpersonal structural critique, “not a crime of hatred (Lorde, 1990, p. 9).” In acknowledging her own sadness, anger, worry and love for the Black women who were in her life who she feared losing
to violence, while also seeking not to alienate Black men as comrades in struggle against inequality Lorde opens up a space to explore the complex field of sentiment and structures which created and/or were in reaction to the violence and death experienced by Black women.

In speaking the unspeakable, *Need* literally offers the names of the dead. Lorde inserts their names back into our cultural memory. And where memory fails, Lorde still seeks to raise the dead and give them a space to speak. Lorde (1990) states,

I do not even know all their names. Black women’s deaths are not noteworthy not threatening or glamorous enough to decorate the evening news [...] we are refuse in the city’s war with no medals no exchange of prisoners no packages from home no time off for good behavior no victories. No victors (p. 10).”

In exploring the unspeakable, reinserting names, or simply the space for the dead to speak, Lorde opens up a space “forming inarticulate places into conversational territories (Holland, 2000, p. 5).”

**Recognizes need.** In returning to the quote, Lorde (1990), states “We are too important to each other to waste ourselves in silence. “WE CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT OUR LIVES (p. 6).” This quote underscores the need created by loss. Not simply the physical loss embodied by “the dead,” but also how death operates as a type of “figurative silencing or process of erasure (Holland, 2000, p. 4).” Lorde acknowledges the haunting specter of death, an absent, yet felt presence. This need functions as urgency for recognition, honesty and reconciliation. Lorde (1990) states, “I need you. For what? (p. 11)” This is a statement, a declaration of need. Here, hooks (1990), articulation of “yearning” is useful in understanding the need that Lorde expresses. For hooks (1990), need is expressed as a yearning, “the yearning that wells in the hearts and minds of those [...] longing for critical voice (p. 27).” This need/yearning for voice reverberates in the statement by Lorde, for the recognition of Black women’s experiences.
This declaration is then followed by a question, questioning the relationship of need, which exists between black men and women. She goes on to explore the paradox of this need, as she states “And what do you need me for, brother, to move for you feel for you die for you? We have a grave need for each other but your eyes are thirsty for vengeance dressed in the easiest blood and I am closest (Lorde, 1990, p. 11).” This portion of the poem is a moment of honesty, which lays a foundation for reconciliation. Lorde in speaking from and through loss, articulates an analytics of loss which does not simply mourn for the lost object, but crafts that mourning into a productive conversation towards not only recognizing the dead, the structures and relationships which create various types of death but also a strategy towards action to combat these same forces. Between making the unknown known, and expressing one’s deepest longings, loss serves as a reminder of the stakes involved both material and spiritual consequences, while creating a bridge for a type of recuperation.

**Failure as an analytic**

We are not always
the bravest sons
our fathers dream.
Nor do they always
dream of us.
We don’t always recognize him
if we have never seen his face
We are suspicious
Of strangers.
Question:
Is he the one? (Hemphill, 1987)

The aforementioned quote is from the companion book to the documentary *Tongues Untied* (1989) by the late Marlon Riggs. The poem describes Hemphill’s relationship with his father. A type of failed father-son relationship, Hemphill points to the choices each have made and the subsequent questions which arise from these choices. Within this poem are two imperatives,
which speak to the analytics of failure. The analytics of failure offer failure as a i) generative force of inquiry and ii) an embrace of disruptive alternatives.

**Generative force of inquiry.** To illustrate how failure fosters a generative force of inquiry I return to the quote. Returning to the opening quote of this section, Hemphill (1987) ends the first stanza of the poem with a question, “Question: is he the one?” This question can be assumed by the readers to be in reference to a fatherless son in search of his father. While this is a plausible given the nature of the failed relationship outlined in the rest of the stanza, so are other alternatives. These alternatives move throughout the poem from wanting to know and recuperate the failed also read as lost relationships to inquiries regarding the usefulness of the failure. Instead of “what if,” failure throughout the poem moves us to ask “what, now?”

The question of “what, now” is a recurring theme within the poem. Hemphill approaches understanding not to arrive at a clear answer, but to deal with the consequences and rewards of the choices already in operation—What now? “The nagging question of blood hounds me. How do I honor it” (Hemphill 1987). The dilemma between knowing one’s family lineage, a history of belonging, a past, one’s kin, and foreclosing these possibilities. What now? “The ghost of my wants is many things: lover, guardian angel, key to our secrets, the dogs we let sleep. The rhythm of silence we do not disturb (Hemphill, 1987).” Failure works to dream of a place to “call home, a place better than here, wherever here might be (Hartman, 2007, p. 87).” What now? “I want to be free, daddy, of the black hole between us. The typical black hole. If we let it be it will widen enough to swallow us. Won’t it (Hemphill 1987)?” What, now?

“What now,” becomes a useful way to think about strategies of resistance and liberation. Hemphill’s poem about his father becomes a collective poem where the absent father can be thought of as the state an oppressive absent yet present regime. Exuding authority, when like
Hemphill all we want is to be free, to not be consumed by the force of the state, or by the death and violence perpetuated and produced by the state. “What, now,” reframes the relationship, and inquiry, asking us to rethink what is the nature of our relationship, the benefits, rewards, and punishment. As Hemphill (1987) articulates, “I wanted tenderness to belong to us more than food or money”—what makes a good parent, a good state?

Uncertainty is constant in asking what now, and it forces a constant revisiting of understood and taken for granted knowledge and strategies. What now re-strategizes and repositions tactics towards equality. If violence of Blackqueer individuals is premature and preventable, what, now? If we know we were never meant to survive, what, now (Lorde, 1978; Vargas, 2008)? Wrestling with this question of survival, Hemphill, asks “And do we expect to survive? What are we prepared for (Hemphill, 1987)?” Survival preparation lies in the same impetus for the quandary, failure, or rather embracing disruptive alternatives.

**Embraces disruptive alternatives.** To illustrate how failure embraces disruptive alternatives, I return to the quote. Hemphill (1987), states, “We are not always the bravest sons our fathers dream. Nor do they always dream of us.” This line of the poem joins in a chorus of other lines, which accepts and in many ways rejects the prescribed father-son relationship valued in society. Here Hemphill disrupts this seeming natural and organic familial relationship, instead embarking on a different narrative of kin relationship (Halberstam, 2011). Typical forms of masculinity are rejected as Hemphill expresses a desire for affection, “I wanted tenderness to belong to us (Hemphill 1987).” Hemphill goes on to further advance an embrace of disruptive alternatives, as he states, “I leap unprepared to be brave. I surrender more frightened of being alone. I have to do this to stay alive. To be acknowledged (Hemphill, 1987).” Disruptive alternatives dismantle logics of success and reevaluate conventional standards of success, “in a
heteronormative, capitalist society [which] equates too easily to specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation (Halberstam, 2011, p. 2).” Hemphill in advocating for the uncertainty of danger, and risk, to leap unprepared in order to survive, embraces a counterintuitive stance of resistance, and survival. This stance is not predicated upon assimilation, but rather the embrace of deviance, of an already outsider status which requires navigating the world in oppositional ways (Cacho, 2007; Cohen, 1997, 2004). This opposition is not always intentionally oppositional, but rather an embrace of survival habits, which cannot easily configure into narratives of resistance, empowerment and agency. As Cacho (2007), states, “Narratives of resistance often betray certain assumptions that acts of defiance will lead to (or at least support) progressive politics because it is assumed that everyone desires freedom from domination and subordination (p. 199).” However, Hemphill throughout, the poem gestures towards accepting disruptive alternatives, which might prove more useful. More useful because acts of failure create opportunities of “losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming” which “offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world (Halberstam, 2011, pp. 2–3).” Furthermore as Halberstam expresses, as illuminated through Hemphill’s poem, “Failing is something queers do and have always done exceptionally well (Halberstam, 2011, p. 3).” This failure as previously argued is predicated upon a necessity, and includes that of Blackqueer people, the deviants, punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens (Cacho, 2007; Cohen, 1997, 2004; Halberstam, 2011).

Conclusion

Death haunts this text. It is a spectator, which looms in an unknowable space. However, for as much as death looms in the background it should not overshadow life. As readers continue to move forward it is important that you remember to hold life and death in tandem, in order to
avoid the easy misstep of understanding the Black/queer individual as “always already tragic,” “inevitably destined to die too young or face a miserable fate of economic exploitation, militarization, or incarceration” (Cacho, 2007, p. 197). If loss remakes us, then “return is as much about the world to which [we] no longer belong as it is about the one in which [we] have yet to make a home (Hartman, 2007, p. 100). As we move forward let us seek a place of return, to find and make new homes together, somewhere between our aching for what we have lost and the promise of something we can collectively create to remove the structures, which perpetuate loss—death. Love offers such an antidote, alongside embracing a queer project of failure so as not to replicate the status quo (Halberstam, 2011).

In this chapter I offered my personal narrative to illustrate the personal as political. I also outlined the analytics of love, loss, and failure, through examining three-text. This chapter, as an autoethnographic telling, sets the stage for the subsequent chapters. The next chapters serve as a showing, Chapter 4, Tell It: A Contemporary Chorale for Black Youth Voices, an exemplar of my auto/ethnographic practice, illustrates how I move from autoethnography to performance auto/ethnography placing my personal narrative in conversation with the cultures I inhabit.
Chapter 4 Tell It: A Contemporary Chorale for Black Youth Voices

Tell It!: An Introduction

Only some of us get remembered. That is the bone chilling truth of the stories collected here, remade as performance and a live witness to testify to this truth. This truth is also the drive, which causes me to collect these untold stories, to return to these tragedies over and over again, and to “tell it, tell it, tell it like it is.” I am reminded that the only symbolism of life for many queer subjects are the cultural markers which signify their living through their death in the form of obituaries, elegies, sound bites on the 5 o’clock news, vigils held in their remembrance, and the sheer memory carried in the hearts, uttered as whispers on the tongues of family members, friends, and loved ones. This performance text, which originally began as individual poems, many of which were elegies, signify the way in which “death poems” like obituaries stand as history, especially for the lives of people of color and queer people of color (see Brownworth, 2013).

In particular “Take Back Life I,” was my initial response poem to the death of one of my students Tyrone Williams, his cousin Percy Day, as well as the beating death of Derrion Albert which also occurred around the same time as Tyrone being shot. Since then, I have thought about the intricate ways in which violence shapes the lives of youth of color, as well as queer youth of color. For me, there is little separation, as I think of myself as a Black/queer young adult. The systematic premature and preventable death experienced by youth of color and queer youth of color begs our attention. Vargas (2008), in his exploration of anti-Black genocide, and the imperative this creates for our society, collectivities, and subjectivities to be radically transformed, and stripped of the premises that require, perpetuate, and desensitize us to the manifestations of anti-Black genocide, illuminates for us the necessity of collective and
individual action in order to enhance and sustain the life chances and life opportunities of Black people. Moreover, as he states:

> The ongoing marginalization and premature, preventable death of disproportionate numbers of Black persons in the African Diaspora create the very conditions for the revolutionary transformation of our societies. Anti-Black genocide generates the imperatives of liberation and revolution. (Vargas, 2008, p. x)

When taking this into consideration, along with an extension of Gilmore’s (2007) definition of racism—“the state-sanctioned and/or extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death, in distinct yet densely interconnected political geographies” (p. 247)—to include issues such as sexism, classism, homophobia, etc., a multifaceted approach towards liberation and revolution becomes necessary.

Centering a politics rooted in the lives of people of color this chapter stretches the bounds of traditional queer theory, illuminating queerness and queer politics as predicated beyond sex (Cohen, 2010). Through an intersectional analysis the lives of Black and Brown youth’s systematic victimization are held in tandem with the victimization experienced by LGBTQ youth of color, centering their stories as essential to contemporary queer movements (Cohen, 2010). This is not a means to queer Derrion Albert, Tyrone Williams, Percy Day, and the other non-LGBTQ identified individuals mentioned within *Tell It*, however, *Tell It* is a call to reconnect our movements of liberation, and to recognize the systematic violence which permeates the lives of people of color and queer people of color noting that the pervasiveness of violence although experienced differentially is not a mutually exclusive phenomena (Cohen, 2010).

*Tell It: A Contemporary Chorale for Black Youth Voices*, began at the rupture, which was Tyrone. It also affirms as Cohen (2010) states that the deaths of non-LGBTQ people of color are deeply connected to the deaths, suicides, violence, and victimization experienced by LGBTQ identified individuals because, “young folks of color operate in the world as queer subjects, the
targets of radical normalizing projects intent on pathologizing across the dimensions of race, class, gender, and sexuality. By normalizing their degradation, marginalization, and invisibility, it becomes something to which we no longer pay attention (Cohen, 2010, p. 128).” *Tell It* makes plain and wrestles with this interconnectedness. As an homage to Audre Lorde’s (1990) *Need: A Chorale for Black Woman Voices*, *Tell It* takes up the call of *Need*, centering the necessity and sacredness of life. Lorde’s (1990) chorale ends with a quote by Barbara Deming, “We cannot live without our lives.” Where *Need* ends, so I begin. *Tell It* tells—of joy, sorrow, violence, the lives, and deaths of Black youth, in particular, and urban youth, in general, experience. In its declaration and therefore affirmation of the sacredness and value of life, *Tell It* acts as a witness, demanding us all to bare responsibility as witnesses to the stories and lives of urban youth. I now present to you *Tell It: A Contemporary Chorale for Black Youth*
Tell It: A Contemporary Chorale for Black Youth Voices

Characters Information:

Voice 1—narrator, weaving thread throughout piece, male or female voice

Voice 2—male voice, representative of the stories of Tyrone Williams, Percy Day, and Derrion Albert

Voice 3—male voice, representative of the story of Jorge Steven Lopez Mercado

Voice 4—male voice, representative of the story of Kiwane Carrington

Voice 5—female voice, representative of the story of Sakia Gunn

Voice 6—female voices, meant to be representative of the stories of 8-year-old Tanja Stokes and her 7-year-old cousin, Ariana Jones.

