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Pandemic Pedagogies: Fatalistic Or Black Feminist?

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PANDEMIC PEDAGOGIES: FATALISTIC OR BLACK FEMINIST?

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to give more than I receive. I wanna thank me for trying to do more right than wrong. I wanna thank me for just being me at all times.

PREFACE

In my scholarship, I ascribe to the Black feminist praxis outlined by Nash (2019) in *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality*. She writes "there is a single affect that has come to mark contemporary academic Black feminist practice: defensiveness" (Nash, 2019, p. 3). Ironically, the very process of completing a dissertation is grounded in argumentation and defense. But that, to me, is not Black feminist. Nash (2019) goes on to say "if 'holding on' describes the set of Black feminist practices this project seeks to disrupt, 'letting go' represents the political and theoretical worldview this project advances, a vision of Black feminist theory that is not interested in making property of knowledge (p. 3). My disinterest in "making property of knowledge" is what also inspired me to develop my research questions by reflecting on the prevalent identities that I embodied at the time I was writing this project.

I arrived at this topic from three different directions, one political, one vocational, and one spiritual. Politically and intellectually, I am a Black feminist. I align and deeply identify with bell hooks' framework for intersectional feminism and radical love in the face of marginalization, neoliberalism, and institutional harm and neglect. I also ascribe to Charlene Carruthers' Black Queer Feminist framework for radical movement-building, and I apply this in my practice as an activist, particularly in my work with the campaign to defund the Chicago Police Department. Working from the margins as a Black woman, and from the center as a temporarily able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual, highly educated, middle class person, I endeavor to bring my dominant and subordinate identities to bear in the spaces of power that I occupy in my community and my career. I do this through the example of Adrienne Maree

Brown, who calls activists and Black feminists into an ethic of contextualized and ever-emergent strategy when working for social justice. She invites us into a practice of pleasure activism through which we are meant to find embodied liberation, peace, rest, and pleasure as integral to the process and products of our struggle.

Vocationally, I've worked in faculty development and instructional design for the last four years, kicking off my career squarely within the space of postsecondary teaching and learning. I was working as an Instructional Designer throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and was one of the first people called to respond to the needs of instructors, faculty, and staff at the University of Chicago during the transition to emergency remote education. Through these experiences, I gained an insider's perspective on how different modes of pandemic pedagogy can play out, and how they are often driven by institutional sustainability rather than student needs. Furthermore, I have spent countless hours consulting with instructors on how best to deliver their courses and support students in ever-changing learning environments. This insight has reinforced my understanding that while an institution may carry out and enforce its own interests, each individual instructor has power and agency to create an inclusive, responsive, and engaging learning environment.

Spiritually, I am searching desperately for a sense of wholeness and peace. I recently learned, through scripture, that fragmentation, or constantly weathering the demand to separate my heart, mind, and body from the work required to sustain myself in a neoliberal world, is not of God. I believe that my Creator made each of us whole, unique, and perfect. I believe, in the words of bell hooks, that education is the practice of freedom and within it, that the classroom is the most radical space of possibility. Freedom and possibility, to me, are spiritual concepts because, although we must fight tirelessly to experience them in our present, transactional world,

they are available to all in the worlds of our creation, the worlds we can bring forth

through our hope, imagination, and creativity as educators.

Dedicated to anyone trying to be whole. And to all the teachers.
Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam.

"Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well?… 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, "The Salt Eaters"

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Black Feminist Action Research (BFAR)

Black Feminist Ethics of Caring (BFEC)

Black Feminist Pedagogy/ies (BFP)

Black Feminist Thought (BFT)

Communities of Practice (COPs)

Community of Care and Practice (CCP)

Critical Interfaith Dialogue (CID)

Critical Religious Pluralism Theory (CRPT)

Curtis Method (CM)

Faculty Learning Community/ies (FLC)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs

ABSTRACT

The research question I pursued is: "How do Black feminist instructors who identify as spiritual define and embody pandemic pedagogy?" Pandemic pedagogy is a term used to describe the experiences of teachers and students at HEIs and K-12 schools as they navigate teaching and learning during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (Schwartzman, 2020). I identified two general approaches in the current literature on pandemic pedagogies in postsecondary education: "fatalistic" approaches that bemoan the challenges faced by teachers and students during the pandemic, and "responsive" approaches that describe attempted solutions to these challenges, without addressing root causes. Conversely, "transformative" pandemic pedagogies are strategies that situate the necessary subversion of power dynamics in the classroom, and the role that the instructor plays in facilitating this disruption, as part of their solutions. To study what "transformative" pandemic pedagogies could look like, I used qualitative methods to examine the distinct yet related realms of online postsecondary education, Black Feminist Thought, spirituality, and embodiment through the formation of a faculty learning community (FLC) called the Community of Care and Practice (CCP). Using the Curtis Method (CM), I addressed my research questions by observing, analyzing, and later describing how Black feminist educators apply Black feminist pedagogies (BFP) and spirituality to their teaching practices during the ongoing pandemic. The behaviors that we engaged in—*(a) edification through fellowship, (b) spirituality as resistance to transactional teaching, and (c)*

collective embodied vulnerability—constitute a new term for teaching and learning in the

COVID-19 era: *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy.*

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

I chose to center healing in my dissertation because it has become abundantly clear that

healing is desperately needed in postsecondary education. The events of the last few years have

included the COVID-19 pandemic, an ongoing global public health tragedy, a white nationalist

coup attempt at the U.S. Capitol, and several highly publicized murders of Black people at the

hands of white law enforcement,[1] just to name a few. However, in the aftermath of these

instances of human suffering, higher education institutions (HEIs) maintain an unyielding need

to "return to normal." Even amidst the devastation, destabilization of social supports, and loss of

life wrought by these events, "higher education does not know what it means to stop or pause"

(Stewart, 2020, p. 261). Stewart (2020) named the relentlessness of higher education institutions

(HEIs) that continue to operate even as people within and beyond their walls navigate "an ever-

rising death toll, millions of people [continuing] to face incredibly challenging home lives,

financial hardships, and both mental and physical health issues." In other words, "Higher

education struggles to put [students', faculty, and staff's] humanity above our ability to produce"

(Stewart, 2020, p. 261). This, I believe, has led to an immediate and urgent opportunity for

centering healing in postsecondary education research and practice.

To contribute to this effort toward healing, I used a Black feminist lens to explore

pedagogical strategies that promote wellbeing and wholeness in postsecondary education during

the COVID-19 pandemic (or simply, "the pandemic"). What I found was that applying Black

feminist, spiritual, and embodied pedagogical practices can lead to transformative approaches to teaching and learning online[2]. The final outputs of this study, which was centered around four convenings of five Black feminist postsecondary educators are: 1) the development of a new pedagogical construct which I call *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* and 2) the formation of a new online avenue of support for Black women in postsecondary education called The Steal A/Way Collective for Empowered Pedagogy. What this study ultimately discovered is that in these turbulent times, healing is derived through fellowship, vulnerability, and spiritual support in the context of a loving community.

Overview

In Chapter One, I introduce and define the concept of pandemic pedagogies, describing the different components and conceptions I am applying to this term. I also define key terms including "Black feminism," "spirituality," and "embodiment" and foreshadowed how I will explore them further in Chapter Two. In Chapter Two, I review the literature on three topics: 1) Black feminist instructors and their pedagogies, 2) instructors who identify as spiritual and their pedagogies, and 3) embodied pedagogies in postsecondary education. I also situate these interrelated topics within the umbrella literature of critical pedagogy and include a brief description of the Theoretical Frameworks that inform my study's methodology: Critical Religious Pluralism Theory and Black feminist ethics of care. In Chapter Three, I introduce The Curtis Method, a qualitative, participatory action research (PAR) design that I used to pursue my research question with a group of co-researchers through our Community of Care and Practice (CCP). In Chapter Four, the findings chapter, I describe the context, actions, and embodied moments we experienced during our CCP convenings and how these come together to address

my research question. Finally, in Chapter Five, I outline how my findings answer my research questions while also updating, augmenting, and complementing existing theory and research.

Research Question

The research question that guided this study is: How do Black feminist instructors who identify as spiritual define and embody pandemic pedagogy? Sub-questions included:

1. How do these instructors sustain their Black feminist pedagogical praxis as we continue to navigate the neoliberal pandemic?

2. What new directions for teaching and learning in postsecondary education do these instructors envision amidst the ongoing pandemic, in the 2022-2023 academic year, and beyond?

I define each part of this question in the following ways:

1. *Black feminists* are those persons, regardless of race or gender, who ascribe to and embody a Black feminist politic and worldview. My definition is inclusive of those who identify as womanist, or who have a "feminist consciousness while being fundamentally culturally and community oriented" through a commitment to the survival and wholeness of entire people that is not singularly focused on Black women (DeLoach & Young, 2014, p. 2083).

2. *Instructors in postsecondary education* are those persons who teach at HEIs, inclusive of graduate students, contingent faculty, and all those who do not hold faculty appointments, because, in fact, these folks represent the majority of those who teach at HEIs (Kezar et al., 2019).

3. Persons who identify as *spiritual* are those who "[have] a consciousness of and attention to the order, power, and unity that flows through all of life and that encompasses an energy and responsibility greater than ourselves" (Dillard, 2022, p. 3).

4. To *define* means to articulate the conceptual and applied meaning of an idea, internally with oneself and in dialogue with others.

5. To *embody* means, as in the tradition of bell hooks, to "see yourself always as a body in a system that has not become accustomed to your presence" and to attempt to deconstruct traditional biases by asserting yours and others' bodily presence through tone, word choice, movement, and pedagogical processes (hooks, 1994, p. 135).

6. And lastly, *pandemic pedagogy* refers to the experiences and strategies of teachers at HEIs as they adapt their instruction methods to respond to mandatory campus closures mandated by their institutions and stay-at-home orders implemented by state and local governments to slow the spread of the coronavirus (Schwartzman, 2020).

I stated off with these research question prior to initiating the PAR process because I wanted to focus on the specific concepts of spirituality and embodiment throughout the study, and because it was important to me to try to address the issues of pandemic pedagogy. Having my research questions set beforehand, also known has an *a priori* approach to research question development, allowed me to focus on the context and actions taken throughout PAR in greater detail as my co-researchers and I were already aware of the central question we were studying, which was essentially whether the postsecondary classroom can be a space where healing, alongside learning, is possible. My goal with this project was to explore whether and how, in the context of

the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Black feminist instructors were about to facilitate learning and healing in their pedagogical practices. What I found was that we embody pandemic pedagogy by edifying one another through fellowship, offering spiritual support to one another, and by practicing collective embodied vulnerability. In the next sections, I will introduce the problems that inspired this study.

Introducing Pandemic Pedagogy

Beginning in March 2020, HEIs in the U.S. scrambled to respond to the onset of COVID-19 by closing campuses to limit the spread of the virus in response to state, local, and national government restrictions (Rifino & Sugarman, 2022); setting up contact tracing for students, faculty, and staff as more and more became infected (Addo, 2020); and attempting to protect against financial loss as enrollments, athletics, and other sources of revenue declined (Association of Public Land-grant Universities, 2020). From the disproportionate number of illnesses and deaths among communities of color, to the economic disenfranchisement of women who were forced out of the workforce, the pandemic magnified underlying structural and systemic inequities present across the social, economic, and political landscape of the U.S. (see Iturbe-Lagrave, et al., 2021) and in HEIs. In this study, I was less interested in examining the harms weathered by HEIs during the pandemic, and more interested in the experiences and responses to this harm by individuals, specifically Black feminist instructors who are working to facilitate effective teaching and learning amidst these conditions.

Pandemic pedagogy is a term that is used to describe the experiences of teachers and students at HEIs and K-12 schools as we adapt to ever-changing teaching and learning modalities, and the interpersonal dynamics of face-to-face, screen-to-screen, and mask-to-mask

education during the pandemic (Schwartzman, 2020). There are two general categories of

literature on pandemic pedagogies in postsecondary education, most of which has been published

in the last 24 months (Shankar et al., 2021, p. 1). I identify scholarship that centers on the harms

and challenges faced by teachers and students during the pandemic as "fatalistic" conceptions of

pandemic pedagogy, and articles that describe attempted solutions to these challenges as

"responsive." However, before I delve into these themes in the scholarship of pandemic

pedagogy, I first want to outline how I understand what healing is and the strategies and

paradigms that inform my epistemic stance on it, as well as what harm is, and how I see it

showing up in postsecondary teaching and learning during the pandemic.

Strategies for Healing

Once when asked "How do you survive in a world where we are all victims of

something?" Toni Morrison replied, "Sometimes you don't survive whole. You survive in part.

And the grandeur of life is that attempt. It's not about that solution" (CTFORUM, 2020). In this

study, I attempted to contend with the harm wrought by the pandemic, the neoliberalization of

the academy, and their impacts on postsecondary teaching and learning to instead hold space in

postsecondary education for research and practice that centers embodied strategies to promote

healing at HEIs. Before I define what I mean when I use the word "healing," I first want to

situate higher education institutions (HEIs) as a space where healing can occur.