Voice 7—chorus of voices, interchangeable and at times simultaneously male (3) and female (3) representative of the stories of countless/nameless murdered youth

Voice 8—“Journalist”, representative of media investigation, and coverage

Movement I: Day Breaks/Heart Aches

Setting takes place at the intersection of Anywhere USA and The Forgotten Avenue, which should be urban in display. Begin scene with pedestrian traffic, where various stage crossings occur. There should be a group of teenagers standing on the corner, huddled, with some leaning on the wall. <Cue Music: Moment 4 Life> <Lights Fade Up> Scene opens with sounds reminiscent of a neighborhood Summer scene. Upstage center girls are jumping rope, with downstage left (V7) singing “Tell It,” sitting on one of the stoops reading a newspaper, and surveying the neighborhood is V1.

See Gumbs (2011)
V7: (female lead throughout) Tell it

All Voices: Tell it/ Tell it like it is uh-oh

V7: Tell it

All Voices: Tell it/ Tell it like it is uh-oh

V7: My name is (insert name)

All Voices: Tell it tell it

V7: I’m on the line

All Voices: Tell it, tell it

V7: And I can do it

All Voices: Tell it tell it

V7: With a (insert Zodiac sign)

All Voices: Tell it tell it

V7: And you know whut

All Voices: Whutttt

V7: And you know whut

All Voices: Whutttt

V7: My man was rollin on the ocean, he was rollin on the sea but the best thing about it

he was rollin on me

All Voices: (trailing off) Tell it, Tell it/ Tell it like it is uh-oh

<Chorus members fade into background. Lines below performed in cannon with slow deliberate speed, whereas each line builds, and is connected to the one preceding and following it. >

V1: (slow as if gasping for air) I have been try-ing to honor life
V1: But DEATH you have been making this very

All Voices: (in round robin form, various deliveries) oh so very

V1: hard/ In lieu of recent events….The shooting and death of one of my students

V2: Tyrone Williams, 19

V1: His cousin

V2: Percy Day, 17

V1: The beating and death of

V2: Derrion Albert, 16

V1: The decapitation, dismemberment and partial burning of

V3: Jorge Steven Lopez Mercado,13 19

V1: The state sanctioned, court ruled “accidental” death of

V4: Kiwane Carrington,14 15

V1: The stabbing murder—death of

V5: Sakia Gunn, 15

V1: And countless others who I know not of,

V6: (with care) Tanja Stokes,15 8

V1: whose names evade our memory

V6: (with care) Ariana Jones, 7

13 Including Jorge Steven Lopez Mercado, a queer Puerto Rican youth slain on the US Territory of Puerto Rico underscores the vulnerability created by the relationships of race, sexuality, and age.

14 See Dolinar (2009)

15 See Coleman (2010)
V7 (interchangeably female/male): The Atlanta Child Murders: Edward Hope Smith, 14; Alfred James Evans, 13; Milton Harvey, 14; Yusef Ali Bell, 9; Angel Lanier, 12; Jeffrey L. Mathis, 10; Eric Middlebrooks, 14; Christopher P. Richardson, 11; Latonya Wilson, 7; Aaron D. Wyche, 10; Anthony Bernard Carter, 9; Earl Lee Terrell, 10; Clifford Jones, 13

V1: And whose deaths all seem

V1, V2, V4: (slow and deliberate) so very justified

V1, V5, V6: (slow and deliberate) so very necessary

V7: as if just the status quo

<V8 enters, s/he should be wearing distinctively different clothing from the rest of the setting, equipped with a small, ruffled notepad, voice recording device, and pen >

V1: (pause) But instead I have decided to take this moment to honor not death

But living

V8: (to VI) Sir may I have a moment of your time

<VAbsent chorus members filter back on stage>

Chorus

V7: (V7 male lead for chorus) Tell it

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16The names, lives, stories and histories of people of color are often times not told, remembered, given substantive media coverage, or allowed critical mass, inquiry, and generative space within our social institutions. Resulting in cultural amnesia, this denigration and denial of memory blocks our access to healing the wounds created by the tragedies and loss suffered by people of color (Alexander, 2005). Remembering therefore becomes an antidote to mediate this healing. My attention to listing the names, and ages is to help precipitate healing. For Atlanta Child Murders see Baldwin (1985).
All Voices: Tell it/ Tell it like it is uh-oh

V2: Tell it

All Voices: Tell it/ Tell it like it is uh-oh

V2: My name is Ty

All Voices: Tell it tell it

V2: I’m on the line

All Voices: Tell it, tell it

<Chorus fades down, as conversation between V8 and V1 takes precedence>

Movement II: Good Kids

V8: Could you tell me about Tyrone Williams, are you familiar with his story

V1: “Williams was home for the weekend from the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, where he was a student, to get an outfit to wear to a homecoming dance at the school.”¹⁷

<Lights Fade Down and should be dimly lit, with spot lights on V1, V2, V7 (female) and V8. A re-enactment of the night should occur as V8 recants events from the night>

V8: Saturday September 26, 2009—family members were at a loss Saturday about why two cousins were fatally shot outside one of the teen’s home in the Homan Square neighborhood. Sharnia Goodman was having a laugh with cousins Percy Day, 17, and Tyrone Williams, 19, outside the two-flat in the 3700 block of West Polk Street when she said somebody opened fire at about 9:15 p.m.

V7: "We saw him walking up the block, then he stopped a few houses down, turned and walked away"

¹⁷See Byrne (2009)
V8: said, Goodman, who was Day's girlfriend.

V7: "About 10 minutes later he came back, the shooting started and everybody tried to run."

V8: The shooter was not familiar to any of them, and they had no interaction with the man before he opened fire, Goodman said.

< Lights fade up. V1 and V8 resume conversation. Neighborhood interactions continue >

V1: “They were good kids. Good kids. They rarely ventured past the front steps when they were out here, and we have never had any kind of trouble on this block. It's all turned around. This just doesn't make any sense.”

< V8 moves to group of youth standing at the corner, V7 (male voice 1) begins lines >

**Movement III: Autophobia**

V7 (male voice 1, to V8): Are you afraid of the dark?/I use to be/That dim quiet smoothness/Vulnerable coolness/Midnight skin/Bumps in the night/Terrors of the imagination/Hooded strangers/Thieves coming to rob you/Rape your women/Always male/About my height or taller/My complexion or darker/Baggy jeans, and a white tee/ Media induced frenzies of

V2: Me

V7 (male voice 1): Bombarding your motherboards/Cascading across TV screens

18Autophobia literally means the fear of (phobia) self (auto). Movement III is meant to ask audience members as well as the performers to reflexively analyze their fears. Furthermore, Movement III moves the audience/text beyond a structural critique to understanding the ways in which our individual agency is not only structurally shaped, but how as “free” agents we collude and therefore perpetuate structures of dominance.
V3: Me

V7 (male voice 1): Downloaded onto desktops

V4: Me

V7 (male voice 1): Distributed on handouts

V6: Me

V7 (male voice 2): Drudged up from the annals of history

V6: Me

V7 (male voice 1): Mongrel, infidel, coon,

V7 (female voice 3): Me

V7 (male voice 1): Mammy, pappy, nigger

V2: Me

V7 (male voice 1): Wetback, chink, kite

V3: Me

V7 (male voice 1): Faggot, sissy, carpet muncher

V5: Me

V7 (male voice 1): I use to be afraid of the dark

V1: Until I learned, it was me

V7 (female voice 2): Until I learned

V7 (male 1 and female voice: 2,3) Til I came to know

V7 (female voice 1,3): Realized

V7 (male voice 2, female voice 2): That it was

V7 (male voice 1, 3): Is

V7 (female voice 1): Simply
V7 (*male voice 1*): Me

V8 (as if searching for words, or creating a headline): Bumps in the night/Terrors of the imagination/Hooded strangers/Media induced frenzies of

V6: Me

V7 (*male voice 1*): Of YOU <pause> Now are you still afraid of the dark?

**Movement IV: Street Lights**

<Lights Dim, as V5 moves downstage on The Forgotten Avenue, wearing baggy jeans, a loose fitting shirt and durag, she is not discernibly female to an “untrained eye”>

V5: “I learned to sag my jeans just right by watching the men around me. Studied the way they rocked tilted fitted caps over crisp tapers and deep waves. Matchin kicks, neatly creased jeans ‘throwback’ jerseys, that was my style,”¹⁹ our style, girls who dressed like boys, often mistaken for teenage boys because. We have the courage to dress the way we feel inside. We are your daughters, sisters and nieces. We are young, black, lesbians. Our courage makes you uncomfortable. Our authenticity scares you.<pauses>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&lt;Spotlight on V5’s face&gt;</th>
<th>&lt;Chorus members in arc surround</th>
<th>V5, solo females first, then males join similarly&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V5: Me and my crew Newark, New Jersey After a night out, we had just got off the bus. Then this car pulls up. We already knew what they wanted. No</td>
<td>V7 (male voice): Hey girl</td>
<td>V7 (male voice): I’m just tryin to</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

¹⁹See Freeman (2008)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>holla</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>V7 (female voice): He got out the car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We’re gay</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>V7 (female voice): Richard McCullough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>V7 (male voice): you know you want it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>V7 (male voice): Slut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>V7 (female voice): No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>V7 (male voice): Dyke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>V7 (male voice): Bitch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting for my life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>V7 (female voice): Movin closer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>V7 (female voice): A knife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stabbed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>V7 (female voice): Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bled out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>V7 (female voice): No means no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board and Market</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>V7 (male voice): No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>V7 (female voice): A knife</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mothers Day Morning

Bled out

<V5 exits stage into audience>

<All cast members enter stage, with candles, creating a memorial at the corner of Anywhere USA and The Forgotten Avenue. Consider non-traditional items, what should be memorialized should be of importance not only to cast but to youth—items which resonate familial/family remembrances. >

V7 (male voice): Mama don’t cry

V7 (female voice): Fighting for our lives

V7 (male voice): No

V7 (female voice): No

V7 (female voice): No

V7 (female voice): No

V7 (female voice): No

V7 (female voice): Sakia

V7 (female voice): No

V7 (female voice): Sakia

V7 (female voice): No

V7 (female voice): Sakiaaaa

<Chorus members separate. As Chorus members separate V3 enters with rose>

V3: Jorge Steven Lopez Mercado

20. “Mama Don’t Cry (A Queer Son’s Tribute to His Mourning Mother)”, a poem underscores not only my ethics—personal vulnerability and commitment to justice—but also makes visible intersectionality. Placing my personal narrative in conversation with the narratives of “strangers”
There wasn’t nothin you did wrong
This life choice as you so call it
Was if we believe choosing is involved…mine

Mama don’t cry
You didn’t raise no sissy twinkie
for a man
You weren’t ill equipped
Nor robbed me of anything cause circumstances required that only women’s hands would steer this one

Mama don’t you cry
I’ve cried sea fulls enough for the both of us
Drowned myself in them

who I connect with due to our common yet differing subjectivities is an intrinsically political and spiritual practice (Alexander 2005).

V3: Mama don’t cry

V8: A very well known person in the gay community of Puerto Rico, and very loved. Jorge was found on the site of an isolated road in the city of Cayey²¹.

V3: Mama don’t you cry

²¹See Towle (2009)
Been baptized anew
Washed over, and healed
And you know it was you who
taught me the power of a tear
The necessity of release
The sanctity, cleansing, life giving,
anger freeingness of it all
The vulnerable strength it required

Mama don’t cry
I am strong
I am healthy
I am intelligent
I am survivin on my own
I got street smarts
I still love God
And knows without a shadow of a
doubt that God loves even me

Mama don’t cry
I will make it
I am loving me ALL of me now a
days

V3: Don’t cry

V8: He was partially burned,
decapitated, and dismembered, both arms,
both legs, and the torso.
Mama please…
Please don’t you cry
You ain’t failed nobody
This could not have been prevented
This was oh so necessary
It was pre-destined before either of
us came to know the other

Mama don’t cry
I am gay
And that doesn’t change a bit of
who I was
Who I am,
Nor who I will become

If you must cry
Cry over the accomplishments
Rejoice in tears that I weep no more
If you must cry
Cry about the love that we share
Let each tear careen down your

| V8: Never in the history of Puerto Rico has a murder been classified as a hate crime. |
| V3: Don’t cry remember your words, “Love conquers hate” |

22See The National Center for Lesbian Rights (2009)
If you gonna cry
Cry knowing
That you did
ABSOLUTELY NOTHING
WRONG BUT LOVE
ME AS ME….And that, that Mama—
AIN’T NEVA WRONG!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V3: Remember</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Love, conquers hate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

V3: Love, conquers hate

Remember

Love Conquers Hate

Love

Conquers Hate

V3: Love…conquers…hate

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**Movement V: Moment 4 Life**

V7 (female voice): I want you to know and remember my cousin, Brandi Rose Hobson (September 20, 1983–September 2, 2001). Raped and strangled 9 years ago in Chicago. She was my beautiful, open, and fun cousin. I hold sweet Alabama and Chicago summertime memories of her.²³ (places memorial object on corner after delivery of lines)

V1: You See I am TRY-ING to take back life/ These tears are not of sadness/ No, no defeat lies here/ Today I must remember/ Have you remember/ That life is about living/

That we weep in our coming in/ But rejoice in our going out/ Today I refuse/ ABSOLUTELY, refuse to allow death to have yet another victory/ So what these atrocities happened in cities distant from here/ Hell in your own back yard Chicago, Puerto Rico, Champaign-Urbana, Atlanta, Baltimore, Detroit, Oakland, Saint Louis, Compton,

<Crowd dissipates, blowing out candles as they exit stage. V1 and V8 are left on stage. V8 rapidly takes notes of what V1 says. Lights gradually fade up and feel sharp like a burst of light in contrast to the previous darkness of the scene. >

V1: So what they were black, brown, gay/ Male/ Female/ So what they were young/ So what, so what!/? This could have been anywhere/ Any city/ So what, so what? This is everywhere/ This is most cities/ These are not exceptions/ No, these are common day casualties/ Casualties of some war we are desperately losing/ Some war we deny is at our very own doorsteps/ In our very own homes/ Beaming in from our televisions/ Streaming across the internet/ Downloading right onto our desktops/ There is nothing to fear/ But this threat is real/ Very real/ These deaths real/ Very real/ And I refuse/ I refuse any longer to sob/ Refuse any longer to cry/ Refuse any longer to pain/ Over death/ No today/ Today I remind you/ Remind me, that life is about living/ So do it!/ Do it freely/

<All other cast members begin to filter back on stage assuming previous positions from Movement I.>
V1: Do it justly/ Do it as if it is the last thing you could ever do/ Because it/ JUST/
MIGHT/ BE!/ But (my God) do it/ Love it/ Cherish it/ Make it Sacred/ Remember it/ Remember
to live/ For I today/ Challenge us/ That we not mourn, and give death yet another victory/ But
that we live/ Live life/ Life live/ Live!/Live Life fearlessly/ Take back our streets!/ Take back the
day!/ Take back even the night/ But (my God) Take back life!

Movement VI: Just Another Day

V7: (female lead changing lead throughout)

V7: Tell it

All Voices: Tell it/ Tell it like it is uh-oh

V2: Tell it

All Voices: Tell it/Tell it like it is uh-oh

Continues as background chant while Voices fade in and out delivering lines

< Lines below performed in cannon with slow deliberate speed, whereas each line builds,
and is connected to the one preceding and following it. >

| V1: These stories needed tellin | V7 (male voice): Cuz we were |
| V2: Tellin cuz | human |
| V1: Cuz they needed ta be told | V5: Were real |
| V6: Are human | |
| V3: So they might be of use to someone | |
| V2: Cuz if I hold it in then it’s only mine | V4: Because if I hold it in then it’s |
| V3: Dies with me | V6: Cuz if I hold it in then nobody else will know |
| V1: Tyrone Williams, | V2: Cuz if I hold it in then it’s only mine |
| V1: Derrion Albert | V1: Cuz if I hold on to them |
| V4: Kiwane Carrington | V2: Percy Day |
| V6: Tanja Stokes | V3: Jorge Steven Lopez Mercado |
| V1: And countless others, names I may never know, Atlanta child murders, Amber alerts never found, Amber alerts never sounded cuz | V1: Sakia Gunn (pause) if I hold em in, then nobody else will know |
| V6: Too poor | V1: Ariana Jones |
| V2: Gay | V7: *(Chorus of Tell It increases)* |
| | V5: Cause the child was too Black |
| | V1: Too queer |
| | V5: Butch |
| V6: Too much not what u needed | V7 (round robin): If we keep silent |
| V6: time of day | V1: Refuse of the state were they |
| V4: Ran across the wrong authority | V1: nobody else will know |

Chorus: *Decrescendo*

V7: Tell it

All Voices: Tell it/ Tell it like it is uh-oh

V7: Tell it

All Voices: Tell it/ Tell it like it is uh oh *(retard this line)*

*Silence* *Lights Down*

*Barrage of sounds building upon one another that is in no particular order. Layered entrances, with childlike fun beginning, interrupted by city sounds, ending in a gunshot: childlike laughter, double dutch ropes turning, basketball bouncing, licks of a hand game (e.g., Miss Marry Mack), running, bicycle bell, ice-cream truck, city noises (e.g. horn honking, backing up of trash truck, industrial noises, etc.)*

*Gun Sounds* *Lights up on V1 as he finishes drawing an outline of a child on the ground. Once finished, he places a kiss with his hand on the forehead of the figure, then places the piece of chalk in the drawn hand, and leaves.* *Silence* *Cue Music: Moment 4 Life*


**Conclusion**

I wrote *Tell It* as a response to the systemic violence I witnessed which was prematurely ending the lives of young people of color. There was and still is little conversation which places the individual experience of death—homicide or suicide—of young people of color or LGBT youth of color as a part of a larger structural problem. Because the youth of color were murdered and/or experienced death in different ways and contexts their murders/deaths were understood as unrelated. Consequently, these deaths were rendered invisible and unable to acquire significance even in death (Hong & Ferguson, 2011). Building upon the legacy of Black feminist activists, theorists, and artists *Tell It* aggregates these seeming disparate deaths (Baldwin, 1985; Combahee River Collective, 1979; Lorde, 1990; Jordan, 1988). In doing so it illuminates the implications of valuation created in and through Blackness and queerness. *Tell It* examines the necropolitical, demonstrating that these deaths were not random but socially determined. And determined precisely because the victims were Black and queer.

Within this chapter I have offered an exemplar of my auto/ethnographic practice illustrating how I move from autoethnography to performance auto/ethnography. As a performative piece, *Tell It* situates performance as the site to produce alternative relations to power, each other, and to envision a radically different world. The closing of *Tell It*, with a barrage of noses, child-like laughter and play, an abrupt gunshot and the image of a chalk outline of a child, sets the stage for a sustained dialogue on Black queer futurity, and utopias. Emphasis on futurity, and utopia, within the context of thinking about Black queer youth and bodies, ask us to rethink our day to day practices as a site and possibility for revolutionary practice. The following chapter takes this up and reflects on my engagement with Saving Our Lives, Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT)—a black girl celebration collective, and how my engagement with Black girl
genius, shapes my artistic practice and understanding of the intersections of Blackness and queerness.
The Scene/Seen of BlackQueer 4

Journal Entry #1: Untitled

It is the day after National Coming Out Day and two days after my mother’s birthday, three days after my nieces. Today I watched a celebration in honor of Audre Lorde and got all sorts of shook up and emotional and tears streaming listening to Amina Baraka, Shani’s mother speak so tenderly about her daughter, her lesbian not so “out” daughter’s death. Tenderly and proudly…and all these things congeal today for me, Black mothers mourning thrice, once for their child’s blackness, two times for their queerness and three times for the bone-deep, gut wrenching fear and reality of the cruel punishment, silence, and death their children may face simply because of who they are and who they love…In the time that has passed since I invited my mother into all of or more of my life, silences have been broken, she asks now if I am seeing anyone and wonders when I’m not, WHY not—we have talked of dating white men just in case our go this time with our Black brothers doesn’t work out…the anger, most of which I think was fear or guilt—fear of losing the other, guilt at not being honest sooner, not providing a father figure, not being a good enough mother, and fear of love unrequited has subsided. But the fear I think that still lingers is for my very life—physically and spiritually. And these are motherly fears that I can’t quite understand, parental fears that having no children of my own, I also cannot understand or even begin to fathom. I have never questioned my mother’s love for me, the excitement in her voice about what I’m doing whether she totally understands or not, the way she tries to make ends meet on a half of a shoestring and a whole lot of prayer—how I know she cares for my soul tenderly, sternly, through those eyes that pierce and see the truth of you searching back and forth over your face into your eyes—your heart, your soul…the struggle in her voice—the breaks to say I love you back, or “same to ya.” Black women know intimately how to 1. Fight for the things and people they love (only) and 2. How to do what one must for the things and people they love. Because my mother is Black, because she is a Black woman mother who fights for me and my siblings, our dreams and hers, I know that the love sometimes unspoken and at other times lingering in the background, waiting to embrace me in moments when I am so far from home that love I know is always working…in her work and labor as a cafeteria worker and supervisor nourishing children physically or in the daily life-long giving as a mother of 4 Black children, 3 male one of which is queer and 1 a girl child, along with being a grandmother, sister, daughter, wife, person…I see and know her love in her labor, in her sacrifice, in the fear, desire to protect and freedom to nurture me into my own self, confident and secure in who and whose I am. Four years after or maybe five years after inviting my mother in…our love still grows. And it might not be perfect but that’s what love is about—work!
Letter to My Father: Journey Stone 1

Dear Father,

I have been angry with you for the past 26 years of my life….and it has taken 26 years to realize this. You have shaped indelibly almost every action or lack of action I have taken in my life. Since the moment that I decided to deal with betrayal, and loss, and disappointment, and anger, and whatever else made me cry was simply to cry and move on…to cut off future interactions…to hold looming in the back of my mind that this niggaz ain’t shit, won’t do shit, can’t do shit, SHYT…and without him…it has been each missed moment of that I might not be love… that they will because they will not be missed out on love in a rush that I would be better off since that moment that I see love… the doubt which arises ENOUGH for somebody to inevitably disappointment ENOUGH for me…I have to miss out on pain… been all too busy running from a past of hurt that my present never seemed present…like you I was missing in action…resurfacing at moments…shining through…in trying to dodge you, the idea of being you I have perhaps in ways made decisions you would…breaking the heart of a woman who loved me unconditionally…failing to be present in my familial responsibilities…choosing silence as a weapon when really what I needed to do was be more open, more honest, more vulnerable, more outspoken, more of a me unfettered by a you…. I have told myself that I was better without you…that men aren’t a necessity for the whole development of a child…and there is still a part of me which very much so believe both of those things but perhaps the truth is I needed you…in ways that wouldn’t have made me a better macho man but in ways that would have allowed me access to all of what I was feeling…I needed a you not high…responsible…present…not promiscuous…not sorry…I didn’t need a sorry you…no more apologies necessary, nor the should’ve, could’ve, would’ve you…no more excuses necessary just you…whole…you…healthy…you…available…you…responsible…you…present…me healed…

You, Kelvin who taught me sons still grow in the shadow of their fathers
The Scene/Seen #4

This Work is Dirty Work

This work is dirty work...and not in the sense of soiled pampers or blood stained underwear
No, this work is dirty because these girls come to us....
So as we come to them
Half-whole-but already whole just needing someone to help us connect our disconnected parts...to explore with us and awaken in us our rightfully divined god/goddess....
Needing just a touch...yes a laying on of hands to witness this beauty I/we sometimes hide and run from....this beauty I/we sometimes don't see....
This work is dirty work
Because you make it be...
If only you reverenced me...
Listened to me...
Held me when I cried....
Loved me as I needed....
Heard me...
Saw me whole...talented...beautiful and a divine gift....
And so we do this cleansing work, this exorcism of demons which rack our bodies, hold captive our minds, silence our tongues and allow you to see us as deaf-dumb-and blind...
So we do this work of undoing
This work of purifying
Our temples the homes of thieves and robbers, gamblers-who are yet our brothers-yet our sisters but who yet defile us...
And so we must reclaim our sacred....reclaim our sanctuary...reclaim our whole selves....
And so I ask that unless you are about this dirty work
Unless you wish to toil with us...
Change and be changed by this collective created....I ask that you do not show up...
Cause this work is a holy work...
Of which many are called...but FEW are chosen
Is it you?
Are you sure?
Then enter this holy of holies, this temple made of stones which the builders rejected...
Find sanctuary with us
But do enter at your own risk
Chapter 5 Dear SOLHOT: “And so we must...”

Introduction

Seen/Scene # 5, “This Work is Dirty Work” was written as a reflection after my first time attending Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truth (SOLHOT) at Franklin Middle School on March 19, 2008. The poem captures much of the work undertaken in the arts-based Black girlhood celebration collective, which is SOLHOT (Brown, 2008, 2013). The poem illustrates the need for SOLHOT, because the heteropatriarchal, sexist, racist, capitalist and homophobic society in which we live does not listen to Black girls, nor see them as “whole...talented...beautiful and a divine gift,” but more often than not as problems in need of fixing. Being a problem resonates deeply with me in that my identity as Black queer man, often disallows me from certain opportunities. “This Work is Dirty Work,” makes room for simultaneously recognizing and honoring the singular within the collective (Brown, 2013). As a form of the generative force of the creative (Brown, 2013), “This Work is Dirty Work,” not only illustrates what is necessary to do the work of SOLHOT, but also illuminates what is created in doing, such “dirty work.” My engagement with SOLHOT has been instrumental to my graduate school training, which is why this chapter focuses on the insights I have gained through my work in and with SOLHOT. Specifically this chapter uses poetry, and narrative to reflect on three particular moments of engagement with SOLHOT in order to illustrate how SOLHOT stands as foundational to my own creative practice of Blended Scripting, has been pivotal in my turning to creative and disruptive methodologies, has influenced my thinking of the expansive possibilities of education and shaped how I understand queerness.
What is SOLHOT: On Being a Homeboy

SOLHOT can be defined “as a political project [that] values the contradictions, paradoxes, and truths that emerge from articulating Black girl celebration as a worthwhile goal” (Brown, 2008, p. 1). Further as Hill (2014), states,

SOLHOT is a space of Black girlhood appreciation where Black girls, our bodies, and lives are deemed important and precious. In this celebrating and desire not to manage black girls, there is a great deal humbling, self-critique, and collective recovery work. With societal structures resulting in Black girls being suspended, dying, sexually harassed, amongst other things SOLHOT becomes a place to air, address, and make meaning of those obstacles. SOLHOT is hard work, but a necessary valuable contribution to black girlhood.”