Higher Education as a Site for Social Justice

The key challenges facing HEIs in the United States today are, at their core, social justice

issues (Osei-Kofi et al., 2010; Kramer & Hall, 2018; Strunk, et al., 2020; Pulcini, 2018; LePeau,

2019). The ways they go about "solving" these problems have implications for equity that extend

far beyond the experiences of students, faculty, and staff, and are interrelated with unjust

structures, systems, and policies in the U.S. more broadly (Bell, 2013; Young, 1990). Equity is

the process and outcome of understanding and dismantling institutional systems, policies, and

practices that hinder the goal of "full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is

mutually shaped to meet their needs" (Bell, 2013, p. 21). Working for equity at HEIs requires

attention to critical questions. For instance, Lincoln (1991) inquired:

> What are the underlying structures—the processes and unexamined social
> arrangements—of institutions of higher education that act to reproduce larger social
> structures? Does the university's role in knowledge production and transmission function
> in reifying certain worldviews and dismissing to marginality others? How do
> reconstructions of ways of knowing bring about and provide contradiction and conflict in
> academic organizations? (pp. 24–25)

I also share the purpose and lens of Osei-Kofi et al. (2010) who articulated their reason for

studying social justice in higher education as follows:

> Our focus on social justice in the study of higher education is based on seeking to
> provide...an in-depth understanding of concepts and theories of social justice so that they
> may apply…to understanding macro-, meso-, and micro-level issues when studying
> institutions of higher education and their roles within the larger social structure. In our
> work, we strongly identify as part of a greater struggle for liberatory education that not
> only spans primary, secondary, and tertiary education but also is fueled by transnational
> material realities of social injustice, in which education is heavily implicated. (p. 329)

This study centered on the postsecondary classroom and the strategies of instructors at HEIs to

address these questions. The key challenges that I named, and the ways that I reviewed potential

solutions to them operationalize my understanding of HEIs as both a site for liberatory struggle

and a space which can perpetuate oppression and marginalization. Although working for equity

is structural and institutional in nature (see Lincoln, 1991), what the present study uncovered is

that individuals and instructors can contribute to this effort by creating learning experiences that

intentionally center equity, and that by doing so we may facilitate healing.

Defining Healing

I operationalize a four-part definition for what I mean when I use the word "healing." Healing is collective, healing is wholeness, healing is transformative, and healing is embodied.

Part one of my definition is that healing is collective. In her article "Healing Circles as Black Feminist Pedagogical Interventions," Jennifer L. Richardson (2018) states: "I seek a continuation of Audre Lorde's work, which locates healing at the center of our interactions not just with ourselves, but also with our students, co-investigators, colleagues, and others" (p. 293). This is the collective, relational healing which I continue to seek in my academic work, and in my personal life.

Secondly, I define healing as wholeness, the bringing together of groups, externally, and the fragments within ourselves between body, mind, and spirit, internally. This can look like greater attunement to our physiological and emotional selves and the wisdom that our bodies communicate to us (Freiler, 2008; Stuckey & Nobel, 2009). This would represent a shift in the power dynamics, especially those in academia, that privilege cognitive knowing and ignore embodied knowing. The social aspect of healing through wholeness is facilitated through solidarity and dialogue with others, and through individual reflection (Freire, 2017; Bryant & Astin, 2008; Love & Talbot, 1999).

Thirdly, I believe that transformation is integral to facilitating healing, and is an outcome of healing. Transformation is predicated on tangible, sustained, positive change in the lives of those who experience oppression and marginalization (Rendón, 2009). Transformation can only be achieved if there is a shift in the locus of power from the dominant groups to the oppressed, along with the abolition of oppressive frameworks, policies, thoughts, actions, and paradigms

(Perlow et al., 2018). In addition, transformative healing can occur in the body, mind, and spirit if the same sources of oppression that affect our social lives are routinely challenged in our interior lives, as well (Love and Talbot (2009). Thus, transformative healing is an ongoing process of individual change and systemic change, with each impacting the other towards the greater good of all.

Finally, in the tradition of bell hooks, I believe that for healing to occur it has to be embodied (hooks, 1994; 2003). Embodiment is an affirmation "of multiplicity, multiple layers of being, a way to be in the body at all times, [and a way] to express the whole of the person so there can be no separations" (Argyle & Shields, 1996, p. 68). According to Renee Sills (2022), a consulting astrologer, somatic intuitive, and leader of the Embodied Astrology community, embodiment also refers to the "felt sense, [physical] movement, and creative exploration." This focus on wholeness and centering of the body, affirms the wholeness and transfer of power that I define as necessary components of healing.

Throughout this study, I use the word "healing" as a synonym for wholeness, transformation, collectivity, and embodiment. The following sections briefly introduce Black feminism, spirituality, and embodiment as facilitators of healing in postsecondary education. After introducing these healing concepts, I briefly provide a definition for harm, the antithesis of healing, and the relevant ways it shows up in pandemic pedagogy. The literature on each of these topics is explored in greater detail in Chapter Two.

Black Feminism for Healing

Contemporary Black feminism was first articulated in 1977 by a group of Black lesbians called the Combahee River Collective who were excluded from full participation in the

Women's Rights and Civil Rights movements (Taylor, 2017). The Combahee River Collective defined Black feminism as "the political realization that comes from the seemingly personal experiences of individual Black women's lives" (Taylor, 2017, p. 2). To narrate the process of their emergence and describe their shared beliefs, they stated:

> A combined anti-racist and anti-sexist position drew us together initially, and, as we developed politically, we addressed ourselves to heterosexism and economic oppression under capitalism. Above all else, our politics initially sprang from the shared belief that Black women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's [sic] because of our need as human persons for autonomy. (2-3).

The positioning of the women of the Combahee River Collective as outsiders within both society at large, due to the double marginality of their identities as Black and as women, and within the political movements for Women's Rights and Civil Rights echoes through today as Black women at HEIs and in other institutional positions navigate our place as inherent outsiders within these systems, while also fighting for equal participation and an end to the oppression that these systems exacerbate (Perlow et al., 2018)

The key tenets of Black feminism, some of which include radical imagination, magical realism, abundance mindset, and the supremacy of embodied knowledge are represented within many critical and liberatory pedagogies (Perlow et al., 2018; McLaren & Jandric, 2017). Black feminist pedagogy transcends responsiveness to create new knowledge and strategies for social justice in postsecondary education that are informed by Black women's intersecting identities, outsider-within status, and embodied ways of knowing (Perlow et al., 2018; Collins, 2009). Because of this, Black feminists have been the vanguard of pedagogical innovations that position

teaching as a practice for social justice. From Gloria Ladson-Billings' Culturally-Responsive Pedagogy (1998) to bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), Black feminists' scholarship and practices inform new approaches in education that center the experiences and empowerment of marginalized students, and those who teach them, calling for all of us to bring our whole selves into the learning environment through embodied and context-informed strategies.

Spirituality for Healing

One popular definition of spirituality in postsecondary education comes from Love and Talbot (1999). They define spirituality as:

> the internal process of seeking personal authenticity and wholeness; transcending one's current locus of centricity; developing greater connectedness to self and others through relationships and community; deriving meaning, purpose and direction in life; and openness to exploring a relationship with a higher power or powers that transcend human existence and human knowing. (p. 364-367)

The literature on spiritual teaching approaches (see Rendón, 2009; Korth, 1993; Kaufman, 2017) and postsecondary instructors' spiritual identities (Lindholm, 2014) affirms the agency that instructors hold in centering spirituality in their pedagogical practice. As Shahjahan (2005) claimed, "centering spirituality requires us to blend emotion, our spirits, and embodied knowledge with critical analysis to make the study of equity and social justice inclusive to our diverse student body" (p. 303). In this conceptualization, practicing spiritually centered teaching and learning strategies at HEIs can also be a way to address social justice issues and promote healing.

Embodiment for Healing

As mentioned before, I define "healing" and "wholeness" synonymously; relatedly, I position "embodiment" or the unification of mind, body, and spirit as a prerequisite for healing in the educational space (see Okello et al., 2022). My position around embodiment for healing is

directly informed by the teachings of bell hooks and her theory of "engaged pedagogy" (hooks, 1994, p. 17). Hooks (1994) derived the core premise of engaged pedagogy from the teachings of the late Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. Reflecting on his impact, she said,

> In his work Thich Nhat Hanh always speaks of the teacher as a healer. [He] offered a way of thinking about pedagogy which emphasized wholeness…His holistic approach to learning and spiritual practice enabled me to overcome years of socialization that taught me to believe a classroom was diminished if students and professors regarded one another as 'whole' human beings. p.14.

Healing though embodiment is also enacted by a reciprocal relationship between teacher and student wherein both parties endeavor to bring their whole selves to the learning space (Lawrence, 2012). In other words, for instructors to apply the healing effects of embodiment in the postsecondary classroom, "[they] must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being…to teach in a manner that empowers students" (hooks, 1994, p. 15). In this study, I explored how Black feminist instructors practice embodiment in their teaching through attunement to emotionality, non-verbal expressions, and awareness of psychosomatic or "felt" sensations, and how these contributed to our process of healing.

Situating Harm

I believe that a core root of harm in our society comes from the bifurcation of the collective into dominant and subordinate groups. The relationship between dominant and subordinate groups is "often one in which the targeted [subordinate] group is labeled as defective or substandard in significant ways" (Tatum, 1997, p. 7). Although, as Dr. Beverly Tatum asserts,

"many of us are both dominant and subordinate," this bifurcation of privilege and the assignment of roles to subordinate groups has been conspicuous in the U.S. throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (p. 9). Tatum (1997) clearly defines dominant groups in society:

> "[Those who] hold the power and authority; have the greatest influence in determining the structure of society; are seen as the norm for humanity; set the parameters within which the subordinates operate; and assign roles to the subordinate(s) that reflect the latter's devalued status, reserving the most highly valued roles in the society for themselves (p. 7-8).

The COVID-19 pandemic, however devastating, is a circumstance that perfectly illustrates Dr. Tatum's (1997) claim: "In a situation of unequal power, a subordinate group has to focus on survival" (p. 8). While oppressive dynamics did not originate with the COVID-19 pandemic, the resultant chasm of inequality and disproportionate harm between dominant and subordinate groups grew much wider because of it, and the stakes for subordinates' survival have been heightened (Iturbe-Lagrave, et al., 2021). A specific mechanism of harm that this study examined is the harm of neoliberal fatalism.

The Harm of Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is a broad term with multiple meanings, spanning the realms of policy and ideology (Jackson & White, 2020). In general, neoliberal political, educational, and economic policies prioritize consumerism in privatized, autonomous markets, and "value-for-money" in all levels of commercial and interpersonal exchange. Ideologically, neoliberalism represents the belief that, in all realms of society, the government should intervene only in ways that foster competition for labor and resources, and not for supporting or financing social welfare (Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017). These policies and ideologies are a central cause of the continued bifurcation of society into dominant and subordinate groups, reproducing harm.

The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated "higher education's capitalistic and neoliberal sensibilities" (Stewart, 2020, p. 261). Slaughter and Rhoades' (2004) work is often referred to for its early analysis of the neoliberalization of the academy. However, their research "did not focus on the shift in labor on campus" (Kezar et al., 2019, p. 15). One byproduct of neoliberalism at HEIs is the fissured workforce and managerialism shaping the roles of faculty and staff; this is evident in "the dwindling number of tenured or tenure-track faculty and concomitant growth in contingent hires including both part-time adjunct and full-time faculty off the tenure track" (Kezar et al., 2019, p. 15). This reduction in faculty appointments has led to a concurrent reduction in the amount of time spent on teaching and course development, as faculty are more incentivized to pursue profitable research projects for the institution than to teach (Kezar et al., 2019). In other words, the emphasis on neoliberal policies at HEIs has co-opted the purpose of teaching to be transactional, an exchange of students' money for a credential, rather than an intentionally engaging learning experience (Giroux, 2013). In regard to how the pandemic has impacted teaching and learning, Rippé found that students and instructors have increased fatalistic feelings of disconnectedness from their learning goals, the course material, and their peers (2021).

Neoliberal Fatalism in Pandemic Pedagogies

Baatjes (2005) defines neoliberal fatalism as the notion of "inevitability" that accompanies individuals' belief that they are "deficient and inadequate" within a neoliberal system that refuses to acknowledge itself or celebrate efforts toward justice and equality (p. 3). I recognize neoliberal fatalism in the literature on pandemic pedagogies through works that describe the impacts of disrupted teaching and learning during the pandemic, while failing to

adequately couch these impacts within the systemic, structural effects of neoliberalism, and/or

deconstruct them and offer solutions using a critical framework. Some of these issues include

students' and instructors' perceived lack of control in their learning and the negative effects it

has on their academic performance (Zheng, 2020), the notion of "home as a problematic locale

for learning" as students were closed off from the resources of their college campuses

(Schwartzman, 2020), and lamentations of the digital divides that impacted the accessibility of

online classes (Rippé, 2021). Although Schwartzman (2020) did incorporate neoliberalism into

their context and critique of pandemic pedagogy, theirs and others' work is still limited in that

they do not use an empirical approach or apply a critical framework to investigate

neoliberalism's role in the lived experiences of students and teachers. Offering solutions to the

challenges of pandemic pedagogy without centering the neoliberal political context of instruction

leads to the development of pandemic pedagogies that are responsive rather than

transformative.

Responsive Pandemic Pedagogies

In 2021, Gloria Ladson-Billings, who developed the framework for Culturally Relevant

Pedagogy, wrote "I'm Here for the Hard Reset," a reflective article urging educators to resist the

"return-to-normal" narrative being pushed by administrators and institutions as an ideal

resolution to the challenges of pandemic pedagogies. She offered this criticism:

> Although many educators and policy makers insist that we have to "get back to normal,"
> I want to suggest that "going back" is the wrong thing for children and youth who were
> unsuccessful and oppressed in our schools before the pandemic. Normal is where the
> problems reside. (p. 68).

She went on to reassert the importance of pedagogical strategies that "re-think the purposes of

education in a society that is straining from the problems of anti-Black racism, police brutality,

mass incarceration, and economic inequality" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 72). I argue that these approaches are starkly contrasted from some of the responsive pandemic pedagogies described in the current literature.

Some of the behaviors encapsulated in responsive approaches to pandemic pedagogy include an instructors' choice to center students' wellbeing rather than their attainment of learning outcomes (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020); instructors unilaterally sharing their personal challenges and struggles with their class (Cutara, 2021); and cursorily allowing students to express their fears and feelings of loss and grief (Mehrotra, 2021). Although they are well-meaning, these approaches are starkly contrasted with CRP, which explicitly centers the subversion of power dynamics in the classroom and the role that the instructor plays in facilitating this disruption (Ladson-Billings, 1998; 2021).