SOLHOT for its members/participants has come to mean more than a gathering of predominately Black girls/women after school in a library, or classroom. Words like “after school program,” “girls empowerment program,” do not adequately reflect how SOLHOT exists and operates. As a collective, SOLHOT allows for those in attendance to simply come together, be, celebrate, and see one another clearly. SOLHOT is work, and a sacred intentional practice, it has come to mean performance in academic, and community spaces, to pick girls up to bring them to said performances, it has come to mean snacks, a warm embrace, and a gentle yet much needed admonishment about why the guy/or girl your seeing is not worth your time. In its various iterations SOLHOT as theatrical performance, music making as We Levitate, or working with Black girls within the local community, SOLHOT is a complex, collective, and sacred creative work with and for Black girls and women (Brown, 2008, 2013; Hill, 2014).

In SOLHOT, we call the organizers Homegirls, which as Brown (2013), discusses honors the legacy of Black feminist Barbara Smith and her comrades “as they called themselves homegirls to connote their love for home and reject the homelessness their critics insisted on for them because of their intentional practice of Black feminism (p. 40).” Often the only male in the
room reppin’ SOLHOT, I am an elephant in the room. “If SOLHOT is a space for Black girlhood celebration, then what does that have to do with you Black boy,” is the question I assume to be written upon the quizzical stares, or the neatly dressed question directed at only me, “So how did you become involved in SOLHOT?”

What most people do not know when they ask me this question is that I come from two successive generations of woman run-single parent homes. I have mostly female friends; my male friends, mostly gay, are not stereotypically masculine. I have sought out to no avail and still do seek male camaraderie however due to being too feminine, too openly gay, too Black but not that kind of Black, or too down with feminism I do not have many male friends and even fewer male role models or mentors. My earliest mentors and those who nurtured me most were by and large women and most of them Black women. I start here with where I come from because much of the work that I do emanates from familial places, from relationships of both real and fictive kinships. Moreover, I never understood the idea of Black girl celebration to preclude my showing up to join the celebration.

However, joining in on the celebration, and the work of SOLHOT comes with responsibility. I am haunted by the admonishment of a friend and home girl who stated in casual conversation, “It was a BLACK WOMAN who put you on, AND IF YOU EVER GET OUT THERE and show your ass, I will light into that ass and let em’ know IT WAS A BLACK WOMAN who put him on!” The details of what prompted this dialogue evade me, I don’t readily recall prompting any particular discussion to be indicted of not giving Black women credit for who I was as a scholar, but the words stung, and stuck with me. I recall thinking, “But wait, ain’t I down”, I was looking to be validated by a woman in my life—a script I can easily rely on as a Black male. But in truth I must confess that if I was not a gay effeminate male,
raised by women, who could listen to them and not think there was a lack in my upbringing
AND did not have friends, Black women in particular to snap me back to reality, I too might be
drunk off the patriarchal punch that nourishes too much of men’s and boy’s sense of self, self-
worth, their manhood and ideas regarding the treatment and value of women.

How I became involved in SOLHOT and for that matter performance is a tale of risk,
humility, longing, providence, and intentional nurturance from peers, my advisor, and a host of
unexpected individuals both working within and outside of the academy. I came to SOLHOT
because much of my boyhood is informed by Black girlhood as evidenced by my vivid memories
of playing Black girl hand games growing up with my younger sister coupled with the musical
innovation of Black female R&B/hip-hop artists such as Lauryn Hill, Lil Kim, and Envogue in
the 90’s and early 2000’s (Gaunt, 2006). I am the only homeboy to date, however becoming the
only homeboy has been a journey filled with lots of highs, confrontations, and a few lows. The
following sections cover these highs and lows, while also illustrating how SOLHOT has
informed my thinking about the intersections of Blackness and queerness as well as my turning
to creative methodologies.

**Memory 1: The Smackdown**

Journal Entry:

SOLHOT Malady: Communal Misalignment
This morning I rose, and realized I had not rested as well as I could have last night. I am
not tired, no but I am concerned, I am weary, I was anxious last night when I read in a
rather violently fraught email WHAT and WHO WAS and WAS NOT SOLHOT. And I
am NOT about furthering that conversation. Cannot be, it would be to war with my own
Spirit, and having tried that for far too many a year, know now that war against self is
never a fight in which anybody wins. And so I lit incense, I needed a freshness to lighten
the air around me, to lighten these thoughts. The violence wrought against me, wrought
against us, silenced Baby Suggs from reminding me this morning to caress my face cause
they don’t love that neither. I miss her laugh, miss hearing the laughs of the children,
seeing the men dance, hearing the women weep, and something moving in our coming
together. Call it a block, or maybe it is this thought, which was to pervade my thought,
and intervene in the vision of such a celebration, such a coming together. I am still
listening to Spirit, for it instructed me to light the incense so surely my hearing is not off today but something is. Something is.

Yes that is what it is, I’ve engaged in a battle of selves, cause myself, is composed up of ourselves, we are and thus I am in misalignment.

09/22/09 early morning

It was a smack down. Fall, 2009. In SOLHOT a smack down, refers to an argument, confrontation, an issue that needs to be resolved. The heated classroom debate centered on what was and was not SOLHOT. By extension this also meant who was/was not doing the actual work of SOLHOT. At this particular moment in SOLHOT we were beginning to use performance as a part of our practice. This was how I initially became involved with SOLHOT. The statement was made that conference presentation, performances, publications, and essentially anything that did not involve working with the girls physically was not SOLHOT. The class made up of undergraduate and graduate students our opinions about the labor of SOLHOT differed upon those lines. The aftermath nuclear, a furry of email exchanges, personal conversations, some students choosing to drop the course, or check-out of the class for the remainder of the semester.

What we were struggling for in that moment was about recognition for our various labors. Capitalism had taught us that only certain sorts of labor had value and we were forgetting that SOLHOT was an anti-capitalist space. A place in which, we all had value. Similarly the tension of this moment has shaped how I think about the intersections of Blackness, queerness, and violence. The lack of spaces, which hold Blackness as valuable coupled with those spaces, which do not hold queerness as valuable creates a tension and hierarchy of politics. Our conversation that day and the subsequent aftermath illustrated this, valuing and devaluing types of bodies, their labor, and the knowledge they generate.
This moment was a crash course on intersectionality. Or at least the various ways Blackness and difference manifested, creating hierarchical values of knowledge production and the labor, love, and bodies associated. My body was on the line in particular, as the only Black gay male in the room, doing the work of SOLHOT. E. Patrick Johnson (2001), suggests that there is a gap within queer studies, between that of “theory and practice, performance and performativity (p. 9),” suggesting then Quare studies as remedy to lessen this gap in order to pursue an epistemology rooted in the body. What Johnson (2001) suggests is an insistence on the fact that the body matters, and on how to mobilize actual bodies to action. We too were insisting on the fact that bodies mattered, in different ways. The home girl who began the smack down with the fact that SOLHOT was not a paper or presentation was asking us to pay attention to bodily presence, and that our practice and theorizing be rooted in bodies and relationships to actual girls and one another (Brown, 2013).

The smack down and its aftermath—creating a collective theatre production that centered on our lived experiences—taught me two particular lessons. Lesson one: we have the tools necessary to make ourselves vanish. Lesson two: we also have the tools necessary to reappear ourselves (Laymon, 2013). Our smack down illustrated one of the course texts that semester, Andrea Smith’s (2006) “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing,” and what a classmate aptly described as our ability to disappear one another within SOLHOT. Smith (2006), in outlining the various ways people of color are differentially effected by white supremacy offers a different paradigm for people of color organizing based upon political alliances which do not center on the flawed logic of “shared victimization but where we are complicit in the victimization of others.” (p. 69)
Here it is important to think about the ways one can be complicit in the victimization of others, as it relates the intersections of Blackness, queerness and violence. Our complicity in the victimization of others is illustrated in the social justice mobilizing work of the It Gets Better Campaign as mentioned previously. In its inattention to the ways youth of color and in particular Black youth are effected by LGBT bullying, Black youth like Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover are literally erased from such campaigns, his body discarded and rendered unmemorable. The anti-Blackness imbued in the campaign has dire consequences for those who are Black and queer, in that it is always the body that bears the burden (Cohen, 2010; Johnson, 2001). Black queer bodies like Carl who are disappeared by the organizing logics of white supremacy within mainstream LGBT organizations like the It Gets Better Campaign not only illuminate how anti-Blackness manifests and its consequences, but also a need for different organizing tactics as Smith (2006) highlights. Tactics, which in fact do not simply coalesce around an idea of shared victimhood but move beyond and troubles this identity manifesting a more complex organizing logic.

One such organizing model, has been proposed by Ruth Nicole Brown (2013), as she offers the creative potential of Black girlhood as an organizing model moves beyond binary categorizations “which do not function as reliable organizing logics for movement toward greater collective visions of justice (p. 189).” What SOLHOT illuminated for me were the ways for instance Black (gay) men’s aims towards liberation if not held accountable to Black women/girls same gender loving or otherwise, could prove to become a model of oppression which in fact does not also liberate Black women and girls. I know this to be true, because of the practice of SOLHOT. The words shared in the smack down were harsh, but the truth of them still remains. Unless we are in communion with one another, actually working with the girls, and insisting on
and actually making Black girls lives better somewhere then that is not SOLHOT. I did not understand that then. Our various works were all SOLHOT for me, and they still are but what this home girl was saying was about presence, and body’s, and the material (not just discursive) reality and consequences body’s are made to bear. She was insisting that with our theorizing and all the other academic routines of professionalization (i.e. conferencing, writing papers, brown bags etc.) that we actually had a praxis that held ourselves accountable to each other, and to the Black girls/women we professed to love. Another binary community/academia we were disappearing ourselves, even as we so desperately wanted and needed to be seen, affirmed, loved, cared for, heard, and simply allowed to be the fullness of ourselves. We survived. SOLHOT survived. A truth, we can disappear each other in our social justice efforts. Another truth, we can also make ourselves reappear.

**Accountability: Making Ourselves Reappear**

Since this smack down organizers within SOLHOT have expanded our views of what is SOLHOT. For instance, we have gone on to create numerous performances, some of which were created by the very same participants who did not initially see this sort of labor as SOLHOT. I want to take a moment here to talk more about performance, and how SOLHOT not only introduced me to performance expanding what I thought of the possibilities of research but also introduced me to Black queer artists and individuals like Sakia Gunn (Goodman & González, 2003) who demonstrate the high stakes and material realities manifested in Blackness and queerness.

The semester ended in each of us creating a choreopoem, and sharing it in the class. Having read Ntozake Shange’s (1977) *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*, we each were instructed to create a choreopoem—poetry coupled with music
and movement (Shange, 1977). Ultimately each of our individual choreopoems became combined, and produced as a theatrical production for the local community, as well as at several research conferences entitled, “SOLHOT the Mixtape.” I created two choreopoems, “Sweetheart, Be Well” and “Freedom Dreams.” “Freedom Dreams” was written to and in honor of my late maternal grandmother. Autobiographical in nature the poem took up what Moore (2012a, 2012b) calls “inviting in.” Inviting in, as opposed to “coming out” is meant to signal another means of disclosure for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, gender queer and queer identified individuals, to invite people into the fullness of their lives on their own terms. Moving beyond the closet as a trope and ideas of compulsory “coming out,” inviting in offers a different paradigm to think about issues of identity, creating community for LGBT individuals while also affirming the complexity of one’s sexual life and desire (Moore, 2012a, 2012b). “Sweetheart, Be Well” is a meditation on Black (queer) survival, celebration and how it echoes the sentiments of Audre Lorde’s (1995) “Litany for Survival,” Toni Cade Bambara’s (1980) The Salt Eaters and Lorraine Hansberry’s (1970) To be Young Gifted and Black in its insistence on healing and sustaining Black queer lives.

In creating “SOLHOT The Mixtape,” we also created a means for each home girl/boy to be present to each other’s truth. In sharing our truth we created a moment of vulnerability which should not be taken for granted in an ever increasing atmosphere which sees vulnerability and sharing one’s personal narrative within research as not legitimate enough. This is especially true with regards to educational research (Delamont, 2007; Holt, 2003; Hughes, Pennington, & Makris, 2012; Sparkes, 2000). Described by Brown, Carducci, and Kuby (2014) as “the politics of inquiry,” which operates at a global, organizational, and individual level to disciplining educational inquiry norms. As the politics of inquiry shape educational research norms, its
methodological conservatism not only discredits other forms of research and analysis, but often punishes and requires conformity of those practicing non-traditional and disruptive methodologies in order to receive professional rewards, recognition, publication opportunities or even degree attainment (Brown, Carducci, Kuby, 2014). What is often missed in these assessments is how the sharing of one’s personal narrative within research, and in particular our means of doing so—performance—provided an opportunity for collective knowledge production.

Performance became a site of agency for us. A way to make us reappear ourselves, to reveal ourselves back to one another and hold each other’s truths as sacred, real, and valuable. As a way of knowing, and embodied epistemology, performance provided a means for us to reconfigure the classroom space metaphorically and literally. Within our own literal class that met on a weekly basis, as well as within the community spaces beyond the classroom, engagement with performance was an act of critical pedagogy, which situated our bodies, our stories, and the communities we loved and represented as central figures of analysis and knowledge creation. We staged critical conversations with and through our bodies, in spaces, which often relegate Black girls and Black queer stories and knowledge as unimportant.