In addition to finding ways to challenge responsive pandemic pedagogies, my goal for this study was to center spirituality and explore its role in pandemic pedagogy. My hypothesis was that spiritual pedagogy, like CRP, could have a transformative impact on pandemic pedagogy by changing the locus of power in teaching and learning interactions to include the mind, body, and spirit at the same time. In the next sections, I will offer more context into why I chose to center spirituality in this study, and how I contrast spirituality and religion.

Centering Spirituality

An important aspect of my hypothesis in this study is the relationship that I intuit between critical pedagogy, embodied pedagogy, and spirituality (see Rendón, 2009; Korth, 1993; Kaufman, 2017). By choosing to center spirituality as a way to address the challenges introduced by pandemic pedagogies, I want to be clear and purposeful that my intention is not to promote

any form of religious belief, practice, or adherence in my study. The literature on spiritual pedagogies and an exploration of some of the many definitions of spirituality are addressed in Chapter Two; however, situating my epistemological standpoint on the differences between spirituality and religion is a matter of greater urgency for this work is thus addressed first, in Chapter One.

Spirituality and religion are complex, distinct, and yet also related concepts. According to Nye (2008), the word "religion" is a noun describing a universal aspect of culture, or a particular group or tradition, while the word "religious" is an adjective to describe a thing, behavior, or experience. In the book *Theology of Culture* (1970), Paul Tillich, a famous theologian, defined religion as a ubiquitous concept in the search for ultimate meaning. Searching for meaning through religion can look like engaging in outward acts such as "prayers, rituals, and spiritual exercises," (Snipes, 2017, p. 13). However, I do not agree that "spiritual exercises" are inherently embedded within religion, or that spirituality is simply the outward expression of religious beliefs. My understanding of spirituality removes it from the confines of religion.

I chose to center spirituality as a construct that is separate from religion in this study for two reasons. The first is that I think that the growing trend toward dis-identification with religion and growing identification with spirituality is an important reason to begin engaging spirituality as a distinct concept, particularly in research and scholarship. The U.S. population, especially among traditionally college-age students, is trending more toward spirituality than religion (Pew, 2015). According to a 2015 survey of 35,000 Americans by the Pew Research Center (Pew) called the "Religious Landscape Study," the percentage of Americans who identify as religiously unaffiliated—those who are, according to Pew, Atheist, Agnostic, or "nothing in particular"—

grew by 6.7% in seven years, from 16.1% in 2007 to 22.8% in 2014. However, for many in the

U.S., spirituality is understood as synonymous with or directly related to the traditions and

practices of Christianity (Small, 2020). Therefore, the second reason I chose to study spirituality

instead of religion is to maintain a critical awareness of this hidden dynamic to proactively resist

Christian hegemony.

Christian hegemony is a form of religious oppression that dominates U.S. society and

HEIs (Small, 2020). Blumenfeld (2006) defines Christian hegemony as

> the institutionalization of a Christian norm or standard, which establishes and perpetuates
> the notion that all people are or should be Christian, thereby privileging Christians and
> Christianity, and excluding the needs, concerns, religious cultural practices, and life
> experiences of people who are not Christian. At times subtle, Christian hegemony is
> oppression by neglect, omission, erasure, and distortion (196).

Christian hegemony reinforces the collective harm of dividing society into dominant and

subordinate groups discussed earlier. The organization of society, and HEIs as microcosms of

society, around Christian religious observances, rituals, symbols, and ideologies as opposed to all

other religions, or no religion at all, are all structural examples of Christian privilege (Seifert,

2007). At HEIs specifically, Christian privilege can be observed in the organization of academic

calendar around Christian holidays; public representations of Christianity such as Christmas

trees; and the hegemonic understanding of and organization around Christian religious

observances such as not scheduling class on Sunday mornings (Seifert, 2007). By intentionally

naming Christian hegemony and calling it out in my study, instead of allowing it to be hidden in

the conversation on spirituality, I hope to challenge and "call out" this oppressive system as a

way of resisting it (Small, 2020). In doing so, I also hope to make space for naming and

celebrating "alternative" practices in spirituality, especially those that are connected with the

Black feminist tradition such as self-love rituals, collective and community care, and even political activism and organizing (Carruthers, 2019).

My goal throughout this study was to garner viewpoints on spirituality in teaching and learning from Black feminist instructors without purposefully centering a Christian perspective. I did this to be mindful of the growing number of folks in the U.S. who do not identify as Christian, and to engender as many approaches as possible for healing through postsecondary education while also resisting Christian hegemony. The academy itself and many aspects of this study are still influenced by Christian values and worldviews. However, I hope that by naming these structures in all parts of this research I can demonstrate how Christian hegemony can be acknowledged and challenged in postsecondary education research and practice. In Chapter Two, I discuss Critical Religious Pluralism Theory as a framework that informs my efforts to disrupt Christian hegemony in my study.

Chapter One Conclusion

In Chapter One, I provided background on the urgent need for healing in postsecondary education as HEIs continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. I also situated my understanding of what harm and healing are, and how I plan to mitigate the former and facilitate the latter in my study. I went on to define "Black feminism," "spirituality," and "embodied pedagogy" as the key components of my research question and named how each is related to healing. Finally, I introduced and defined the concept of pandemic pedagogies, and described the two different themes—fatalistic pandemic pedagogies and responsive pandemic pedagogies I've observed in the literature on this topic.

What I found after completing this study is that *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy,* which is grounded in spiritual and embodied pedagogy, offers strategies for healing though teaching and learning practices that encourage *edification through fellowship, offering spiritual support, and collective embodied vulnerability.* The ways that I arrived at these strategies as the core of *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* will be discussed in Chapter Five. In Chapter Two, I will review the different bodies of literature that foreground *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* to later highlight the ways that this novel construct contributes to each of these traditions.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As I shared in the Preface, I arrived at my topic through the confluence of three core parts of my identity and how I felt them shapeshifting during the pandemic: my vocation, my politics, and my spirituality. When I started my career in teaching and learning and faculty development in 2018, reading *Black Women's Liberatory Pedagogies: Resistance, Transformation, and Healing Within and Beyond the Academy,* was a revelation to me. Its wealth of perspectives and bountiful ways of conceptualizing and applying Black feminist pedagogy, especially through spirituality, we life-giving and clarifying of my lived experiences. Reading and re-reading chapters in the book—such as Atta's (2018) exploration on "bringing Afrikan indigenous wisdom to the academy" and Harris' (2018) perspective on "healing through (re)membering and (re)claiming ancestral knowledge about black witch magic"—bolstered my belief that spirituality, in all of its fullness and diversity, was indispensable from Black feminist teaching. Seeking guidance and comfort in the midst of the pandemic, I returned to the book in 2020; this time, I noticed that there weren't any essays included that explored Black feminist pedagogy in online environments. Teaching and learning online has always been a curiosity of mine, maybe because of my millennial upbringing in the digital age, but when the pandemic hit and I was supporting instructors with transitioning their courses to the remote environment, what started as a curiosity about effective online pedagogy became a confrontation between the need for holistic and care-centered teaching, and the need to simply carry on during a crisis

applications to higher education. Watching the footage of white rioters screaming vitriol while also quoting Scripture was deeply jarring and upsetting to me, especially when I contrasted their behavior with the peaceful marches and protests I'd participated in during the summer of 2020. In both of these instances, however, I maintained my suspicion of Christianity, or some charismatic interpretation of it, as a catalyst for social action and for destruction.

As a Black feminist, I am committed to a praxis of centering those on the margins. Christianity is a dominating system in U.S. society; it leaves little to no room for other religious, secular, or spiritual groups to organize or have as big of an impact on the laws and social norms that shape our lives and interactions as Christianity (Resiner & Mulvhill, 2020; Ferber, 2012). The Critical Religious Pluralism in Higher Education group is one of the only spaces I am part of where Christian hegemony, and its harm is explicitly challenged and named. In solidarity with other scholars who are doing the work of challenging Christian hegemony in higher education (see Snipes & Mason, 2020b; Small, 2020; Edwards, 2016), and to operationalize a broader understanding of what Black feminist spirituality is, I chose to apply the tenets of Critical Religious Pluralism Theory and the tenets of the Black feminist ethics of care simultaneously, to my theoretical framework. These two theories are discussed in more detail later in Chapter Two.

In Chapter One, I situated the research question: *How do Black feminist instructors who identify as spiritual define and embody pandemic pedagogy*? Chapter Two explores the literature related to this question in order to illuminate the relevant bodies of literature *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* is in conversation with. Specifically, I review the literature on three topics: 1) Black feminist instructors in postsecondary education, 2) postsecondary instructors who

identify as spiritual, and 3) embodied pedagogies in postsecondary education. To situate these related bodies of research, I will start by overviewing critical pedagogy as a central framework for centering and challenging issues of power and politics in the classroom. Afterward, I discuss each topic within the umbrella literature of critical pedagogy to exemplify that what draws these topics together is the critical pedagogical perspectives and strategies employed in each. I conclude Chapter Two with a brief description of the two Theoretical Frameworks that were applied to my study's methodology: Black feminist ethics of care and Critical Religious Pluralism Theory.

Critical Pedagogy: The Umbrella Literature

Liberatory education is not a discipline or theory. Rather, it is "grounded in the space *between* [emphasis added] theory and practice" (Jefferson et al., 2018) influencing both "in the interests of justice and solidarity" through education (McLaren & Jandric, 2017, p. 632). One manifestation of theory and practice in liberatory education is critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is an umbrella term coined by Henry Giroux in the early 1980s. It encompasses multiple frameworks of emancipatory education that utilize a critical lens, including liberatory pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy, and anti-racist pedagogy among others (Parson & Ozaki, 2020). "A critical [pedagogy] paradigm interrogates how systems of power, privilege, and oppression shape individual identity development and links the individual with larger societal forces" (Shaheen, 2020, p. 96). Paulo Freire first cultivated the practices of critical pedagogy in the early 1960s as an intervention to improve the literacy rates of poor communities in post-colonial Brazil so that the approximately 2,000,000 illiterate people living there at the time would be able to vote (Freire, 2017). Because of its many applications, defining critical

pedagogy "is inherently unstable" (Neumann, 2011, p. 617). Across various critical pedagogy frameworks (see Parson & Ozaki, 2020) I have identified four key outcomes, factors, and actions that characterize critical pedagogy: examination of context, critical praxis, conscientization, and collective liberation (Freire, 1987). In the next sections, I define the key constructs of critical pedagogy and overview some of the common barriers to enacting critical pedagogy in postsecondary education.

Context and Critical Praxis

The first key construct in critical pedagogy is context. In education, context is the relationships between the student, instructor, and the world at-large. Critical praxis, the second key construct, was initially developed as a Marxist philosophical concept (see Gramsci, et al., 2014). Its adoption into the educational vernacular is widely attributed to Freire, who defines praxis as "reflection and action upon the world to transform it" (Freire, 1989, p. 36). This transformation is evident in the elimination of power dynamics that reify the oppression of dominant groups over subordinates. For example, Freire's application of praxis was derived from his work with impoverished and illiterate people in his homeland of Recife, Brazil as they attempted to recover from Portuguese imperialism. Critical praxis, which maintains critique of oppressive structure and dominant norms, is also the concept which underlies the dual tenets of reflection and action that drive critical pedagogy (Oldenski, 2002).

Reflection and Action

Reflection in critical praxis is explicitly aimed at producing awareness of harmful structures and systems of dominance—including racism, sexism, class exploitation, ableism, cisgenderism, ageism, and imperialism—by examining one's complicity within these systems,

and then taking action to resist them (Freire, 1989; hooks, 1994)**.** In critical pedagogy, solidarity and dialogue are two specific action strategies that inform critical praxis. Solidarity is the conscious decision to fight at the side of the oppressed to transform their reality (Stenberg, 2006; Oldenski, 2002). Dialogue is a tool to "give voice to the subversive memory of the poor" that is used to amplify the lived experiences of those who experience marginalization as they question and challenge dominant structures (Stenberg, 2006, p. 273).

Conscientization

Originally coined by Freire, conscientization is a construct that captures and informs an individuals' "sense of the larger context, the larger forces that shape and mold not only who we are but our projection of where we want to go" (West, 1993, p. 227). Related to the concepts of critical consciousness and "wokeness," conscientization is the realization that "individual experiences with injustice are part of a collective experience of injustice" (Grier-Reed et al., 2019, p. 22). It is activated by discovering the root causes of oppression, organizing in solidarity and dialogue with those who are most affected, and taking coordinated action to resist it (Boff & Boff, 1989). Conscientization is also a product and prerequisite of critical pedagogy's central mandate: education for liberation (Oldenski, 2002; McLaren & Jandric, 2017)

Liberation

The final construct in critical pedagogy, liberation, requires "conversion to the other, the resistance to oppression, [and] the attempt to live as though the lives of others matter" (Welch, 1985, p. 87). Boff, Rivera, and King (1980) echo this sentiment in their description of the spirituality of liberation which entails:

solidarity with one's class, participation in community decisions, loyalty to the solutions

that are defined, the overcoming of hatred against those who are agents of the

mechanisms of impoverishment, the capacity to see beyond the immediate present and to

work for a society that is not yet visible and will perhaps never be enjoyed. (p. 376)

Despite this call to action, working for liberation is not a major priority in U.S. education

(Giroux, 2013). It is, however, a priority for Black feminists. What follows is a discussion of

some of the key sociopolitical and epistemological barriers that hinder the adoption of critical

pedagogy at HEIs, and the ways that Black feminist pedagogy resists and transforms them to

support liberatory education.

Barriers to Critical Pedagogy in Postsecondary Education

There are myriad challenges and barriers to enacting critical pedagogy in postsecondary

education (see Giroux, 2013). Currently, the pervading sociopolitical climate in the U.S. is

hostile towards critical frameworks being applied in K-12 and postsecondary education

(Sawchuk, 2021). Simultaneously, the culture of neoliberalism (see Jackson & White, 2020;

Kezar et al., 2019) adds further complications to maintaining the dialogue and social

relationships necessary to enact critical pedagogy at HEIs. The university industrial complex (see

Canella & Miller, 2008) and academic capitalism (see Slaughter & Rhodes, 2004) are byproducts

of neoliberalism, which have contributed to the loss of academic freedom (Jackson & White,

2020). Neoliberalism has also co-opted the purpose of teaching to be transactional rather than

transformative (see Giroux, 2015) by over-emphasizing students' job readiness rather than their

development of critical consciousness. This practice has negatively impacted students' learning

experiences HEIs, as their needs, prior knowledge, lived experiences, and individual goals are left unexplored.

Since before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the pedagogical strategies postsecondary instructors have employed for their students have sometimes functioned to reproduce social inequalities (Giroux, 2021). In addition to challenges in the sociopolitical environment, teachers' beliefs about education can affect whether critical pedagogy is part of their teaching methods in practice (see Northcote, 2009). Epistemologies are one way in which teachers' beliefs about the meaning and legitimacy of certain forms of knowledge can be manifested in the classroom. The epistemological dimension of teaching and learning comprises "what students are expected to know and be able to do" (Ornellas et al., 2019, p. 3). What an instructor values from an epistemological standpoint can "inform their use of specific instructional strategies that, in turn, impact on the quality of student learning" (Northcote, 2009, p. 70). Positivism, for example, is an epistemology that is antithetical to critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2013; Jackson & White, 2020). Positivism pushes for the social sciences to be molded against the assumptions and methods of the natural sciences through its "preoccupation with the instrumental use of knowledge," which is tied to the notions of objective neutrality and scientific conclusions as superior to values, feelings, and subjectively defined knowledge (Giroux, 2013, p. 33). This is diametrically opposed to the complex interplay of personal reflection, acknowledgement of power, ideology, and lived experience which inform critical pedagogy.

Positivist epistemologies can lead to the reproduction of dominant norms in education. A primary example of this is what Freire termed the "banking" concept, whereby an instructor "bestows'" knowledge upon students, acting on the perception that students have an inherent

deficit in understanding and knowledge of their own (Freire, 2017, p. 45). Banking education, and the deficit lens that informs it, is perpetuated by "degrading students' prior knowledges, [and the] colonization of settler groups where the values and attributes of certain other groups are backgrounded and rendered invisible in the curriculum" (Leibowitz and Bozalek, 2016, p. 6). Prevalent assumptions about what is considered real knowledge (Giroux, 2013); whose knowledge and experience is most credible (Loya, 2020); and whether social justice is an appropriate consideration in teaching and learning (Parson & Major, 2020) have made it so that critical pedagogy is not widely adopted into teaching and learning practices. Furthermore, hegemonic practices in teaching and learning such as banking education (Freire, 2017) and the prevalence of educational psychology myths and fallacies (Lester, et al., 2020) continue to hinder instructors' ability to meaningfully incorporate critical pedagogy for student learning.

While these epistemologies and practices can manifest in individual choices and psychologies, such as in the example of Northcote (2009), they can also exemplify the beliefs and values of institutions (Fraser, 2009). It is well-documented in the literature that HEIs have an inherent epistemology of deficiency, or a deficit lens, toward underrepresented and marginalized students (Yosso, 2005; Leibowitz and Bozalek, 2015; Loya, 2020). Contrarily, teaching and learning using critical pedagogy requires instructors to actively resist these dominant norms and harmful epistemologies, whether they exist within themselves, within their discipline, or within their institution. Having established their shared roots in the constructs and challenges of critical pedagogy, in the next sections I offer an overview the literature on Black feminist instructors, instructors who identify as spiritual, and instructors who utilize embodied teaching strategies as forms of resistance in postsecondary pedagogy.

Black Feminist Pedagogies: Centering Black Feminist Instructors

My working definition of a Black feminist is a person of any race or gender who defines themselves as a Black feminist and who ascribes to and embodies a Black feminist politic and worldview; my definition is inclusive of those who identify as womanist. DeLoach and Young (2014) offer this helpful definition of womanism:

> Alice Walker's *Womanist* is "one who values the soul and the well-being of the black community," not just Black women. She is "committed to the survival and wholeness of her entire people, she loves the spirit, the Folk, women, and herself" (Aldridge, 2003, p. 192). Thus, the term "womanist" expresses African-American feminist consciousness while being fundamentally culturally and community oriented. The term womanist consciously connotes an inclusiveness of race, social class, and sexuality. It appreciates and embodies Black women's culture and the community of women while opposing a separatist gendered ideology that may situate Black women against Black men. Indeed, such a positioning is counter to the cultural continuity reflected in Womanism and may reflect a more Eurocentric praxis. To this end, Womanism seeks to celebrate the power inherent in Black women's ability to negotiate subjugative spatial locations, including that within academe and ideological discourse in general. (p. 2083)

I am intentionally contrasting the theory and practice of Black feminism with that of womanism throughout this study for two reasons. The first is that I identify as a Black feminist and, as will be discussed in Chapter Three, I am one of the "primary instruments" in a study (Ravitch & Carl, 2020, p. 5). The second is that Black feminism is a political praxis, theorized through the frameworks of Black feminist thought (BFT), which has more breadth and applicability to the

core constructs of this study, namely spirituality, embodiment, and pedagogy, than womanism does. BFT is "an intellectual tradition" that "embraces more than womanism, Blackness, or African Studies" (Olomade, 1994, ix). Patricia Hill Collins (2009), a founding theorist of Black Feminist Thought, identified six distinguishing features of BFT that, when they converge, encapsulate its capaciousness, inclusivity, and political expediency.

Features of Black Feminist Thought

The first distinguishing feature of BFT is that its constructs are derived from the lived experiences of Black women in the United States as we "participate in a *dialectical* relationship linking African-American women's oppression and activism" (Collins, 2009, p. 25). In practice, this means as Black women navigate and contend with intersecting systems of oppression in the U.S. (see Crenshaw, 1991) our encounters with these systems are considered authoritative to inform the social and political knowledge and strategies of BFT. A second distinguishing feature of BFT are the tensions that emerge when linking the diverse lived realities and perspectives of Black women in the U.S. with ideas and frameworks that can be utilized by them as a collective (Collins, 2009, p. 28). Relatedly, a third distinguishing feature of BFT is its assertion that "knowledge for knowledge's sake is not enough—Black feminist thought must be both tied to Black women's lived experiences and aim to better those experiences in some fashion (Collins, 2009, p. 35). Thus, BFT explicitly advances social justice projects across identity groups, both nationally and transnationally (McLaughlin, 1995). This is achieved through the epistemic centrality of Black feminism's primary claim: "If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression" (Taylor, 2017, p. 7).

Lastly, "a fourth distinguishing feature of Black feminist thought concerns the essential contributions of African-American women intellectuals" (Collins, 2009, p. 37). Foremothers such as Anna J. Cooper, Ida B. Well, and Mary Church Terrell embodied this construct through their stalwart commitment to self-definition and their ability to foster effective coalitions with other groups (Collins, 2009). This practice of coalition-building rather than separatism, in particular, exemplifies the invitation for non-Black and non-women folks to join in the liberatory struggle that Black feminists take on. Coalition building is essential to the fifth distinguishing feature of BFT: its relationship to other projects for social justice.

Even as we fight to assert our autonomy and self-definition, Black feminist intellectuals understand "autonomy comes from a position of strength, separatism comes from a position of fear" (Smith, 1983, xi). We believe in principled struggle across coalitions through dialogue and engagement that is "based not upon expediency, but upon our actual need of each other" (Smith, 1983, xxxiii). The sixth and final distinguishing feature of BFT dynamism within our political framework and strategies for social change. As Collins (2009) asserts: "Neither Black feminist thought as a critical social theory nor Black feminist practice can be static; as social conditions change, so must the knowledge and practices designed to resist them" (p. 43). BFT is the theoretical foundation for Black feminist pedagogies (BFP).

Black Feminist Pedagogies

In 1993, Barbara Olomade offered this definition of BFP:

> Black feminist pedagogy is not merely concerned with the principle of instruction of Black women by Black Women and about Black women; it also sets forth learning strategies informed by Black women's historical experience with race/gender/class bias and the consequences of marginality and isolation. Black feminist pedagogy aims to develop a mindset of intellectual inclusion and expansion that stands in contradiction to the Western intellectual tradition of

> exclusivity and chauvinism. It offers the student, instructor, and institution a methodology for promoting equality and multiple visions and perspectives that parallel Black women's attempts to be and become recognized as human beings and citizens rather than as objects and victims. (p. 31)

The edited volume *Black Women's Liberatory Pedagogies: Resistance, Transformation, and Healing Within and Beyond the Academy*, stretches BFP to include "the multiplicity of meanings, forms, and outcomes" that may be "hidden or unacknowledged…that Black women engage within and beyond a higher education setting" (Perlow et al., 2018, p. 4). For Black women in postsecondary education, defining our pedagogical thought and contributions without limiting them to their academic or classroom-level impacts is especially important because "we have systematically been denied access to both [of these spaces], especially to higher education" (Perlow et al., 2018, p. 4). The inclusivity of Black feminist pedagogies to include way-making frameworks that are applied outside of formal education is reflective of the Black feminist commitment to honor and derive knowledge directly from the lived experiences of Black women.

I utilize Perlow et al.'s (2018) capacious definition of Black feminist pedagogy as a way of iteratively defining, embodying, and observing phenomena because this usage allows for the necessary breadth needed of all frameworks in liberatory education (Giroux, 2021). Yet, even with this breadth, there are two specific forms of political interrogation present in every manifestation of Black feminist pedagogy: 1) interrogations of the political structure of postsecondary education systems broadly, and 2) interrogations of the postsecondary classroom or learning environment. I will overview these methods of political interrogation in the next sections.

Structural Interrogations in BFP

Applying BFP to analyze Black women's role in the academy begins with the recognition that postsecondary education is an historically white institution. Thus, Black women's presence in these spaces can be fraught with "difficult reminders" of our outsider status within them through "controlling images of Black womanhood" such as loud, angry, hyper-sexual, ratchet, or sassy (Gilliam & Toliver, 2018, p. 85); and misogynoir or "anti-Black racism and misogyny worked against Black women" (Bailey & Trudy, 2018, p. 764). However, as Kessler (2020) reminds us: "Black feminism provides context and analysis of the ways in which Black women are both marginalized by and resistant to these inferior positions" in the academy (p. 24). For instance, in their study of the experiences and perceptions of Black women contingent faculty, Porter et al. (2020) developed a new pedagogical viewpoint on the institutional "marginalization of contingent faculty, intersections of identities inextricably linked to teaching, and devaluation of scholarly pursuits" from a Black feminist lens (p. 674). Porter et al. (2020) used their personal narratives to question the political structure of HEIs that impede their advancement through the faculty ranks. They also applied "intersectionality as an analytical tool [to] articulate how Black women's social location is impacted by [academic] systems that have embedded privileged, oppressive, and power-informed structures" (Porter et al., 2020 p. 679). Decades earlier, Olomade (1993) similarly interrogated the political structure of her institution and her role as an outsider within it using BFP.

Olomade (1993) challenged the role of "power and authority" that she was implicitly made to assume over her students as their professor, noting that "my condition and position in the society were (and are) sociologically and economically the same as my students" (p. 32), She

believed that her students "also reflected my own complex and contradictory marginality within the white-male-dominated academy" (Olomade, 1993, p. 32-34). After observing her "sister-students" combine their political power to push for more resources at their institution and for access to ethnic studies courses, Olomade (1993) learned through their organizing efforts that her struggles with navigating power and authority in the classroom "were part of a more critical inversion process" through which she could empower students and herself to "transform their institution and overturn those who would impose a 'foreign' understanding of the world upon them" (p. 37). As Black feminist pedagogues, political convergence and identification as part and parcel of those we teach to upend patterns of domination is an enduring example of BFP applied at both the structural and classroom level in postsecondary education.

Classroom Interrogations in BFP

As noted earlier, political interrogations of power and authority using BFP can be practiced in any number of spaces. Perlow et al. (2018) describe numerous physical and conceptual locations for the enactment of BFP including through movement (King, 2018); in activism and organizing spaces (Gines et al., 2018; Bonsu, 2018); and in spiritual practices (Atta, 2018; Harris, 2018). However, teaching and learning spaces within HEIs are the focal point for this study.

Enacting BFP in teaching strategies typically includes the application of a love-politic (hooks, 1994; 2003). "Black feminist traditions have long recognized love beyond its romantic connotations and posited it as an ethno-political practice" (Rifino & Sugarman, 2022). This shift positions "love as a theory of justice" that can be applied to teaching and learning practices (Nash, 2013, p. 3). Rifino and Sugarman (2022) offer this three-part definition of Black feminist

love-politics: "1) It is racialized, rooted in Black women's experiences of gendered and racialized oppression; 2) It is affective, refusing the binary between emotions and resistance; and 3) It is erotic, entailing corporeality and eros as an embodied desire" (p. 5). A fourth, but unlisted element of Black feminism love politics is self-love, which originated in the Black feminist tradition (Rifino & Sugarman, 2022). Using love as a tool for political interrogation in the classroom is a Black feminist strategy that supports wholeness, healing, and critical resistance to domination for students and instructors (Rifino & Sugarman, 2022).

Edwards (2018) described their understanding and application of Black feminist love politics to their work in the academy:

My pedagogical goal is no longer the transfer of information that silently reasserts narratives of domination. Instead, the goal of my teaching—in the classroom and in my writings—is uncompromised loving liberation. As I craft syllabi and prose, I am constantly aware of the paths that lead to unknowing and the tools my students and readers need to dismantle structures that require their bondage. This means calling on other storytellers in my work who express divergent ideas, developing classroom activities and projects that require the application of critical perspectives, and embracing as well as verbally acknowledging with my students the tension-filled pedagogical relationships that emerge in the process of challenging taken-for-granted assumptions. (97-98)

This is a concrete example of the application of Black feminist love-politics, which are a hallmark of BFP, into the structure and function of a learning experience.