Although we were unable to in that moment recognize what we were actualizing, that the “Failure to ground discourse in materiality is to privilege the position of those whose subjectivity and agency, outside the realm of gender and sexuality, have never been subjugated (Johnson, 2001, p. 12).” We were responding to the truth of the smack down, to ground our work in and through practice, and in and through our own bodies. Further our engagement with performance was as Alexander (2006a), describes a “performance studies paradigm of pedagogy,” in which traditional forms of knowing, teaching, and knowledge production, and social systems are
interrogated, challenged, and transformed in order “to liberate the human spirit (p. 253).” It was through this course, our theatre productions, and my continued engagement with performance in ensemble work that I continued to see how performance was and is pedagogy. Performance makes possible dialogues that might not otherwise happen, and provides a solution to the ways those from marginalized backgrounds are disappeared and/or disappear one another. By performing our own narratives, and our collective story as a cohesive theatrical piece, we not only provided an opportunity for audiences to see themselves through us, and to confront their own assumptions, stereotypes, and resistances to our truths but we also created the same opportunity for ourselves as a collective (SOLHOT) and as an ensemble.

**Memory 2: Self Benediction**

*Self-Benediction*

I think I’ve heard my last and I mean last
Anti-homosexuality sermon, speech, soap-box oration from in the sanctuary of the Lord….
From in the sanctuary of the Lord!!!
No longer can I subject myself willingly or otherwise…to be torn down
I have tried…and God knows I have tried to cast out this “demon” called my life….
These mannerism you denounce but are battle scars of a boyhood of difference…
You ask me to lie…to ignore the love fostered by women in my life…
These hips move as they do cause my momma raised me…
This voice echoes a tenderness of a grandmother….
These hands swapped licks with a sis…wrist limp to bend for Slide baby 1-2
Rockin Robin Tweet tweedle dee….and
Miss Mary Mack all dressed in black- black-black,
I have cried one too many nights prayed one too many prayers…lied one too many times to you and myself….
Hated who I was for far too long to allow you to poison me any longer…
I think this is where I must depart with you my beloved brethren in the Lord…
You ask for far too much of me…
My life is no longer up for sale…
I will not trade you any longer
Rhetoric for righteousness
Fellowship for silence
Love and affirmation for denial and dishonesty
I cannot allow you to war against my body and spirit any longer…
I take back sanctuary, this sanctuary…
Refuge and safety shall I find among the robbers and thieves the gangsters and prostitutes…and among the others you rejected
The drug dealers shall distribute joy to this soul…
The prostitutes breast milk will feed this weary soul….
The thugs and gangsters shall now administer my peace
Our Lord still Jesus, our love still for Christ, but a love now unfettered beyond these four walls you paint and remodel, renovate and decorate to hide who we truly are…
Human….
Among the people shall my tabernacle lie…
With the sheep and not the wolves will I fellowship….
I Think I have heard my last anti-gay sermon from the pulpit
Cause I have tried and God knows I have tried but you…you ask of far too much of me…
My dignity, my life…my love…for humanity and Christ is NOT and I repeat NOT for sale…

And so may the Lord watch between me and thee while we’re absent on from another.

Cause I have tried God knows I have but I’ve come to love myself far too much to tolerate this any longer…
Amen…

April 19,2009. I left The Church of the Charismatic before the benediction. Sitting in my car with tears streaming down my face, I penned “Self-Benediction.” The sermon that Sunday was violent, yet familiar. Familiar in the sense that I grew up in church, I knew the power and possibility of the pulpit to soothe, to incite, to offer hope, and to enculturate. We were receiving an education, one that placed my Blackqueer body on the line. The violence came as the pastor proceeded to preach that “the demon of homosexuality....it's comin even earlier....kids at 5 and 6 years old showin mannerisms.....the demons our kids r fighting today are not the same ones of our generation they are more concentrated.....they r the John 10:10 demons who come to steal, kill and destroy our children’s futures..... (Personal Communication April 19, 2009).”

I had stopped regularly attending church, a break from my non-traditional charismatic Baptist upbringing where I was routinely in church every week, several times a week. Being

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24This is a fictitious name I created to protect the name of the actual church located in a small Midwestern city
away from home, allowed me to break away from this routine, as well as the expectations, and responsibilities I had back home as a youth minister. Excited to finally go to a service after my prolonged absence, I could not believe what I was hearing. My unbelief was informed by the fact that as a country we were in the midst of a string of LGBT youth suicides that year. Contrary to the preacher’s admonishment it was not homosexuality, which took Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover of Jaheem Herrera’s life, but rather homophobia (James, 2009; Simon, 2009).

My body radiated red hot, pulsating in silence with all of the faces and stories I carried of those snuffed out because they lived in their truth. I recalled my own silent pain, the years I spent as a youth minister outwardly loving a woman, while secretly sleeping with men (Callier, 2012). In that moment I also remembered growing up, fervently, praying to be delivered from my attraction to and sexual desire for men. Now, in an awakening of coming to accept my own truth and honor it, I was unwilling to believe the logic that “God hates the sin, but loves the sinner.” I was also unwilling to sit, and listen to a homophobic sermon, within the context of a community of care. I looked around to see if anybody else was disturbed, amid the high praises that went up to affirm the pastor’s point. A familiar face, met mine, I had seen him around at the local gay club from time to time. Our gazes met, no smile, no nod, but a meeting nonetheless. I was looking for something in our meeting that I never received—an acknowledgment that we did not deserve this, that we should not subject ourselves to it, and that we were in fact worthy of God’s love. He stayed. I left.

In my Baptist upbringing, you do not leave before the benediction. To do so is borderline sacrilegious because you are never to leave before the final blessing—the benediction. You can come late; just do not leave before you receive the final blessing. But what happens when there is no blessing to be received because you and those like you are considered a problem to be cast
out? You bless yourself. Or as SOLHOT had taught me, you save yourself. “Self-Benediction” was an enactment of the lessons I had learned within SOLHOT. Lessons like the sacred is within and made between those who can create, celebrate, laugh, cry, heal, pray, dance, gossip, and love together. I had come to know love differently through my interaction with a few of the homegirls in SOLHOT, and as hooks (2001) states, “Love and abuse cannot coexist (p. 6).” After writing and crying, I hit up a few of the home girls, and their response, immediate and necessary is what I want to turn our attention to in the subsequent section.

**Presence and the Blackqueer Body**

Attending to the harm and violence done against the Blackqueer body requires active presence. Pritchard (2013), points to the fact that effective ways to combat bias motivated violence, requires more than an emotional response of outrage. Although, useful, I needed more in that moment than someone else being angry about what I had experienced. I needed presence, for someone to show-up and nurture my spirit despite time and distance and affirm (with me) what I was feeling. When I reached out to the home girls via email, they all immediately responded with words of concern and encouragement. We were in the middle of a larger project and had already intended to meet later that night. Sitting around a small table nook, we exchanged laughs, broke bread together, and checked-in (see Brown, 2008) with each other. Again they reaffirmed my value and that I should not be subjected to such violence. The affirmation, although directed towards me, was in that moment as it always is within SOLHOT, a means for us to reaffirm our collective worth. I should not trade, “Fellowship for silence/Love and affirmation for denial and dishonesty,” because we should not.

I do not know why or how I made it and Carl did not either. We were both Black boys who were teased for being perceived as gay. And while there are gross differences, I recall what
it was like growing up queer. For each traumatic moment I can recall, what softened the blow. What helped me to survive was the presence of those like the SOLHOT home girls. They showed up and it is our ability to show-up in meaningful, life giving, affirmative ways, which can attend to the harm done against Black queer communities and individuals.

Memory 3: Dirty Work

“Folks come in here,” Minnie Ransom was saying, “moaning and carrying on and say they wanna be well. Don’t know what in heaven and hell they want.” (Toni Cade Bambara, 1980, p. 8)

Just so’s you’re sure, sweetheart, and ready to be healed, cause wholeness is no trifling matter. A lot of weight when you’re well.” (Toni Cade Bambara, 1980, p. 10)

Our time with the girls was over. My first time with the girls, over. As previously mentioned, this was my first time at Franklin Middle School with the girls. I knew of the work in SOLHOT because of what I did with the home girls. I was familiar with, as Brown (2013) describes, the “tangible productions” of SOLHOT—books, plays, articles, photography exhibits, etc. (p. 88). I was also familiar with the “intangible productions” of meaningful relationships with Home girls but had not had those experiences with many of the girls. Leaving the middle school that day after an intense SOLHOT session I penned “Dirty Work.” “Dirty Work” serves, as a reminder of what SOLHOT requires of each of us as Home girls and a Home boy in working with Black girls. This is spiritual work that is as political as it is sacred (Brown, 2013). As Alexander (2005), notes, “spiritual labor and spiritual knowing is primarily a project of self-knowing and transformation that constantly invokes community simply because it requires it (p. 15).”

What is the Work

“Dirty Work” takes up what Harney & Moten (2013) describe as the refusal of what has been refused us. In SOLHOT the legacy of Zora Neale Hurston is ever present as we recall her
refusal to as Walker (1979) describes be humbled by second place in a contest she did not design. Dirty work refuses to see Black girls, and ourselves as less than or broken. In doing so, “Dirty Work” locates the problem not in Black girls, or Black people, but rather on a world that sees us as a problem. A world which does not see us as “whole...talented...beautiful and a divine gift.” The problem is not our loudness, or quietness, or effeminate nor butch mannerisms, neither is it our Black skin, but a world that sees all of those things as less than, in need of correction, unnatural or wrong. Because we know that wrong is not our name (Jordan, 1980) we refuse to “allow you to see us as deaf-dumb-and blind.” But rather as the poem suggests, we take up the work of “undoing”—healing ourselves.

Healing work requires that we take stock of our own lives and fess up to what is killing us (see Alexander, 2006 and Gordon, 2005). As Bambara, (1980) in The Salt Eaters reminds us, healing and wholeness are “no trifling” matters. In the novel, Bambara points to healing and wholeness as something that happens in community, but that also requires the individual to let go of the things which are keeping them from being whole. The proverbial bag lady a la E. Badu, Velma Henry cannot seem to “dump the shit...to give it all up, the pain, the hurt, the anger and make room for lovely things to rush in and fill you full (p. 16).” There can be no revolution or healing unless we fashion revolutionary selves within the context of a reciprocal and dynamic relationship within our communities. We have the power to heal ourselves if only we would believe it and act on it. SOLHOT continues to illustrate the possibility of healing in a community, the risk, vulnerability, and personal responsibility involved. Further, “Dirty Work” illustrates and recognizes the sacred work, which takes place in SOLHOT and the knowledge generated within the spiritual praxis of doing SOLHOT (Brown, 2013). The effects of colonization are fragmentation and dismemberment at “both the material and psychic levels,”
necessitating healing work (Alexander, 2005, p. 281). Therefore, remembering ourselves whole, valuable, loved, and loving becomes an antidote to mediate this healing.

Dirty Work remains a reminder that not everybody can do this work, and that is ok. Whether individuals are uncomfortable with the intentional disorganization of Black girlhood as illustrated in SOLHOT, or attending to a Blackqueer body that is not easily identified as queer. What we do in SOLHOT with the girls and each other, and what SOLHOT has taught me in regards to attending to the harm done against the Blackqueer body is that this work is necessary.

Although necessary, the intellectual project of saving, hearing, seeing, valuing the Blackqueer body, is much more than that. SOLHOT taught me that I needed to save, hear, see, and value myself, my own Blackqueer body. Because I owe much more than my intellectual maturation to SOLHOT, because the knowledge that we create is important, and because relationships always, always, matter in doing transformational life sustaining work I want to close this chapter remembering us, SOLHOT style.

This Work is Dirty Work Remix: A Letter

_Batty dance_  
_Ba-ba-ty dance_  
_Batty dance_  
_Ba-ba-ty dance_  
My name’s Durell and here’s my chance to show my sisters my Batty Dance!

Dear Homegirls and Future Homegirls/boys,

“This work is dirty work and not in the sense of soiled pampers or blood stained underwear” but in blood and sweat and tears poured onto paper and left on the stage for others to marvel. This is our legacy. Like when I first uttered, in front of folks “Audre Lorde sho ain’t God but I think she was right about this one thing, your silence to recognize me to see me clearly, love me truly, embrace me freely stifled me and disconnected me not only from humanity but
from the divine for which you professed I must come to know.” Or when Cha screamed through a red scarf draped over her head, to tap into feelings of anger, disappointment, and hurt to declare, “I am a survivor, yes a Survivor” and when our Low End Scholar said, “Let me upgrade you on me and my girls, Cuz on this block I am the lights that keep the street on, So let me upgrade you.”

This work is dirty work of the incessant email and text messaging kind of, “so where’s rehearsal again?”, “sorry for being late, I’m five minutes away” and notes on line delivery like “Give Durell more grief- ya'll letting him off easy.” It’s learning to always and I mean ALWAYS be present, to make a decision and to take risks. Like not being over there thinking about all the work you could or could not be doing if you were not having a mini personal day, and being right there with Queen Boochie when she along with E. Badu reminds us that "I still get cold when I’m cold hungry when I’m hungry miss my mama when we’re away I’m a person...I’m a person, Damn sometimes I forget.”