Literature Gaps in BFP

In this section, I overviewed what BFT is and how BFP is derived from it. Then I gave examples of how BFP is applied to structural and classroom-level interrogations of political power dynamics. Some of the areas that are currently underexplored in the literature on BFP include: 1) BFP applications to remote teaching and learning; 2) empirical studies, rather than first-person reflections on how Black feminist instructors in postsecondary education sustain their pedagogical practice amidst the COVID-19 pandemic; and 3) an exploration of how spirituality informs BFP in postsecondary education. In the next sections, I provide an overview of the literature on instructors who identify as spiritual and spiritual pedagogy frameworks in postsecondary education.

Spiritual Pedagogies: Centering Instructors Who Identify as Spiritual

As I mentioned in Chapter One, there are many definitions of spirituality. To reiterate, I am intentionally distinguishing spirituality from the related concept of religion. Love and Talbot (1999) provided the following working definition of spirituality in postsecondary research:

> [Spirituality is] the internal process of seeking personal authenticity and wholeness; transcending one's current locus of centricity; developing greater connectedness to self and others through relationships and community; deriving meaning, purpose and direction in life; and openness to exploring a relationship with a higher power or powers that transcend human existence and human knowing. (p. 364-367)

This is the definition of spirituality I use when referencing it in the context of postsecondary education research and practice.

The working definition of the adjective "spiritual" that I used throughout this study was also discussed in Chapter One. To reiterate, I define persons who identify as spiritual as "having a consciousness of and attention to the order, power, and unity that flows through all of life and that encompasses an energy and responsibility greater than ourselves" (Dillard, 2022, p. 3). Thus, I define spiritual pedagogies as the teaching and learning strategies that do the same. The next sections overview relevant literature in the study of spirituality and spiritual identity development at HEIs, including literature on the experiences of instructors who identify as spiritual and their teaching practices in postsecondary education.

A Brief History of Spiritual Identity Development Research at HEIs

In 1999, Love and Talbot published the first peer-reviewed article on spirituality at HEIs in NASPA Journal. Understanding that this was an under-theorized topic in postsecondary education, Love and Talbot (1999) called for greater attention to students' spiritual identity development from student affairs scholars and practitioners. After their formative publication, over the last two decades, that call has been answered and college students' spiritual identity development has been more rigorously investigated (see Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000; Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2013; Patton et al., 2016; Snipes & Mason, 2020). The aspects of spirituality that have been historically explored the most in higher education center on college students' pursuit of purpose and meaning (Chickering et al., 2006; Parks, 2000; Lindholm & Astin, 2008). Currently, a growing number of sub-areas examining non-dominant experiences in spiritual identity development include the impact of race on spiritual identity development (Snipes & Mason, 2020; Park, et al., 2019); the role of gender in spiritual identity development (Richey et al., 2019); queer conceptions of spirituality (Weaver & Linley, 2020); and perspectives from

Non-Christians at HEIs including Buddhists (Schier-Happell, 2020), Muslims (Peek, 2005; Shaheen, 2020; Yousafzai, 2020) and atheists (Smith, 2011; Reisner & Mulvhill, 2020). However, empirical studies of postsecondary faculty and instructors' spiritual identities, attitudes, and pedagogical practices are less plentiful.

Instructors' Spiritual Identities at HEIs

In 2011, a team of well-known researchers on spirituality in postsecondary education, Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011), published the results of a 2004 survey that sought to better understand faculty's spirituality. They later followed-up in 2012 with the Faculty Beliefs and Values Survey (FBVS). Participants in the FBVS were 8,447 tenure-track faculty members from 264 HEIs throughout the U.S. When summarizing the results of the FBVS, Waggoner (2016) stated that "More than 80% [of faculty] felt that their professional and spiritual lives were at least somewhat integrated, and more than half reported a sense of calling in their work" (p. 151). These findings support my rationale for studying postsecondary educators who identify as spiritual; they appear to be a viable and engaged population of scholars. In addition, some scholars claim that faculty also stand to gain personally from increased emphasis on their spiritual experiences and perspectives at HEIs (see Terenzini et al., 1996; Lindholm & Astin, 2006).

Chang and Boyd's (2011) *Spirituality in Higher Education: Autoethnographies* also provided rich insight into faculty's experiences navigating the integration of their spiritual and religious identities with the demands of academic work (Galman, 2011). Faculty members express the relative integration between their work and spirituality by pursuing spirituality as a focus in their research agenda (Ngunjiri, 2011); teaching from a lens of religious pluralism

(Jacobs, 2011); centering spirituality in their activism (Boyd, 2011); and utilizing research methods that lend themselves well to the exploration of spirituality, such as ethnography and inductive data analysis (Saggio, 2011).

Lindholm (2014) also reported findings on the spiritual perspectives of FBVS participants in *The Quest for Meaning and Wholeness: Spiritual and Religious Connections in the Lives of College Faculty* that expressed some of the doubts and concerns that faculty had about incorporating spirituality into college students' experiences. For instance, 77% of faculty agreed that campus life should contribute to students' personal and professional development, but more than half disagreed that spiritual development should be included. Lindholm (2014) hypothesized that these faculty members' reticence to engage students in matters pertaining to spirituality may be due to fear of criticism by colleagues and perceived lack of knowledge to deal with the potential range of possible issues that may arise from such interactions. In the next section, I review literature that examines how spirituality factors into faculty's teaching and learning strategies, and in particular how student-faculty interactions and student-centered pedagogies can contribute to spiritual identity development.

Student-Instructor Interactions and Spiritual Identity Development

There is no shortage of literature outlining the importance of student-faculty interactions in shaping students' outcomes at HEIs. Social cognitive theories such as vicarious learning (Bandura, 1977), validation theory (Rendon, 1994), mattering (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981), and sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012) all emphasize the impact of interactions between students and faculty members "as one of the main educational practices affecting the attainment

of positive student outcomes" (Kezar et al., 2019, p. 111). When describing faculty's potential impact on students' spiritual identity development, Waggoner (2016) stated:

> When faculty encourage exploration of questions of meaning, introduce self-reflection and meditation in the classroom, model alternative viewpoints with integrity and respectfully, and are available for mentoring, positive outcomes for students increase in most every area: grades, satisfaction with college, [and] intellectual self-confidence, and increases in all five measures of spiritual development [equanimity, spiritual quest, ethic of caring, charitable involvement, and ecumenical worldview]. (p. 151)

One way faculty can promote spiritual engagement and development in their interactions with students is through their pedagogical choices.

Black Feminist Spirituality

Before I introduce spiritual pedagogies, I want to mention another important definition of spirituality that I explored in this study. This definition of "spirituality" comes from Akasha Hull (2001). Hull's (2001) definition of Black feminist spirituality that contains three specific elements germane to the tradition of BFT: "(1) our politics; (2) our spiritual consciousness; and (3) our creativity" (p. 3). Dillard (2022) added on to Hull's (2001) definition of Black feminist spirituality; she stated, "engaging [Black feminist] spirituality is also about using it to address, break down, and work to abolish structures and conditions that hamper liberation and freedom for Black people" (p. 3). I am operationalizing this definition of Black feminist spirituality because I want to make a delineation between the ways spirituality as a general term to describe institutional or individual dispositions, and how I understand spirituality as a Black feminist practice. Hull's (2001) definition positions spirituality as a set of values and beliefs that guide

and orient our lives as Black feminists, and as behavioral practices that help us to challenge harmful, dominant structures in our lives and bring us closer to wholeness and wellbeing.

Spiritual Pedagogies

The central premise of spiritual pedagogy is that by designing learning experiences around students' individuality and unique learning goals, instructors can help facilitate their spiritual growth (Shahjahan, 2010). According to Chavez (1997), for spiritual pedagogy to be enacted the instructor's approaches must be grounded in a practice of contextualized transcendence. As discussed earlier, contextualization in critical pedagogy refers to responsiveness to the lived experiences and impacts of power dynamics that students and instructors experience within and beyond the classroom. The transcendence of experience refers to critical pedagogy's emphasis on individual reflection for inner transformation and action for social justice. Transcendence is an inherently spiritual concept because it centers on imagining and believing in possibilities beyond one's current "locus of centricity" (Love & Talbot, 2009, p. 367). Thus, these pedagogical approaches may also have the impact of supporting students' spiritual identity development and exploration.

Spiritual Pedagogy Frameworks

Spiritual pedagogies engage concepts present in both spirituality and critical pedagogy such as ultimate concerns (Tillich, 1957), critical hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2009), and critical faith (Neumann, 2011). Curtis (2021) exemplified the relationship between spirituality and critical pedagogy through development of The Model of Spiritual Strategies for Postsecondary Pedagogies. Some examples of pedagogical frameworks that explicitly center spirituality and transcendence within the teaching and learning experience include:

- Sentipensante Pedagogy, "[a] teaching and learning approach based on wholeness, harmony, social justice and liberation" developed by Laura Rendón (2009, p. 132) which applies the multi-dimensions of contemplative and spiritual practices to: "a) quiet the mind to allow for cultivation of deep insights and personal awareness, and b) activate the senses as learners engage in social activism and self-transformation" (Rendón, 2009, p. 141).

- The Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm, which contains five concurrent constructs of Ignatian Pedagogy—context, experience, reflection, action for social justice, and evaluation— developed by Jesuit educators in 1993 (Korth, 1993). And

- Critical Contemplative Pedagogy, an epistemological framework that emphasizes instructional practices that promote non-duality, interdependence, impermanence, intentionality, and political consciousness, all of which are commonly regarded as spiritual values and characteristics (Kaufman, 2017).

These teaching and learning strategies also share the aim of supporting healing through social justice by inviting all students to engage in personalized learning experiences as they connect class material to their individual sense of purpose and draw attention to real-world concerns. As Shahjahan (2005) claimed, "centering spirituality requires us to blend emotion, our spirits, and embodied knowledge with critical analysis to make the study of equity and social justice inclusive to our diverse student body" (p. 303). In this way, practicing spiritually centered teaching and learning strategies at HEIs can be a direct way of promoting wholeness and healing.

Literature Gaps in Spiritual Pedagogies

In this section, I overviewed the two working definitions of spirituality I am using in this study, gave a brief history of spirituality in postsecondary education research, reviewed the literature on instructors' spiritual identities at HEIs, and reviewed several frameworks for enacting spiritual pedagogies. Some of the topics currently missing from the literature on spiritual pedagogies include 1) operationalizing Hull's (2001) definition of Black feminist spirituality in research on postsecondary teaching and learning, and 2) an exploration of how spirituality interacts with embodiment in the online teaching and learning space. In the next sections, I provide an overview of the literature on frameworks for embodied pedagogies in postsecondary education.

Embodied Pedagogies: Centering How Instructors Use Embodiment in Their Teaching

As I mentioned in Chapter One, my working definition of the term "embody" comes from the framework of bell hooks' Engaged Pedagogy (1994). For hooks (1994), embodiment means "see[ing] yourself always as a body in a system that has not become accustomed to your presence" (p. 135). She urges educators to attempt to deconstruct traditional biases via their bodily presence through tone, word choice, movement, and pedagogical choices (hooks, 1994). Her assertion of embodiment as manifested through personal "presence" is rooted in decolonial approaches that challenge the bodily erasure of Black, indigenous, and people of color through imperial logics and violence (Shahjahan, 2010). This definition is also identifiably a Black feminist conceptualization of embodiment through its emphasis on interrogation of structures that are hostile to Black women's bodies and the ways that we can use our bodies to reassert ourselves in a space, while making room for others to do the same. Furthermore, Black feminist

notions of embodiment like hooks' center the assertion of Black women's bodily autonomy, and our bodies as valid sources of knowledge in social systems that constantly try to silence, remove, and reduce us (Taylor, 2017). In the next sections, I share some of the common definitions and conceptions of embodiment in postsecondary education. I also name and challenge two common assumptions about embodied pedagogies: 1) that they are only relevant to certain disciplines and 2) that they are only applicable in physical learning environments.

Definitions of Embodiment in Education

Currently, most definitions of embodiment in education center on incorporating "the body and the experiences of its spatial occupancy" into the learning experience "through sense, perception, mind-body action, and reaction" (Chattaraj & Vijayaraghavan, 2021, p. 3). Bloom (1956) offers a familiar definition of embodiment in education as psychomotor or kinesthetic learning. Freiler (2008) and Stuckey and Nobel (2009) refer to embodiment through the lens of somatic learning or the learner's bodily awareness and attunement to sensations "during purposive body-centered movements" throughout the learning experience (p. 39). Embodied pedagogy has also been defined alongside experiential learning, or "service learning" and place-based learning in postsecondary education. These pedagogies usually require students to physically participate and engage with a community-based organization in a specific location as the context for their learning experience in a course or program.

However, unlike these authors, Lawrence (2012) considers embodiment within a framework for holistic, integrated ways of knowing, experienced and shared between the body, mind, heart, spirit, and intuition. Their conceptualization of holistic knowing incorporates and accounts for "the spiritual domain" of embodied learning. Lawrence and Dirkx (2010) state:

The spiritual domain "reflects a sense of the sacred, mystery or awe,
and is deeply connected with our emotions and our bodies". For example, a profound
spiritual moment may be experienced by unexpected chills, tears, or a felt sense of well-
being. (p. 149)

Lawrence's (2012) holistic conceptualization of embodiment is of interest to the present study

because of its clear incorporation of spirituality. Just as I hope that my study can forward the

assertion that spirituality is relevant to teaching and learning beyond the field of religious

studies, I similarly hope to advance the multidisciplinary relevance of embodied pedagogies.

The Multidisciplinary Relevance of Embodiment

In this study, I chose to intentionally explore the multidisciplinary relevance of embodied

pedagogies in postsecondary education through faculty learning communities (FLCs). Tinnell et

al. (2019) offer this helpful definition and overview of FLCs in postsecondary education:

For several decades, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have been a common
practice in the K-12 teaching community, and they provide means for teachers to learn,
share, and encourage each other to develop and test new pedagogies. More recently,
practitioners of higher education have adopted a similar community professional
development model to assist university teaching development and encourage pedagogical
changes, referred to as a faculty learning community (FLC). PLCs and FLCs are both
examples of communities that share a common interest and practice, known as
communities of practice (COPs). (p. 1)

Although it is not explicitly stated in Tinnel et al.'s (2019) definition, I also conceptualize FLCs

as multidisciplinary pedagogical spaces. I am also situating participation in FLCs as a practice of

embodiment. This epistemic shift allows FLCs to also be a space where instructors in higher

education can experience "the spiritual domain" of embodied learning (Lawrence & Dirkx, 2010,

p. 149). The definitions and applications of embodiment that I used in this study were expansive

and included transcendent psychosomatic practices such as tapping into one's intuition

(Lawrence, 2012), meditating (Shahjahan, 2010), and practicing breathwork. My capacious

understanding of embodiment also introduces a challenge to the notion of online learning as inherently disembodied.

"Dis"-Embodiment in Online Learning

The false assumption of disembodiment in online spaces plays into fatalist conceptions of pandemic pedagogies (Parson & Ozaki, 2021). This assumption comes from conceptualizations of embodiment that are explicitly spatial or deal only with "proxemics" and are thereby limiting (Jordon, 2001). Lawrence (2012) challenges this assumption and urges educators to understand embodiment in a holistic tradition. She asserted "people bring their whole selves and the sum of their embodied and affective lived experiences to the learning environment. To not honor all of these experiences is to dishonor the learners themselves" (Lawrence, 2012, p. 12). Instructors' choices in course design and facilitation can operationalize this definition of embodiment, even in online spaces. Specifically, when a Black feminist conception of embodiment is applied to teaching and learning, through the process of edification, offering spiritual support, practicing collective embodied vulnerability, and innovating through participatory action, the assumption of virtual learning as inherently inferior can be critically transformed. Developing these strategies via the novel construct *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* is the primary contribution of this study.

Literature Gaps in Embodied Pedagogies

In this section, I overviewed my working definition of embodied pedagogy and other conceptualizations of this term in postsecondary education. I also named and challenged the common assumptions that embodied pedagogies are only relevant to certain disciplines or to physical learning environments. Some topics that are currently under-explored in the literature

on embodied pedagogies include 1) embodied pedagogy in online learning environments, which is absent in recent publications on critical pedagogy in virtual learning (see Parson & Ozaki, 2021); 2) the relationship between embodied pedagogy and spiritual pedagogy, which can build on the work of Shahjahan (2010) and Lawrence (2012); and 3) a new conceptualization of the relationship between participatory action research methods and embodied pedagogies. In the next sections, I will provide an overview of the two components of my theoretical framework: Black feminist ethics of care and critical religious pluralism theory. In my explanation of these theories, I will also point out their embodied applications to my study's methodology.

Theoretical Framework

There are two critical frameworks that I used to guide my study. The first is the Black feminist ethics of caring. The second is critical religious pluralism theory. In the sections below, I will briefly describe each of these theories and their key components. I will also outline how each theory informed participant recruitment and selection, research design, participatory action research facilitation, and the interpretation of my results.

Black Feminist Ethics of Caring

The Black feminist ethics of caring (BFEC) are a set of strategies that outline the specific ways that care and concern for others are applied to dialogue for knowledge development and meaning-making processes within a Black feminist framework (Collins, 2009). The Black feminist ethics of care are different from the "ethics of care" commonly referred to in pedagogical and social situations where people are encouraged to be kind and polite towards each other (Mehrotra, 2021). Rather, the Black feminist ethics of care reflects an explicitly Black feminist epistemological premise, which, as with all aspects of Black feminism, is informed by

the lived experiences and perspectives of Black women as we seek to generate and validate new knowledge and strategies to eradicate oppression (Collins, 2009). I am applying the BFEC to my theoretical framework to address the "gap" I noted in the literature on embodied pedagogies. Currently, I have not identified studies that apply the Black feminist ethics of care as a theoretical framework to shape engagement in education.

According to Patricia Hill Collins, the three interrelated components of the BFEC, "personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy, are central to the knowledge validation process" (p. 281-282). The first component, personal expressiveness, which is also regarded as "individual uniqueness," names that "each individual is thought to be a unique expression of a common spirit, power, or energy inherent in all life" (Collins, 2009, p. 282). One aspect of Black women's lives in the U.S. that illuminates this value is the emphasis placed on personal expressiveness and authenticity in Black communities. Personal expressiveness plays into the knowledge generation and validation process by allowing each individual to show up as their full selves and bring their individual uniqueness to bear on questions of communal and collective importance.

Black feminists believe that the ideas presented by a speaker, or the knowledge claims that they make, are just as important as *the way in which* those knowledge claims are made (Tate, 1983). Thus, the BFEC explicitly names the "appropriateness of emotions in dialogues" as a necessary part of presenting and validating ideas. This second component of the BFEC is directly related to a third, "developing the capacity for empathy (Collins, 2009, p. 282). Empathy is a posture that promotes trust and understanding in dialogue through critical listening and authentically seeking to understand the lived experiences of another. The BFEC centers empathy,

the appropriateness of emotions, and personal expressiveness, as ethics that can imbue Black

feminist knowledge claims with greater meaning and help to "heal the binary that separates

emotions from intellect" (Collins, 2009, p. 282).

Applications of BFEC to the Present Study

The components of BFEC informed my facilitation strategies with participants in my

study. Using Black Feminist Action Research (BFAR) as my part of methodology allowed me to

apply BFEC within each step of my data collection procedure with participants. BFAR is a

critical qualitative methodology wherein BFT provides the theoretical grounding for

participatory action research informed by the co-researchers' lived experiences, with the aim of

collecting multiple forms of data to address a problem with social justice implications (Merriam

& Tisdell, 2016; Kemmis et al., 2014). A distinct feature of critical participatory action research

is that the study design is emergent, meaning it is developed by the co-researchers while data

collection is in-process, rather than prescribed for them beforehand and implemented without

their input. Creating room for self-definition by my co-researchers in my methodology is

consistent with the values and principles of BFT. It also allowed us all to show up more fully and

be able to engage the BFEC as we co-create the study together. My methodology is described in

greater detail in Chapter Three.

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Critical Religious Pluralism Theory

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The second critical framework that informs my methodology is Critical Religious

Pluralism Theory. As a Black feminist, I am committed to challenging systems of oppression

wherever I encounter them. This includes Christianity, which is a system I am implanted in

because I identify as Catholic. Throughout U.S. history, Christianity has been used as a tool to

catalyze colonization and expansionism, and as a "weapon for the conquest of indigenous peoples, and [to support] major beneficiaries of the American slave trade and slavery" (Wilder, 2013, p. 17). As a result of this foundation, colleges and universities in the United States operate with Christian hegemony, and oppression of indigenous and non-Christian minority groups as an ingrained part of their history, policy, and culture (Thelin 2011; Seifert, 2007). For instance, even as curricula became more secular during the Enlightenment era and began to consider topics like metaphysics and contemporary science, a college education in the United States still included learning and reciting Christian scriptures, prayers, and blessings (Thelin, 2011). To this day, Christian hegemony is pervasive at HEIs throughout the U.S (Seifert, 2007), though there are now more programs in place to promote religious diversity on college campuses. Specifically, many institutions attempt to promote religious pluralism.

Religious pluralism is commonly understood as coexistence and tolerance between a diverse faith community (Patel, 2013). HEIs work toward creating pluralistic climates by offering interfaith dialogues and other programming aimed at "the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference" (Eck, 2006, p. 2) and "the accommodation of human differences...to create a better society for all members" (Dalton & Crosby, 2013, p. 286). However, tolerance, coexistence, seeking understanding, and accommodation are all non-transformative approaches because they do not center equity or justice for those who are religiously marginalized due to Christian hegemony (Stewart, 2017). Furthermore, without a critical interrogation, notions of religious pluralism can exacerbate "the false neutral of secularism" (Small, 2020, p. 62). The false neutral of secularism exacerbates the illusion that HEIs and other institutions and systems are secular, when in fact they have always operated with

Christonormativity—or the implicit role of Christianity as the guiding norm for our inner

identities and outer social norms—at their core (Ferber, 2012). In other words, just because HEIs

and other U.S. institutions, including our legal and policymaking systems, are *supposed* to be

separate from religious influence does not mean they actually are.

 To address these issues, Small (2020) developed Critical Religious Pluralism Theory

(CRPT) as a social justice framework to support religious diversity through the disruption of

Christian hegemony and Christonormativity. CRPT is the second framework that I used to

structure my methodology. The primary goal of CRPT is to acknowledge "the central roles of

religious privilege, oppression, hegemony, and marginalization in maintaining inequality

between Christians and non-Christians in the United States" (Small, 2020, p. 7). The seven tenets

of CRPT according to Small (2020) are:

1. CRPT declares that the subordination of non-Christian (including nonreligious)

   individuals has been built into the society of the United States, as well as

   institutionalized on college campuses.

2. CRPT critically examines the intertwined nature of religion and culture and

   embraces an intersectional analysis of religious identity with race, ethnicity, gender,

   sexual orientation, dis/ability, immigration status, socioeconomic class, and all other

   forms of social identity.

3. CRPT exposes Christian privilege and Christian hegemony in society as well as

   the related concept of the false neutral of secularism.

4. At the individual level, CRPT advocates for a pluralistic inclusion of all religious, secular, and spiritual identities, recognizing the liberatory potential of these identities upon individuals' lives.

5. At the institutional level, CRPT advocates for the field of higher education to utilize a religiously pluralistic lens in all areas of research, policy, and practice, accounting for power, privilege, marginalization and oppression.

6. At the systemic level, CRPT advocates for religious pluralism as the means for resolving religious conflict in the United States.

7. CRPT prioritizes the voices of individuals with minoritized religious identities and those with pluralistic commitments in the work toward social transformation.

Applications of CRPT to the Present Study

The tenets of CRPT informed my effort to "embrace an intersectional analysis" of my participants' identities, "advocate for a pluralistic inclusion of all religious, secular, and spiritual identities," by analyzing the nuance and religious diversity among my participants, and prioritizing "the voices of individuals with minoritized religious identities" (Small, 2020, p. 62). To facilitate my study according to the CRPT guidelines, I took steps "to include all religious, secular, and spiritual identities, deliberately seeking out and emphasizing those identities that are frequently overlooked" (Small, 2020, p. 68). I frequently named and described what Christonormativity is with my co-researchers in effort to address the "false neutral of secularism," or the hegemony of being socialized as "culturally Christian," by participating in Christian traditions and benefitting from Christian privilege, without actually declaring a specific Christian identity (Ferber, 2012). CRPT also informed my approach to facilitating critical

interfaith dialogues with my co-researchers as we explored our spiritual identities. I share the

view of Edwards (2016) who states.

> discussing religious identity with a critical social justice approach requires careful consideration of the historical, social, political, and legal power imbalance between religious groups. Just as White and male hegemony have hindered people of color and women, so too has Christian hegemony in the United States caused oppression of religious minorities. (p. 26)

This critical approach is in strong contrast to "the current strategies and methods for interfaith

engagement in higher education [which] have been significantly developed by Interfaith Youth

Core and its founder Eboo Patel" (Carter et al., 2020, p. 29). Interfaith Youth Core's method for

increasing interfaith literacy among college students centers on "developing appreciative

knowledge, meaningful relationships, and positive attitudes across religious identities" with the

goal of alleviating prejudice and increasing understanding (Carter et al., 2020, p. 30). However,

tolerance, coexistence, seeking understanding, and accommodation are all non-transformative

approaches to promoting religious pluralism because they do not center equity or justice for

those who are religiously marginalized due to Christian hegemony (Stewart, 2017). In response

to this, in solidarity with Edwards (2016) and Small (2020), I chose to engage in critical

interfaith dialogue (CID) with my co-researchers.

I applied CID and CRPT jointly in my data collection process and promoted pluralism

when engaging my co-researchers by situating religious, secular, and spiritual identities as

"motivator(s) for personal, positive agency" (Small, 2020, p. 68). I also transparently report mine

and my participants' self-described religious, secular, and spiritual identities throughout this

study. In the discussion chapter, I elaborate on how these identities inform our spiritual practices

and approaches to pedagogy. By applying all of these strategies, my goal was to use CRPT to

garner diverse viewpoints on spirituality in teaching and learning, to be inclusive of the growing number of folks in the U.S. who do not identify as Christian but should have access to the benefits this study produces through *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy,* and to engender as many avenues as possible for healing through postsecondary education and pandemic pedagogical strategies that deviate from the Christonormativity of HEIs in the U.S.

Chapter Two Conclusion

In this Chapter, I overviewed the four literature bases that my study is informed by and contributes to: critical pedagogy, Black feminist pedagogy, spiritual pedagogy, and embodied pedagogy. I also overviewed the two critical components of my theoretical framework: Black feminist ethics of caring and Critical Religious Pluralism Theory. I have not identified prior work that has brough together critical pedagogy, Black feminist pedagogy, spiritual pedagogy, and embodied pedagogy—especially when thinking about online education. Therefore, I developed a pedagogical construct that allowed me to hold insights from these four literatures in mind as I moved into trying to design a study that would allow me the opportunity to experiment with enacting that which has not been tried before. In Chapter Three, I will describe my research design and outline the qualitative study I conducted to pursue my research question.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In Chapter Two, I situated my research questions within the literature on critical, Black feminist, spiritual, and embodied pedagogies. I also described the two components of my theoretical framework: Black feminist ethics of care (BFEC) and Critical Religious Pluralism Theory (CRPT). In Chapter Three, I describe the steps I took to create and facilitate a qualitative study, using critical participatory action research methods to explore and address the gaps in the literature I identified in Chapter Two. I begin by restating my research question and describe why I used qualitative methodology to answer it. Then I provide an overview of action research methods and introduce the novel approach I used to investigate my question, the Curtis Method, which is grounded in critical action research, Black feminist action research, participatory action research, and critical interfaith dialogue. Next, I describe my targeted approach to recruiting the co-researchers who led the study with me and provide information about their backgrounds and demographics. Afterward I describe the data collection methods I applied and enumerate my process for analyzing the data through transcripts and video footage. Finally, I conclude Chapter Three by describing the "Pre-Par Context" of my study, wherein I share about some key events that occurred in the process of applying the Curtis Method.