This is the dirty work of the fleeting moment to moment made anew each time we commune sort. Cause today being with you, getting clowned by you about a new love interest, or my boogie tendencies when you all know I did not come from a house on the hill, keeps me grounded and reminds me of who I really am. This work is knees on the floor to drop and dance or to deliver a line “This is how the saving really happens.” It is dirty work of a hand placed over a mouth to stop the word b*** from being uttered from my mouth because no matter how down I might be or how I pretend or not this might be, me, a male, uttering that word was in that moment filled with hate and violence. It is dirty work in the sense of finding and being in love wherever that is whatever that is—whether that is packing up over night without telling a soul and moving to be somewhere with someone who loves you unconditionally or struggling to
make ends meet somewhere other than here cause you deserve happiness. We deserve love. This work is dirty work in the 1-800-Call-Up-Yo-Ancestors and the 1-866-Crisis-Hotline of who you want us to know and remember. Sometimes that name and person we pray for, pour out libations for, and clear sacred communal space for is you—because, why, you need to know just how dope you really are. And that is why this work is dirty work and holy work, removing the limits placed on us by society which says we are less than, cannot do, should not do—perform research, be personal, vulnerable, dare to insert your narrative and claim that Black girls matter, that Black queer people matter, that Black people matter, that you and I matter! That work is downright dirty, and holy, because it requires not only an exorcism but a gentle touch to lay hands on someone to pinpoint the hurt and infuse it with light and love. Yeah, “this work is dirty work and not in the sense of soiled papers and blood stained underwear” but of healers meeting together secretly to touch one another, to touch others and intercede on others behalves reassuring us that we are sufficient enough. No, more than enough a la Candy. Letting us know that we deserve better than that bullshit teachers and parents lie to us about, confirming our yes to freedom to live courageously, and daring us to never settle, to dream big, to love ourselves, heal ourselves, and live in our truth.

Thank you for choosing to say yes to our collective dream that is so much bigger than our singular hopes. And thank you for letting me be a part of it. Because we do not hear thank you enough. Because our work is still necessary. Because we continue to choose love again and again. Over grief Porshe and exhaustion Dr. B. Because you Black boy Nate came to celebrate knowing there was freedom there for you too. Because you are genius Mekha and I stand in awe of your shine. Because we found freedom that night in the basement as DJ B.E. saved our lives over and over again as vinyl synthesized with a past, present, future made perfect. Because we
deserve Happy Feelings. We deserve Happy Feelings. And have ourselves and each other to remind us of love. Because you not only move us when you dance, but dare us to move with you and be healed, Dom. Because you show up baddddd and so cold Sesali and Brittany. Because you are a lover Queen Jessica and remind us that there are endless possibilities. Because Cha and Candy, I really would not be here if we had not met. For the laughs, the talks, the tears, the wine, the shade, the smack downs, the soul food, and reminder to own my own shine, thank you. Sheri, Grenita, Jasmine, Taylor-Imani, and Adilia, Taylor, Brittany B., Adrian, Amari, Tammy and Treva I remember and miss you all.

To the chosen, and those soon to come and join us, remember,

This work is dirty work of which many are called and few are chosen. Is it you? Are you sure? Then enter this holy of holies, this temple made of stones which the builders rejected... Find sanctuary with us But enter at your own risk

Loving you all always and forever,

D. aka Song of Solomon aka SOS aka Lil Bro aka Cake Baker

Conclusion

My involvement with SOLHOT as illustrated within this chapter has moved me to consider what Black girlhood as an organizing construct means for the Blackqueer body. Ruth Nicole Brown (2013) argues that Black girlhood as an organizing construct moves beyond thinking of Black girlhood as a “static category of identity,” to the kind of movement work made possible “when Black girlhood is deployed as an organizing construct that moves and affirms Black girls’ lives with justice (p.188).” What might it mean to consider the intersection of Blackness and queerness, to think of Blackness as queerness as not simply an identity category, but rather a way to organize and affirm Blackqueer lives and living? Often indebted to women of
color artist and scholars, Black Queer Theory and Queer of Color Critique could benefit more by turning to the work being done within Black girlhood studies.

The specificity of Black girlhood is not exclusionary as Brown (2013) denotes that Black girlhood as an organizing construct is expansive and makes room for those who want to do the work and join in on the celebration. What then would a call to celebration lend regarding collective action against state sanctioned violence, anti-Black forces and queer antagonisms? For me this celebration has meant documenting Black queer living—my own in particular—and in spite of. This chapter illustrates the lessons I have learned through my engagement with SOLHOT. Further, this chapter has illustrated the possibilities of Black girlhood as an organizing construct when applied to thinking about the intersections of Blackness and queerness. In particular, through personal narrative, reflection, and poetry this chapter illuminates lessons of Black girlhood in order to celebrate and create sacred space for the Black queer body, and to affirm Black queer lives and living.
They Will Say We Were Not Here

In memory of Ugandan LGBTI Rights Activist David Kato

Bones lying in a shallow grave
It is February-Black History Month
Rumors of you whisper over soundwaves
Your co-laborers on these shores, long gone
Haunt us…
Like the nameless
Sometimes faceless
Depictions of Blacks throughout the annals of history
They will say we were not there
At the dawn of creation where all spirits were equal, and free
They will say we were not there when civilizations existed in Africa before colonization
They will say we were not there at Auschwitz
or when Berlin fell
or when the boats sailed in search of gold, spices, and riches untold
Ensuring their survival at our detriment
They will re-write the history books to commit us to be read between lines
Silent, white washed matter where pink triangles can’t bleed Black ink
They will say we were not there at Stonewall
But we were
Brother Kato
We were
They will say we were not there making love under the starry sky
Passionate, lost in each other, choosing who we loved, loving them deeply, intently, on
our own terms
Being made one with each other
Finding eternity in the universe we created
Blessing the earth with each kiss
Creating family
Community
Love unfettered
They will say you were not there in Uganda
Bringing peace
Living
Love

May your bones rest in peace, and the memory of you linger causing us to remember that you
were here!
Chapter 6 The Power and Potential of Performance Autoethnography

In light of recent events….
The shooting death of one of my student Tyrone Williams
His cousin Percy Day
The beating death of Derrion Albert
The decapitation, dismemberment and partial burning of Jorge Steven Lopez Mercado
The state sanctioned, court ruled “accidental” death of Kiwane Carrington
And countless others who I know not of, whose names evade our memory, whose
deaths all seem so very justified, so very necessary as if just the status quo
I have decided to take this moment to honor not death
But living

These were the words to a poem I penned in 2009, entitled “Take Back Life.” “Take Back Life” was my initial attempt to make sense of Black death, deal with my grief, and to imagine and advocate for a different world. A new world which neither ignored the staggering toll of Black and queer youth deaths, nor seemingly required that they exist in a constant state of (near) death, dying, and decay. This poem marked the first time of many during my graduate school training, that I would use the arts as a means to deal with my own mourning and the collective mourning I sensed within Black, and Black LGBT communities surrounding Black queer life and death. It is through poetry, and the other creative mediums that I initially began to make clearer connections regarding the intersections of violence experienced by Black LGBT youth and their presumed heterosexual counterparts.

Since 2009, the list of Black and queer youth who have either been victimized by violence or died as a result of it, has grown. I struggle with keeping up, yet I know there is a value in remembering the sort of absence-presence each manifests. I offer here a partial list of names so as to reinsert these youths’ bodies, stories, and presence back into our collective memory:
What the official report, garnished from legal documents, local and national news coverage both in print and via multimedia will tell you about each of these names, bodies, and

25Islan Nettles a 21 year-old Black transgendered woman was beaten while walking near her home in Harlem on August 17, 2013 (King, 2014). She died in the hospital due to her assault injuries, her murder has yet to be found or prosecuted (Shapiro, 2014).

26Trayvon Martin a 17-year-old Black male who was harassed, assaulted, and killed by self-appointed neighborhood watch captain George Zimmerman in Sanford, Florida (Cobb, 2013; CNN Library 2014). Zimmerman was acquitted of the crime by a six woman jury in July, 2013 (Cobb, 2013; CNN Library, 2014).

27Rekia Boyd a 22 year-old Black woman was killed by off-duty Chicago Police officer, Dante Servin (Schmadeke, St. Clair, Gorner, 2013).

28Renisha McBride a 19 year-old Black woman was fatally shot by Theodore Wafer in Detroit, Michigan (Semuels, 2014).

29Jordan Davis a 17-year-old Black male who was fatally shot in a Jacksonville, Florida gas station by Michael David Dunn, for listening to loud music (Jordan, 2012).

30Michael Brown an 18-year-old Black male fatally shot by police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis after allegedly resisting arrest (Elgion, 2014, Cobb, 2014).

31Sakia Gunn a 15-year-old Black lesbian murdered in Newark, New Jersey after refusing the advances of Richard McCullough (Goodman & González, 2003).
lives are the “facts” of each scenario. That is the age range, how they died, where they were located, who their assailant was, if known, etc. Further these facts as Lisa Cacho (2007) reminds us become the foundation for “determining whose deaths are tragic and whose deaths are deserved (p. 186).” Take for example the grand jury testimony of Darren Wilson the officer who non-discriminately shot and murdered the unarmed teenager Michael Brown. In his testimony Wilson, refers to Brown as an “it” a “demon” and reads his behavior as aggressive and angry:

21 After seeing the blood on my hand, I
22 looked at him and he was, this is my car door, he
23 was here and he kind of stepped back and went like
24 this.
25 And then after he did that, he looked
1 up at me and had the most intense aggressive face. I
2 The only way I can describe it, it looks like a
3 demon, that's how angry he looked. He comes back
4 towards me again with his hands up.
5 At that point I just went like this,
6 I tried to pull the trigger again, click, nothing
7 happened. (Grand Jury Testimony, pg. 224–225)

This type of language not only dehumanizes Brown, but narrates the altercation in a way which justifies Wilson’s actions. Drawing on age old stereotypes of Black bodies as dangerous, violent, and less than human coupled with the presumed threat of large(r) Black male bodies Wilson effectively sets the stage for the inevitable justifiable death of Brown. Of course one should be in fear for their life if who you are in confrontation with, “looks like a demon.” Ultimately leading to a non-indictment, Darren Wilson’s testimony serves as another example of how official reports, like that of the State of Missouri v. Darren Wilson Grand Jury Volume (2014) document conjures historic tropes of racialized fears and fantasies that obfuscate the truth of and inner-workings of anti-Blackness and anti-queerness while at the same time substantiating the loss of Black life. In doing so the official record not only eclipses the value of Blackqueer lives but also fails to see the loss as symbolic of a greater collective loss. We do not mourn these deaths as a
nation, and at times due to the nature of how identity works for and against marginalized bodies, certain communities will not mourn these deaths nor take up political action in the name of victims whose lack of value is made in and through their non-normative lifestyles and the subsequent valuation of those who can attain some semblance of normative living. What I mean in that we do not mourn these deaths is that often, the justification used to validate the death, creates a need for a defense impeding the time to mourn. For instance, instead of mourning the death of Trayvon Martin, time is spent to justify why he was not the aggressor, to illustrate why he wasn’t a “thug,” an adult and therefore an equal in strength and capacity to that of Zimmerman, or to prove that he was not a reckless weed-smoking criminal (FoxNews.com, 2013; Schneider and Hightower, 2012; Winch, 2013). Instead time is spent offering images and testimony to rescue the memory of Trayvon from a smear campaign that not only justified his murder, but also places the blame squarely on his shoulders as if he pulled the trigger on himself that night (Boehlert, 2013; Muller, 2013; Weigel, 2013). The testimony of Rachel Jeantel, Martin’s friend captures this as she states in a post-interview after the not-guilty verdict of George Zimmerman, when she stresses that, “First of all Trayvon is not a thug, they need to know a definition of a thug to be judging a person, well a teenager, mind you a teenager can post anything....it’s not true... (CNN, 2013).”

In the wake of non-indictments by grand juries of the police officers Darren Wilson and Daniel Pantaleo, who shot and killed unarmed Michael Brown and Eric Garner respectively, I am made to think more about the types of coalitions and movements which have always readily rallied around Blackqueer individuals and communities. More often than not, Black LGBT organizations, LGBT organizations of color and other race based organizations who attend to “cross-cutting” issues tend to recognize the ways in which race and queerness conjoin, pointing
to the need for policies and practices which save and sustain Blackqueer lives (see Black Youth Project, 2014; Moore & Stephens, 2014, National Black Justice Coalition, 2012; The Audre Lorde Project, n.d.). However the silence of large predominately white LGBT organizations like the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) for instance in this particular moment has been deafening and it is this sort of silence, and turning away from the Blackqueer subject that continues to concern me (Moore & Stephens, 2014).

As the silence looms, and the protests, actions, acts of civil disobedience, and art making grows, my archive, an archive of death, memory, loss, love, and hope since 2009 has also grown. Collecting this archive, and turning it into something creative and usable has been my response to the intrepid forces of anti-Blackness and anti-queerness sanctioned by the state. What I have found in doing this work is an integration of relying upon archival documentation and the embodied repertoire to make sense of, document, and remember Blackqueer lives. The archive as Diana Taylor (2003), illuminates, is transmutable, consisting of documents, people, and tangible items that may disappear or are given particular significance, historicized differently, or even interpreted differently over time. The archive sustains power, and yet “[a]rchival memory works across distance, over time and space (p. 19),” the repertoire “enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing...[it] requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by ‘being there,’ being a part of the transmission (p. 20).” If the archive most often consists of official documentation, static, tangible objects, which allow for a clear tracing back, how does one archive Blackqueer culture and death if the survival of Blackqueer cultural production does not always survive in print, receive newsworthy attention or editorial documentation? What if your archive consists of sources, which are not seen as “scholarly enough” within your field? And how does one resist the binary
thinking, which easily separates the different types of knowledge created and transmitted through both embodied practice and oral/written forms of communication? Working through these tensions, I draw upon legacies of Black queer artists, scholars, and cultural workers. Specifically I use a methodology called *Blended Scripting* in which performance, cultural memory, embodied knowledge, and personal narrative all come together.