There is a difference between methodology and methods, which I want to briefly discuss so they are distinguished early on. Methodology is "the study—the description, the explanation, and the justification—of methods, and not the methods themselves" (Kaplan, 1964, p. 18). I will describe, explain, and justify my methods to situate my methodology over the next few

paragraphs, ending with the section titled "Overview of Action Research." Methods are "the practical activities of research: sampling, data collection, data management, data analysis, and reporting" (Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1318). After briefly laying out my rationale for using a qualitative methodology, I will focus my discussion on the methods I used in the bulk of his Chapter.

Research Design

The research question that I pursued is: *How do Black feminist instructors who identify as spiritual define and embody pandemic pedagogy?* Sub-questions included:

1. How do these instructors sustain their Black feminist pedagogical praxis as we continue to navigate the neoliberal pandemic?

2. What new directions for teaching and learning in postsecondary education do these instructors envision amidst the ongoing pandemic, in the 2022-2023 academic year, and beyond?

I was extremely wary of developing a new method for my dissertation at first. I did not want to undertake more work, adding even more intellectual labor to my already full plate. At my nine-to-five job, there is a premium placed on "not reinventing the wheel." And with good reason. The demands of my job mounted over the course of the year that I completed this study, and the last thing I wanted to do back in January 2022 when I crafted the methods chapter of my proposal was create a "novel" approach to my study design. I all but rolled my eyes at the idea. Yet, after numerous conversations with my committee chair and one of my readers, it became clear that refusing the opportunity to create a unique research design would be doing a disservice to my goals.

My purpose in this work is to facilitate healing. In order to do that, I thought I needed to show up in the work as fully as possible. So, despite my initial protestations, and my ongoing exhaustion, I took on the work of conceptualizing and deploying a new qualitative method to explore my research question. My heart broke along the way with the passing of my grandfather James Curtis II in April 2022, and I experienced numerous institutional challenges and roadblocks which I'll explain more about later. But with the help of my committee I persisted, struck out on a limb, and created something new, the Curtis Method, a novel framework for critical action research.

Qualitative Research Rationale

I have not identified prior empirical work that brings together critical pedagogy, Black feminist pedagogy, spirituality, and embodiment– especially when thinking about teaching and learning online. Therefore, I conducted a qualitative study to address my research questions by observing, analyzing, and later describing how Black feminist educators embody Black feminist pedagogy (BFP) and spirituality in their teaching practices during the ongoing pandemic. A qualitative approach was the most appropriate for my study because the research question I pursued was exploratory in nature (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative researchers endeavor to learn more about the "how's" and "whys" of individuals' experiences, rather than their statistical significance. Qualitative approaches also employ an interpretivist rather than positivist paradigm. "Positivism is the idea that only what we can empirically observe is important and that science is the only true source of knowledge" (Johnson and Christensen, 2017, p. 422). Interpretivism, on the other hand, contends that human beings, including the researcher and co-researchers, "are the primary instruments in a study" (Ravitch & Carl, 2020, p. 5). The details of

how I considered mine and my co-researchers' humanity in my study through an interpretivist paradigm are discussed throughout this chapter.

There are many different qualitative research methods, however there are several key components that are essential to the process of carrying out any qualitative study. Some of these components, according to Ravitch and Carl (2020), are: fieldwork and naturalistic engagement; process and relationships; and fidelity to co-researchers. Ravitch and Carl (2020) write that fieldwork and naturalistic engagement "means that the researcher is physically present with the people in a community (p. 10). However, as I mentioned earlier in my discussion of embodiment, one of the aims of my project is to stretch the notion of "physical presence" to include engagement in the online environment. Ravitch and Carl (2020) reiterate that "the important point" of understanding fieldwork and naturalistic engagement in qualitative research is that the study engages individuals in "settings that are authentic rather than contrived" (p. 10). As I will discuss later on in this chapter, for the present study this authentic setting was an online learning environment.

According to Ravitch and Carl (2020), "In qualitative research, process and product are viewed as inextricably linked since how data collection is structured and enacted affects the nature and quality of the data it generates" (p. 10). This was especially key as I facilitated a participatory action study wherein the data collection process was largely directed and co-constructed by me and my co-researchers. Finally, another tenet of qualitative research that Ravitch and Carl (2020) name, was perhaps the most important for my study: fidelity to co-researchers. They state.

Qualitative research takes an *emergent* design [sic] approach to research design and

implementation to preserve the researcher's ability to match the emerging complexity and

realities of people as they emerge through the research. This quality of adaptiveness is

central to protecting the authenticity of co-researchers' experiences and responses. (10)

My research design plan fully embraced this emergent approach. In addition to obtaining

informed consent from my co-researchers before the study began and offering pseudonyms to

protect their identities during and after data collection, I practiced fidelity to my co-researchers

by explicitly challenging and subverting the power dynamics between "researchers" and

participants." Working to conduct an action research study on Black feminism, spirituality, and

embodiment in pandemic pedagogy *with* my participants, rather than *about* them is a central

feature of the work we did together. The remaining sections of this chapter will discuss my

research methods. To start, I will provide an overview of what action research is and contrast this

method with participatory action research, which is the method that I used.

Overview of Action Research

As a qualitative methodology, action research involves "partnering with and including"

co-researchers in the study through co-construction of research objectives, data collection

processes, and validation of findings. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) there are three

general types of action research: technical action research, which aims to study ways to improve

control over outcomes; practical action research, which aims to study ways to improve co-

researchers' behavior; and critical action research, which aims to study ways to work for

emancipation of people and groups from unjust circumstances. My study utilized critical action

research to respond to the "unjust circumstances" that have arisen with pandemic pedagogies and

explored Black feminists' critical strategies for creating emancipatory teaching and learning experiences. With these aims at the core of my approach, Black feminist action research is one of the critical action research methodologies that I applied to my study.

Black Feminist Action Research

Black feminist action research (BFAR) is a critical action research method that centers the lived experiences of Black women as paramount and analyzes the unique interaction of race, class, and gender from which emerges the experience of African American women (Patterson et al., 2016; Mullings, 2000). BFAR is considered a critical action research method because it has a critical social theory, Black feminist thought, at its core to inform the methodology. I used BFAR to operationalize the BFEC component of my theoretical framework, and to ensure fidelity to my co-researcher's identities as Black feminist intellectuals who are contributing to Black feminist thought and pedagogy in their work. Although BFAR is an apt framework for this study, it is not a participatory action research (PAR) method. Because I decided to have a participant-led study, PAR is another method that needed to be incorporated alongside BFAR.

Participatory Action Research

Whereas action research is generally "oriented toward some action or cycle of actions…to address a particular problematic situation," in participatory action research (PAR), as the name implies, "participants act to a great degree as co-researchers" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In PAR, participants are given the opportunity to not only determine the direction of the lead facilitators' study, but also to act as action researchers themselves to conduct "PAR studies in their own communities to specifically challenge power relations and initiate change in their own communities" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 57). Furthermore, critical PAR studies "can

affect and transform people from both an individual and societal perspective" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 58). My goal was to facilitate a critical PAR study as an intuitive amalgamation of PAR and BFAR applied in tandem to create new knowledge with my co-researchers. A detailed breakdown of my critical PAR methods approach is discussed in the next sections.

Pre-PAR

The Pre-PAR phase of action research entails the work needed to set up the study, such as selecting a research question and completing an initial review of the literature (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For me, this phase of the study is when I secured funding to compensate my participants, obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the study, recruited my co-researchers, and collected data through individual interviews and the intro questionnaire. This phase is called "Pre-PAR," because it is not one of the four action steps of PAR (plan, act, observe, reflect), but it is still an important step for laying the foundation for the study.

Plan

The planning phase of action research is self-explanatory: the researcher plans what they are going to do. In the present study, the planning phase entailed scheduling times for our group convenings via a Doodle poll, sharing an overview of the study with participants, including a recap of the research question and model to describe the process of action research, and using our first CCP convening to set norms and discuss ideas for what our subsequent action steps could me.

Act

Although PAR itself is an iterative cycle of taking action toward addressing the research question, in the action phase of a PAR study the researcher begins to focus on taking actions that

can lead to changes or impacts that address the specific research question at hand. In a critical PAR study like this one, intentional attentiveness to power dynamics is considered a form of action. For example, "when participants are asked questions in interviews or in other forms of data collection about their experiences related to gender, race, class, or sexual orientation, the very act of talking about issues changes their consciousness about these things and hence invites change" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 30). Thus, in the CCP, all of our conversations around Black feminism and critical religious pluralism are considered a form of action, in addition to the steps we collectively agreed to take to address the research question.

Observe

The observation phase of PAR focuses attention on the results of actions taken thus far. This phase centers accounting for how the actions of the group thus far relate to the initial inquiry guiding the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For instance, in the CCP a core tenant of our study is the exploration of embodiment in the online environment. During observation, which, like the other phases of PAR, is concurrent throughout most critical qualitative studies, special attention was paid to note the "embodied moments" that arose during our convenings such as those from Lawrence and Dirkx (2010) as shared in Chapter Two: "a sense of the sacred, mystery or awe… unexpected chills, tears, or a felt sense of well-being" (p. 149). Another sub-question of this study that is related to embodiment and observation has to do with Black feminist pedagogical praxis. In this case observation was also used to evaluate the teaching and learning interactions within the CCP, which is rooted in the model of FLCs.

Reflect

Finally, the reflection phase of PAR is intended to hold space for the co-researchers to reflect on what we did together, and what they will do next as a result of the action steps taken thus far (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the present study, our reflection led to the development of a new scholarly collective called The Steal A/Way Collective for Empowered Pedagogy (The Steal A/Way Collective), because we realized that more spaces like the CCP were needed for Black women to thrive in the academy. A complete recap of the steps we undertook during PAR and how The Steal A/Way Collective came to be is included in Chapter Four. In the next sections I will introduce my novel study design, the Curtis Method[3], and describe in detail the ways it is informed by BFAR, PAR, CID, and FLCs.

My Novel Study Design: The Curtis Method

The Curtis Method (CM) is informed by my ontological perspectives as a spiritual person, Black feminist, and working professional in Learning Design and Faculty Development. I am also a human being seeking wholeness and healing in the midst of the pandemic. Therefore, I developed the CM to create and participate in a critical and loving space, where we can be in community as Black feminist educators. I will henceforth refer to the space my participants and I created as the CCP, short for Community of Care and Practice. I chose this name for the group to foreground its care-centered purpose, and to distinguish it from FLCs whose primary aim is pedagogical development (Tinnell et al., 2019). By creating the CCP I was seeking to participate in what I needed: a transformative, engaging, and uplifting space to be in community with other Black feminist scholars.

The Curtis Method (CM) aligns with my epistemology for each of the core concepts that my co-researchers and I explored in our CCP: Black feminist pedagogy, spiritual pedagogy, and

embodied pedagogy. Black feminist pedagogy is represented in the Curtis Method through Black feminist action research (BFAR). I applied BFAR to operationalize part of my theoretical framework, the Black feminist ethics of care. Spiritual pedagogies are represented in the Curtis Method through critical interfaith dialogues, which applied to operationalize the other part of my theoretical framework, CRPT. Lastly, embodied pedagogies are represented in the CM through PAR, and the structure and function of faculty learning communities (FLCs). Please see figure one below for a visual representation of how the CM and the components that inform it were facilitated in the CCP.

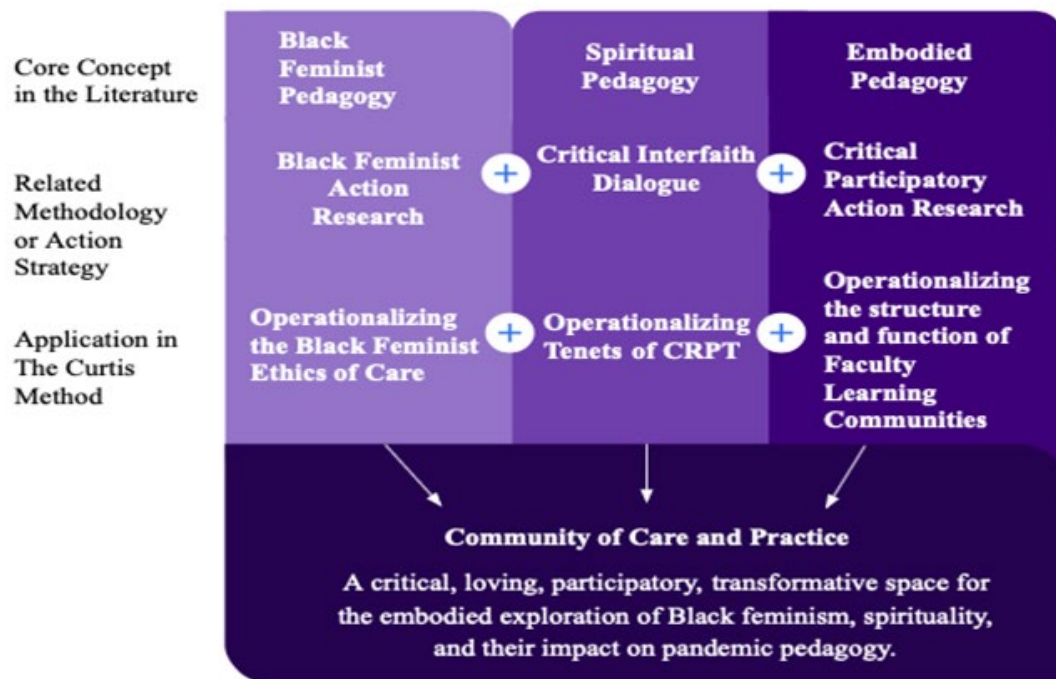**Components of the Curtis Method**

The CM is comprised of three core concepts from the pedagogical literature,—Black feminist pedagogy, spiritual pedagogy, and embodied pedagogy—three related methodologies or action strategies that correspond with the literature,—Black feminist action research, critical interfaith dialogue, and critical participatory action research—and finally a correlating application to operationalize each concept in the CM, namely, the concepts of my theoretical framework—the Black feminist ethics of care and the tenets of CRPT—and finally the structure and function of faculty learning communities.