**Excerpt from *Tell It: A Contemporary Chorale for Black Youth Voices* Movement V:**

**Moment 4 Life**

V7 (female voice): I want you to know and remember my cousin, Brandi Rose Hobson (September 20, 1983–September 2, 2001). Raped and strangled 9 years ago in Chicago. She was my beautiful, open, and fun cousin. I hold sweet Alabama and Chicago summertime memories of her. (places memorial object on corner after delivery of lines)

V1: You See I am TRY-ING to take back life/ These tears are not of sadness/ No, no defeat lies here/Today I must remember/ Have you remember/That life is about living/

That we weep in our coming in/ But rejoice in our going out/ Today I refuse/ ABSOLUTELY, refuse to allow death to have yet another victory/ So what these atrocities happened in cities distant from here/ Hell in your own back yard Chicago, Puerto Rico, Champaign-Urbana, Atlanta, Baltimore, Detroit, Oakland, Saint Louis, Compton,

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<Crowd dissipates, blowing out candles as they exit stage. V1 and V8 are left on stage. 

V8 rapidly takes notes of what V1 says. Lights gradually fade up and feel sharp like a burst of light in contrast to the previous darkness of the scene. >

V1: So what they were black, brown, gay/ Male/ Female/ So what they were young/ So what, so what!?/ This could have been anywhere/ Any city/ So what, so what? This is everywhere/ This is most cities/ These are not exceptions/ No, these are common day casualties/ Casualties of some war we are desperately losing/ Some war we deny is at our very own doorsteps/ In our very own homes/ Beaming in from our televisions/ Streaming across the internet/ Downloading right onto our desktops/ There is nothing to fear/ But this threat is real/ Very real/ These deaths real/ Very real/ And I refuse/ I refuse any longer to sob/ Refuse any longer to cry/ Refuse any longer to pain/ Over death/ Not today/ Today I remind you/ Remind me, that life is about living/ So do it!/ Do it freely/

<All other cast members begin to filter back on stage assuming previous positions from Movement I.>

V1: Do it justly/ Do it as if it is the last thing you could ever do/ Because it/ JUST/ MIGHT/ BE!/ But (my God) do it/ Love it/ Cherish it/ Make it Sacred/ Remember it/ Remember to live/ For I today/ Challenge us/ That we not mourn, and give death yet another victory/ But that we live/ Live life/ Life live/ Live!/Live Life fearlessly/ Take back our streets!/ Take back the day!/ Take back even the night/ But (my God) Take back life!

Why Blended Scripting

I came to Blended Scripting because the research questions which intrigued me the most required complex and creative inquiries. Understanding and animating the relationships of anti-Blackness and anti-queerness necessitated a tool, which could address these complexities. In
seeking an understanding I needed something personable that would allow me to bring my full self as the researcher “studying” a group I consider myself to be a part of. Further, I needed a methodology that would also not replicate the same forces, which required our deaths. I did not want death and violence to be seen as the only aspect of our reality. To be Black and queer even in this moment means much more than death, dying, or the sum total of what is systematically done to us. I came to Blended Scripting because I needed a way to indict the system while imagining us beyond it, alive, well, and full of desire. Blended scripting, the act of dramatizing data and placing my own narrative into conversation with the narratives of other Blackqueer individuals also provided an opportunity to create a text which was accessible and accountable to my communities of affinity. These communities consist of my family, and other Black and queer communities, particularly Blackqueer youth. Accessibility and accountability to my family and Black queer communities, in my usage of hip-hop infused aesthetics informed by Black queer artist, and Black feminist artist, coupled with sharing my work in various spaces both academic and community specific. To be clear, certainly arguments regarding accessible for whom are relevant? However, what I mean in terms of accessibility is to reference other ways of knowing and producing knowledge, ways that move beyond the valorization and domination of literacy and text to the “exclusion of other media, other ways of knowing (Conquergood, 2002, p. 151).”

Including these other ways of knowing is fundamentally important because of the ways they broaden research, creating partnerships which recognize the knowledge within marginalized communities. Further alternative meaning making practices are necessary as an affront to dominant forms of knowledge creation, which eclipse and ignore Blackqueer lives, desires, and truths. For example, in 1979, the Combahee River Collective (CRC) created a pamphlet entitled, “Six Black Women Why Did They Die?” The pamphlet was a response to the “series of brutal
slayings of young Black women,” which occurred during that year in the Boston area. Spurned by the “lack of official concern by city agencies coupled with cursory press coverage of the murders,” CRC and other Black and Third World communities organized to raise awareness, protest, facilitate self-defense classes and create protective neighborhood networks (Combahee River Collective, 1979). Specifically the CRC provided an analysis of the murders, illuminating their interconnectivity as well as the racialized and gendered forces that placed these young women’s lives at stake.

The CRC asserted that, “Our sisters died because they were women just as surely as they were black (1970, n.p.).” As Hong and Ferguson (2011) note the importance of this alternative “meaning-making practice” is that it intervenes in and against traditional meaning making practices that “bestow significance on deaths (pp. 14–15).” Because the twelve women were murdered in different contexts and by various means their murders were understood and narrated as unrelated, individual, yet inevitable randomized deaths (Hong & Ferguson, 2011). The social constructions of these women’s deaths were left unanalyzed until the intervention of the CRC. By linking these deaths and pointing to race and gender as the processes which led to these women’s deaths the CRC also highlights how these twelve Black women were killed because their lives were not valued. Even in death, these women were denied any semblance of value by traditional meaning-making processes.

Alternative meaning-making practices as illustrated by the CRC intervene to create knowledge and value in relationship to people and communities often denied such in life or even in death. These practices can be read as historical practices within marginalized communities, for example Ida B. Wells pamphlet “Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases” published in 1892, which through investigative journalism exposed, White violence, the truth of the
fraudulent reasons for lynching mostly Black men during this time, while also defending Black victims and humanizing them. Another example of this legacy is illustrated in Audre Lorde’s (2009), Preface to a New Edition of Need: A Chorale for Black Woman Voices,” in which she states, “Someone had to speak, beyond these events and this time, yet out of their terrible immediacy, to the repeated fact of the blood of Black women flowing through the streets of our communities—so often shed by our brothers and so often without comment or note (177-178).” Lorde’s alternative meaning making practice was Need: A Chorale for Black Woman Voices initially a poem, which was then shared and read aloud by groups of women resulting in a play-like text. These examples when coupled with the pamphlet created by the CRC and countless other examples illustrate a historical legacy within Black communities in particular of alternative meaning making processes.

Why Blended Scripting? Blended Scripting, provides opportunities to remember, value, and hold sacred the stories and lives of Blackqueer individuals like, Tyrone Williams, Percy Day, Jaheem Herrera, Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover. In particular utilizing poetry, theatre and performance allows us to experience a variety of emotions and feelings to relate to Tyrone and Carl while also illuminating the social inequalities and cultural norms which shaped their lives and construct their stories in ways that make their deaths inevitable or inconsequential. For me, blended scripting is a tool against looking away or relishing in Black death and suffering. In this particular moment of political unrest, continued state-sanctioned violence, and miscarriages of justice these practices are needed more than ever, because they allow for the affirmation of Blackqueer life. Alternative-meaning making practices, such as Blended Scripting provide strategies for survival, and tactics for sustaining life and culture of marginalized communities
while also providing avenues of critique and possible redress. Lastly, *blended scripting* in its usage of poetry, theatre and performance rematerialize Blackqueer bodies.

**How to do Blended Scripting**

She asked us, “How did you come to do performance as a part of your research?”\(^33\) The previous night we had just finished performing, SOLHOT: The Mixtape Remix, a collectively written, performance ethnography which reflected our work with the girls of SOLHOT, working with each other, and offered up salient critiques of the systems of inequality which limited our collective right to life. Dr. Brown, or Dr. B as we affectionately called her was up to her usual. This was a part of our routine, teacher turned student, student turned teacher. This was our opportunity to say what we knew and she always believed (often before we knew ourselves) that we indeed knew something, something everybody else also needed to know. Her prodding, guidance, belief and support necessary. Necessary because schooling and disciplinary training had divorced us from our own sources of power and knowledge. And so here she was like Toni Cade Bambara, reminding us of the need to share what we knew within a collective because, “if your friends don’t know it, then you don’t know it (Bambara, 2009).”

When we shared I was often surprised by our answers, by our collective genius and not because I did not think we were geniuses but because I knew I spent a lot of time pretending that that was not the case. Pretending not to know was costly, but it had become a defense against classrooms, hallway meetings with peers, and conference spaces which asked the same question, “How did you come to do performance as a part of your research,” but with less sincerity and

\(^33\)This question opened up the question and answer portion of Ruth Nicole Brown’s University of Missouri Qualitative Research Consortium talk entitled, “Tiara: ‘Endangered Black Girls’ Instructions 301 in Spring, 2012.”
care as Dr. B had asked of us. The question is often meant to express in some cases how is what you do research, or more bluntly put how is that research. As Ruth Nicole Brown notes, “Research that is creative, public, and grounded in collaboration with marginalized communities, conducted by scholars of color, is always and already suspect (Brown, 2013, p. 31).” Aware of this, I often pretended not to know, but this time I would not be able to get off the hook.

I answered, the question as to how performance became a part of my research,

I think my short answer is that it was initially in need and what I mean by that, when I look at some of my earlier grad school writing, I was always including a poem, song lyrics, or something from a childhood cartoon that I thought was relevant to the literature. Whenever I was writing for a class I wasn’t ever writing just a strict paper....sitting and searching... I think I’m still trying to make some connections because in trying to name exactly what I do I know how central my spiritual upbringing is which I don’t really do now but have found that in the work that I do do and so I think, I think there’s something there in the sense of what we would call a calling that I haven’t owned...Sheesh and I’ll stop there (D. Callier, Personal Communication, February 10, 2012).

I begin here with this reflection because much of how I think about and create Blended Scripted texts comes out of the revelations that unfold from this particular moment. A “story of disruption (Brown, Carducci, & Kuby 2014).” Stories of disruption as Brown, Carducci, and Kuby (2014) within the introduction of Disrupting Qualitative Inquiry: Possibilities and Tensions in Educational Research demonstrate moments along the researcher’s educational experience and professional career in which they experienced dissonance, obstruction, admonishment, resistance and/or outright disapproval for practicing non-traditional method(ologie)s and ways of being within the academy. Each story of disruption also demonstrates a moment in which the researcher had revelations about their own introduction to or practice of disruptive qualitative educational research practices. Offering personal vignettes each author illustrates how and why
s/he came to embrace disruptive qualitative educational research. Similarly my aforementioned narrative illuminates my own story of coming to practice disruptively and highlights what Brown, Carducci, and Kuby (2014), offer, when they state, “where there is passion, there is possibility; where there is a haunting (longing), there is a research question begging to be spoke. If you dare speak the project, a methodology and method can be devised (p. 3).”

Blended Scripting came out of a need to “to supplement my own education,” providing space for interdisciplinary conversations which centered my race, sexuality, and arts (D. Callier, Personal Communication, February 10, 2012).” Further, in supplementing my education, Blended Scripting allowed me to think differently about the nature of knowledge, how it was created and who had the ability to do so. In shifting post-positivist ideas of research and knowledge as a measurable quantifiable thing, Blended Scripting allowed for me to bring my whole self, community, and those similarly situated as Black and queer into conversations and research agendas, which typically did not place these identities, methodologies or theories into conversation with one another.

The emerged methodological practice of moving research data into a dramatized form, Blended Scripting is in conversation with autoethnography (Alexander, 2011; Boylorn, 2013; Chang, 2008; Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013; McClaurin, 2001), performance methodology (Castagno, 2001; Denzin, 2003; Jones, 1997; Saldana, 2011), Black performance (DeFrantz &

As outlined by Brown, Carducci and Kuby, disruptive qualitative educational research disrupts “dominant notions of research roles and relationships”, “approaches to the collection and analysis of data”, “dominate notions of (re)presenting and disseminating research findings,” “rigid epistemological and methodological boundaries”, “disciplinary boundaries and assumptive frameworks of how to do educational research (p. 5).”
Gonzalez, 2014), Black feminist performance (Anderson, 2008; Mahone, 1994; Shange, 1977), and disruptive inquiry (Brown, Carducci & Kuby, 2014). It is my alternative meaning-making practice (Hong & Ferguson, 2011), which places the researchers narrative alongside that of other subjects, popular discourse surrounding the surveyed phenomena and other relevant texts (e.g., visual display, media clips, music, fiction, etc.) to achieve a complex, coherent, artistically good representation of the data. It is through this practice that I reaffirm the existence of Blackqueer lives, and desires. Further through this practice space is created to traverse the affective terrain associated within Blackqueer joy and trauma, while also providing a space to practice and imagine justice, intervening if just for a moment in the violence against these bodies.

**Lessons from Blended Scripting**

I do not have much left of Tyrone, just memories. Likewise there is not much left of Jorge either; just the memory of his mother, reminding us all that “love conquers hate.” Isn’t that enough? And should they not be dignified in death in the ways they were not in life?

Through Blended scripting which heavily relies on the usage of poetry and theatre, I have learned a way to supplement and juxtapose the “limited official archive” against the affective and ephemeral terrains of families, friends, individuals who wish to express love, care, and grief. I creatively stitch together my own biography, critical theory, and the facts reported about other Blackqueer individuals in order to understand what/who is the Blackqueer body/subject, its relationship to violence and death, the affective terrain in which these issues resonate and the possibility to (re)materialize these bodies in both their physical and discursive absences.

Through blended scripting, I have learned that poetry provides another means to tell a more complex story about Blackqueer life. Where traditional archives fail, Blended scripting has

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35See The National Center for Lesbian Rights (2009)
proven useful in valuing the lives and stories of Blackqueer people. It has showed up as love, an antidote to death, a means to create value, to hold the lives of blackqueer people as intrinsically valuable. Through the use of the creative, Blended Scripting provides a counter narrative to the presumed deficit, morally wanting, depictions of Blackqueer individuals and communities.

The beginning of the excerpt from Tell It Movement IV begins with the line, “I want you to know and remember my cousin, Brandi Rose Hobson (September 20, 1983–September 2, 2001; Callier, 2011).” Know and remember, as Ruth Nicole Brown (2008), illustrates is a moment within SOLHOT, which serves to honor someone of importance to each individual present (see also Hill, 2014). A sacred moment, of the incense circle “know and remember” makes room for our collective loss, collective sense of grieving, collective sense of remembering ourselves, and those important to us either still presently here or not. Invoking this ritual within the excerpt, towards the end of the play is intentional, and moves us to a singular loss, a singular memory, a singular story and death. Blended scripting, borrowing from the sacred practices of SOLHOT makes room for the singular, and places that individual need, story, and memory at the center of our collective concern. Blended scripting provides a means to deal with this sort of loss, to hold the individual within a collective and to take the necessary time to grieve, mourn, and honor. Blended scripting provides a means to deal with the pain created by the death and violence, and serves as a way to hold space of those lost, and those still here dealing with the loss. Further, Blended scripting embraces disruptive alternatives for living, to think through other means of living, which might fail to reproduce the types of current structures which limit and devalue the lives of Blackqueer people.
Conclusion

In 1994 Elizabeth Alexander wrote a journal article entitled, “Can you be Black and Look at This?”: Reading the Rodney King Videos.” Alexander argues that the videotaped beating of Rodney King elicits a particular cultural history and memory for African Americans. Further she notes that this collective knowledge is antithetical to the ways Black bodies have been an “American national spectacle for centuries (p. 78).” At the center of Alexander’s article is the idea that witnessing and watching Black pain garners different reactions and that these reactions are based upon one’s subjectivity. Moreover Alexander illustrates how this difference for African American’s in particular creates a collective cultural memory, which “would indelibly affect the very way that someone sees what is before them (p. 93).” I want to read Alexander’s work in our contemporary moment and ask two different yet related questions, Can you be Black and queer and look at this? Can you be Black and queer and mourn this? In this chapter, I think through these questions in relationship to my own work, and to an alternative “meaning making practice,” of Blended Scripting, which reflects my own answer to these questions.

As stated within the introduction of this dissertation I have come to wonder what causes us to look away from Blackqueer death and pain. And the seeing I am interrogating, or rather the ways in which “we look away,” “do not look,” or “glance,” are the fields of vision which might obscure, disappear and therefore disaggregate types of Black bodies and deaths, the queer, the trans, the youthful. Why is it that Rekia Boyd, Renisha McBride, Sakia Gunn, Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis, and Michael Brown are rarely uttered within the same sentences, remembered collectively at rallies, vigils and other forms of political actions against police brutality, vigilante justice, and Black death? Who do we (get to) mourn and why? And the we to which I am referring are American citizens writ large, Black people in particular, and specifically those of us
who see ourselves as Black and queer especially within this moment as we are confronted again and again with the (re)performance of Black death and suffering on national TV.

Utilizing the arts to stage a conversation between the popular and the familiar through my own body, and the archive of “official evidence,” offers another entryway into understanding and valuing Black/queer life. One which Leavy (2009) states, offers “what traditional academic writing most fails to accomplish [...] resonance (p. ix) end quote.” And it is this resonance, which I believe can fundamentally work towards creating a world, which increases the life chances and life opportunities of Black/queer people. Resonance, as Cherrie Moraga (1983) describes a bridge which “can bind us together,” and is the imperative as poet Donna Kate Rushin details, to do the necessary self-work to sustain life, political movements, and freedom, the choice to either “stretch or drown evolve or die.” There has already been enough death, the time is now to think ourselves out of our current predicament and create new possibilities in which a good life is a viable option for Blackqueer individuals and communities.
Chapter 7 Conclusion

The (Mis)Education of a Poet

Way down in the jungle deep when Black folks knew how to fly and OJ was free and bobo’s were still in style and high-top fades were not on the comeback. Back before Baltimore became synonymous with the melodramatic HBO series *The Wire*, a half-baked depiction of my city. Back before No Child Left Behind became an empty promise for generations of Black genius standardized test have yet to latch on to. Back when I believed without question that Black folks could be anything they wanted to be. When *why not* was not a possibility, *how* was not important, and *when* simply a matter of time.

Back then, I wanted to be the first African-American president of these United States of America. The year 1992, the same year Barry Barack Obama solidified his “can do no wrong card.” Black man fresh out of Harvard law, marrying the one and only Michelle LaVaughn Robinson who would be the *only* reason I halfway trusted her too smooth-talkin-sellin-us-hope-and-responsibility-freedom-preachin-drone-droppin-only-reflection-I-got-in-44-elected, husband.

Me and my round, pound cake colored self, you know the inside part, had moved through all of the p’s possible before settling on president. There was being a police officer, then I wanted to be a politician, and for a brief moment as if foreseeing my own future I wanted to be a preacher. Pilot did not make the cut at all, neither did parole officer, nor pharmacist or paramedic. My momma was at that time a paramedic but I wanted to be THE FIRST African-American president.
But pound cake colored boys, you know like on the inside, who come from my side of the tracks, cannot be the President of much else except prisons. That is what Ms. Stansberry told me, in front of the whole class. So she says, through bright pale purple lipstick “Hmph, what do you want to be when you grow up.” Sharply, without missing a beat, “the first Black president.” “Hmph, the first Black president? Silly as you are won’t be much else than the president of somebody’s penitentiary.” Silence falls. The dialogue ended. Point one for the infamously dreaded substitute teacher with frizzled orange hair, slightly balding in the middle, on brownie colored skin. Ms. Stansberry strikes again!

It is now way after watching Mandela become elected president of South Africa. Just some time after I realized Ru Paul really was not a woman, meaning that my mama had been right all along, like mommas tend to be, even if they do not say it out loud. Just a little after Black women’s love came and found me, for who knows what umpteenth time this is. Sometime after we lose MJ to some weird combination of fame, vitiligo, and being Black in America and after we realized Whitney had been drowning all along, and that there are just some things an autopsy will never tell us.

It is after kids no longer play outside, after metal detectors are in every school on the Southside of Chicago yet Sandy Hook still rocks parts of our nation. Yes, even after the Million Man March, all of the 50 year commemorations of the Civil Rights Movement, and just after Don’t Ask Don’t Tell is repealed, marriage equality is gaining traction, and school choice is the only choice. It is well after selfies are a thing, and Twitter beefs are real, and after Blue Ivy is almost trademarked, and after we ask Black girl gold medalist Olympians to not only win gold but look good while doing it.
It is well after we know the price of silence in Rwanda. And I want to go back to the silence, back to Hilton Elementary. Back to the day, my round, pound cake colored self, you know like on the inside, squared off with Ms. Stansberry and lost. Back to the moment I had gotten in trouble one too many times for the same thing that has gotten most black boys and girls alike in trouble, our mouths. Either talking too much, not at the right time, not talking enough, caught whistling at white girls, quenching thirst with Arizona tea, daring to kiss girls and like it, asking the wrong questions on Fruitvale platforms on New Year’s Eve. Black mouths whether open or shut do not seem to have access to the Barry Barack Obama “can do no wrong card.”

I would like to go back and say something like, “Well you know what, my grandmother, and my mother, and my uncle, and Sistah Mabel, and Rev’ren Bailey, and Mama and Papa Isabelle, and Sistah Louise, and Sistah Shirley and Miss Marva, alllllll seem to think I could be. They keep tellin me, I can be anything I wanna be when I grow up.” Score one, for the pound cake colored boy, you know like on the inside. The class is hysterical. There are ooohs and ahhhs and he’s gonna get it and giggles, nobody liked Ms. Stansberry, and I mean nnoooobody.

**Project Contributions: The Coda**

Ms. Stansberry was my (mis)education. Before graduate school where I learned words like “culturally responsive pedagogy” or “critical theory” I was intimately familiar with the concept of “terrible educations” (Bambara, 1996, p. 255). In spite of Ms. Stansberry and the multiple iterations of her in society as disciplinary limits, conservative education research methodologies, and an over emphasis on schooling vs. learning, I learned that education was expansive. Because of my community, I learned education should be emancipatory, culturally relevant, artistic, kinesthetic, accessible and communal (see also Bambara, 1996). Learning and
education should not be measured and equated with traditional schooling processes. It is time that we have research methods and questions, which reflect the reality that education takes place beyond schools.

The story, which opens this chapter, is a reflection of both the expansive vision of education I experienced coupled with my schooling experience. It is biographical, imaginative, and a cultural critique all at once. Joining in Black feminist genealogies of the creative, “I speak from the wound in my mouth” to enact what Weems (2001), calls for as the “imagination intellect”—education as a liberatory, democratic, culturally relevant and artistically engaged practice. Further, in this vein, this story, as a conclusion, offers as much of this document has done, a juxtaposition of the violence experienced by Blackqueer bodies and the resilience and resistance of that body. With a purposeful homage to Toni Cade Bambara’s (1996), “The Education of a Storyteller”, I weave a tale here to underscore again the education I received within schools, and the education I received in other spaces which allowed me a greater sense of freedom.

In doing so, what may be written off as play, or trivialized as a story, my story opens up possibilities and ruptures often foreclosed by traditional methods of inquiry and critical engagement. It is in these openings, that the contributions of my project shine through. Moreover, these contributions can be seen in building and broadening current applications of (Black) Queer Theory, autoethnographic literature, methods, and applications, as well as expanding qualitative research methods (in Education) through the development of an original research methodology—Blended Scripting. Specifically, I have illustrated how my research in its focus on Black youth (i) provides a more intersectional frame which builds upon and broadens contemporary conversations in Education centering on issues of anti-Black racism, queerness,
and gender, \textit{(ii)} expands upon and extends recent deployments of Queer of Color Critique in Educational research, attending to the agency of queer subjects and their unique forms of knowledge production \textit{(iii)} allows the opportunity for educators and educational researchers to think critically about their own identities, shift power dynamics in their teaching and research relationships and practices and to consider multiple ways to value various forms of knowledge \textit{(iv)} offers an innovative methodology for educational researchers that centers the experience, narratives, and bodies of marginalized communities. This innovative methodology, Blended Scripting has allowed me to reaffirm the existence of Blackqueer lives, and desires. As a creative practice, Blended Scripting creates a space to traverse the affective terrain associated within Blackqueer joy and trauma, while also providing a space to practice and imagine justice, intervening if just for a moment in the violence against Blackqueer bodies.

Furthermore, engaging the creative within educational research offers a new paradigm to move beyond our circuitous research, theory, practice model informed by traditional methods and analyses. Further engagement with the creative, situated in and through bodies, and particularly the Blackqueer body, opens up avenues to engage a population of students often under researched, left out of policy conversations and reforms. To do so would also move beyond framing LGBTQ issues within school as bullying issues or students of color issues as race issues only. As previously discussed, framing issues of LGBTQ youth of color only as a bullying problem sorely misses the complications of race one experiences as a queer youth of color. Often the approach and the rhetoric of it asks youth to survive bullying, placing the onus on them without adequately changing the structures which lessen their life opportunities and possibilities. To situate our research methods, and analyses, and therefore policy recommendations in and through the bodies and experiences of LGBTQ youth of color would necessarily shift these conversations, pointing instead to concrete ways which would aid youth
now, rather than the distant future of a supposedly safe queer adulthood. Further, it is through the body that we are able to create politics, and move in radical ways, which do not replicate forms of oppression. It is with Blackqueer youths bodies in mind, like that of Carl and Tyrone which would expand our views as to what is needed in this moment beyond issues of marriage equality and police reform.

Although important issues, I have illustrated within this dissertation that there is much to be learned about LGBTQ issues and race specific issues by exploring the intersections of anti-Blackness and anti-queerness and violence. Beginning from the standpoint that Black is queer and queer is Black, this dissertation illustrates different ways to think about Blackness, queerness, violence and education. Each chapter offered a particular means to consider the role of creative methodologies, the body, and narrative have in shaping academic and educational discourses and possibilities. This is illustrated as I offer the Blackqueer body as a site of knowledge, considering how the organizing construct of Black girlhood shifts social justice aims within education and political organizing, and by offering narrative and performance based methodologies—Blended Scripting, theatrical performance, poetry—as pedagogy. In offering my own body and biography, I have provided a means to think about the loss and violence enacted upon literal bodies, as they are forced to experience school experiences and a society which limits their contributions to creating knowledge and/or do not hold their experiences, knowledge, and genius as valuable or sacred.

The care an individual receives in society is an indicator of the type of institutionalized education she or he will receive. To combat the lack of care, attention, and violence against individuals and in particular students who are Black and queer it is important to take into consideration not only how they are treated in schools, but as a whole how they are cared for in
our society. What might we know, or know differently if Carl and Tyrone were still here to teach us? In their absence, and others like them, I will continue to write their presence into being, imagining futures that do not necessitate their deaths or mine.
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