The first group of interrelated concepts that comprise the CM are Black feminist pedagogy, Black feminist action research, and the Black feminist ethics of care (BFEC). As a reminder, my working definition of Black feminist pedagogy (BFP) is "the multiplicity of meanings, forms, and outcomes" that may be "hidden or unacknowledged…that Black women engage within and beyond a higher education setting" (Perlow et al., 2018, p. 4). BFP was enacted in my study through a partial adaptation of the methodology BFAR into the CM. Through the application of BFAR we also practiced the Black feminist ethics of care (BFEC)

which is one part of my theoretical framework, by promoting "personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy" as central to our data collection, data analysis, and knowledge validation processes (Collins, 2009, p. 281-282). This aspect of my method guided the CCP's exploration of mine and my co-researchers' Black feminist identities, our ethics of care, and how they show up in our pedagogical practices.

Figure 1

The Curtis Method: Core Concepts from the Literature and Applications to the CCP

Core Concept in the Literature	Black Feminist Pedagogy	Spiritual Pedagogy	Embodied Pedagogy
Related Methodology or Action Strategy	Black Feminist Action Research	+ Critical Interfaith Dialogue	+ Critical Participatory Action Research
Application in The Curtis Method	Operationalizing the Black Feminist Ethics of Care	+ Operationalizing Tenets of CRPT	+ Operationalizing the structure and function of Faculty Learning Communities

Community of Care and Practice

A critical, loving, participatory, transformative space for the embodied exploration of Black feminism, spirituality, and their impact on pandemic pedagogy.

The second group of interrelated concepts that comprise the CM are spiritual pedagogy, critical interfaith dialogue, and the components of CRPT that I am using in my theoretical framework. To reiterate from previous chapters, spiritual pedagogy is the process of designing learning experiences to help facilitate spiritual growth (see Shahjahan, 2010) using approaches grounded in contextualized transcendence (see Chavez, 1997), to help others imagine and believe

in possibilities beyond their current "locus of centricity" (Love & Talbot, 2009, p. 367). Critical interfaith dialogue (CID) was the action strategy I applied in the CM to support the process of enacting spiritual pedagogy. As an action strategy, I used CID to guide our discussions of religious identity with "careful consideration of the historical, social, political, and legal power imbalance between religious groups" (Edwards, 2016, p. 26). Practicing CID was also how I applied the CRPT aspect of my theoretical framework in the CM. I did all of this in an effort to resist Christian hegemony throughout the process of data collection. Resisting Christian hegemony is an important part of remaining critically vigilant toward dynamics of power and privilege, which is required in critical qualitative research (see Ravitch & Carl, 2020) and is also required of those who identify as Black feminists (Collins, 2009).

Finally, the last group of interrelated concepts that comprise the CM are embodied pedagogy, critical participatory action research, and the structure and function of faculty learning communities. To reiterate, this is my working definition of embodied pedagogy: teaching and learning strategies that allow instructors and students to "see [themselves] always as a body in a system that has not become accustomed to your presence" and to attempt to disrupt systems of domination by affirming yours and others' bodily presence through tone, word choice, stillness, movement, and pedagogical processes (hooks, 1994, p. 135). Embodied pedagogy was enacted in the CM through its critical PAR methodology. As I described earlier, utilizing critical PAR methods was key to the integration of embodied pedagogy in my study design because it considers the "bodily presence" (see hooks, 1994) of myself and my co-researchers and how our bodies participate in the learning experience (Spatz, 2017). Additionally, I endeavored to reconceptualize traditional FLCs by centering embodiment in the CCP's meaning-making

processes. My hypothesis was that in doing so, the CCP would be a critical and transformative space, centered on healing.

Now that I have defined the structure and components of this novel method, in the remaining sections of this chapter I will center my discussion on the role of my co-researchers as the leaders of this study. First, I will discuss my strategy for and conceptualization of recruitment and "sampling." Then, I will describe the process I undertook to invite folks to participate in the CCP.

Co-Researchers

The research question that I pursued is: "How do Black feminist instructors who identify as spiritual define and embody pandemic pedagogy?" My working definitions of the terms "Black feminists", "instructors", and "persons who identify as spiritual" directly informed my strategies for recruiting co-researchers. I define *Black feminists* as persons who, regardless of race or gender, define themselves as such and who ascribe to and embody a Black feminist politic and worldview. My definition is inclusive of those who identify as womanist (DeLoach & Young, 2014). I define *instructors in postsecondary education* as persons who teach at HEIs. My definition is inclusive of graduate students, contingent faculty, and all those who do not hold faculty appointments. Lastly, I define persons who identify as *spiritual* as individuals who "[have] a consciousness of and attention to the order, power, and unity that flows through all of life and that encompasses an energy and responsibility greater than ourselves" (Dillard, 2022, p. 3). Any person who embodies these three qualities and beliefs was eligible to participate in the CCP.

Recruitment

My approach to what I call "recruitment" aligned most closely with what is also termed "purposive sampling." Eitkan et al. (2015) define purposive sampling, also called "judgmental sampling" as:

> the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses. It is a nonrandom technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of participants. Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience. This involves identification and selection of individuals or groups of individuals that are proficient and well-informed with a phenomenon of interest. In addition to knowledge and experience, and note [sic] the importance of availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner (p. 2)

In the next sections, I am moving away from the language of" sampling." In facilitating a critical qualitative action study, my aim was not to identify a representative group of a population that allows me to theorize about the larger population as the word "sampling "implies. Instead, my goal was to convene a small group of folks who are dedicated to transformative teaching and learning, to engage with, learn from, and observe them in an action-oriented process. I also re-conceptualized what is commonly understood in research terms as a "selection process." In my strategy, I was extending an open invitation to potential CCP members, rather than "selecting" co-them to participate in the CCP based on strict criteria. In other words, I was less concerned with policing the personal identities of my co-researchers to determine their fitness to participate

in the study, and more concerned with understanding their interest and availability to engage with the CCP, and how their spirituality and pedagogical strategies I am studying showed up in their teaching practices and lived experiences.

Initially, my aim was to create a community of about six to twelve co-researchers because I thought, without much evidence, that this is the usual size for faculty learning communities or other traditional academic communities of practice. To find and invite co-researchers to join the CCP, I began by contacting the contributing authors published in Perlow et al. (2018)'s edited volume *Black Women's Liberatory Pedagogies: Resistance, Transformation, and Healing Within and Beyond the Academy.* While the authors in this book did not all explicitly name their Black feminist and/or spiritual identities, their contributions to the volume are all germane to Black feminist pedagogies so I logically considered them a promising group to ask for interest in participating in CCP. I researched the background of each of the books' contributors and composed an outreach message to those whose research focused on Black feminism and curriculum and pedagogy in higher education. I contacted 13 potential participants through this targeted recruitment approach. Four of them accepted my invitation to participate in the CCP. Ultimately, three out of the four co-researchers who were with me in the CCP were contributors to *Black Women's Liberatory Pedagogies*; one is a professor whom I met through a colleague. Information on the CCP members' backgrounds and demographics are included in Table 1 and described in the sections below. I am using direct quotes from my co-researchers in descriptions of their backgrounds and identities to accord them the agency of describing themselves in their own words.

Table 1. Co-Researchers Backgrounds and Self-Reported Identities

Pseudonym and Pronouns	Race	Ethnicity	Location	Sexuality	Gender	Religious, Secular, and/or Spiritual Identities
Athena (she/her)	Black	African American	Chicago, IL, USA	Heterosexual	Cisgender Female	Christian (Spiritual Liberationist)
Melba (she/her)	Black	African-Caribbean	Bedfordshire, United Kingdom	Heterosexual	Female	Christian
Leigh (she/her)	Black	African American	Miami, OH, USA	Heterosexual	Cisgender female	Spiritual
Tisha (she/her)	Black	Black American	St. Louis, MO, USA	Heterosexual	Woman	Christian

Melba

Melba teaches undergraduates and masters students in sociology and in the department of education studies at a large public research institution about 30 miles north of London, U.K. She was initially unsure whether her being based in the U.K. would prohibit her from participating in the CCP. I assured her that I was happy to have her participate and that I was happy to be amenable to your needs as far as scheduling our group meeting times. Melba primarily works with individual doctoral students rather than teaching traditional courses; her students apply individually to do their doctorate with her for projects that focus on race and education. She also works with other faculty to offer doctoral students training in research methods.

Melba described herself as "Black Caribbean or African Caribbean," and stated that her racial and ethnic identity are the same. She is originally from Jamaica and currently and identifies as "heterosexual and gender female." She does also identify as a black feminist,

specifically guided by the framings of Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks, as well as Alice

Walker's womanism. Interestingly, she stated that she began as a Black feminist and then

transitioned more into operationalizing womanism when she engaged more with colleagues

who are womanist. She now locates herself within that in community. However, in her writing

she often returns to Black feminism.

Melba's religious identity is Christian, and she added that in her life she'd been

attending a mixture of "Black churches" such as the Church of God in Christ, Seventh Day

Adventist, and more. When I asked about her understanding of Christian hegemony, I was

surprised and encouraged with how quickly she knew what I was talking about. I said, "Being

in the West, the UK and the US, Christianity is a hegemonic presence," to which she

immediately replied, "definitely." She also gave examples of how Christian hegemony can

manifest through the wealth of the broader Christian church (land, houses, etc.) and in terms of

how the UK and the US will position Christianity in a hierarchy as the faith of the country; she

also called back to the sanctions that President Trump instituted against Muslims. When I

asked Melba if she was a spiritual person, she said yes, although no one had ever asked her that

before. When I prompted her to think about spiritual practices as things that she may say or

repeatedly do, she said "I think I do embody it, but I don't walk around with a label saying,

'I'm spiritual,'" emphasizing that, for her, "faith is inward."

Leigh

Leigh is an Associate Dean and Professor at a large, public research institution in the

Midwestern United States. She grew up in a family "where loving Blackness was a metaphor

for loving ourselves." Her parents were very committed to Black nationalist politics in their

community in Detroit, Michigan. She also grew up Catholic, in a Black nationalist context, which she described as "interesting and yet problematic." Leigh identifies as a "cisgender heterosexual female." Her racial and ethnic identity are "Black, Black, and Black."

Leigh is passionate about teaching. "Teaching in a way, was in my soul. For me, it was always gonna be a thing for me. I was teaching long before I got a teaching degree." She has been teaching at her current institution for over 20 years. Leigh doesn't teach as often due to her administrative responsibilities as Associate Dean, but she teaches a race and education seminar that has a different focus every year. She stated, "Teaching is an act of faith. I want my classroom to be an experience. I don't play by the rules." Leigh is also a scholar of curriculum and instruction, with a critical lens on the ways that institutions have overly structured and formalized teaching and learning. For example, she stated, "School has a function, but it can't love Black children" and "I avoid grading. Grading is a violation of who we are as human beings." Her identity as a Black feminist informs and shapes her teaching practice and her research. She describes her work as constantly "trying to think about all the pieces of myself that I bring to the work that I do. And that's Blackness, that's Black feminist identity and aesthetic."

Leigh does still identify as Catholic, but she attended lots of different churches with friends growing up including a short period of time studying in the Nation of Islam. For her, religion is a tool, and she does not conflate her whole sense of spirituality with Christianity. "Religion is not something you are. It's something you use." Her spiritual practices are "a hodgepodge of things," thus Leigh expressed that she does not identify as someone who benefits from Christian privilege. Some examples of Leigh's spiritual practices are that she

meditates and prays. She also described Black feminist scholarship, specifically works by bell

hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, and Audre Lorde as a "source of spirituality" for her.

Tisha

Tisha is an Assistant Professor at a mid-size public institution in the Midwestern United

States. We met before in our work together for a curriculum development project for a non-

profit organization. She is the only person I knew prior to the summer of 2022 when data

collection was completed to whom I extended a direct invitation to join the CCP; all other CCP

members were recruited via general outreach to contributors to *Black Women's Liberatory*

Pedagogies: Resistance, Transformation, and Healing Within and Beyond the Academy.

Tisha is in her second year on the tenure track. She is also co-director of the college

student personnel/higher education program. Almost all of Tisha's teaching career has taken

place during the pandemic. Tisha also has the largest teaching load out of all CCP members,

teaching four semesters back-to-back. She was initially teaching four sections of a practicum

course about how to connect practice to theory; she has also taught an elective on diversity in

higher education, a student affairs elective, and a research methods course. Tisha mentioned

that she learned about what she did and didn't want to be like as an instructor from watching

other teachers and from books, primarily the works of bell hooks.

When I asked about her race and gender identity, Tisha stated "I'm a Black woman."

Specifically, Tisha identifies as a "cis-het Black woman," meaning that she is cisgender and

heterosexual. She responded a bit hesitantly when I asked if she identified as a Black feminist.

"Yes, I think I do," she answered. "I try to keep Black women in the forefront of everything I

do." She went on to say, "Black women are what fuels me, especially in her support of my two

Black women doctoral students. That is why I do what I do. And who I do it for. When Black women are protected and we win, then everybody else wins, because we always take care of everybody."

Tisha's religious identity is Christian. However, she clarified, "I don't lead with saying "I'm a Christian," in her interactions with others. Related to religious pluralism, Tisha expressed that she is more aware of holidays and privileges shaped around Christianity in her institution and in the US, particularly around religious holidays and scheduling exams and assignments; she tries to be mindful of this when setting up her syllabus, bringing it back to teaching. When I asked about her spirituality, she shared "I identify as spiritual in that I know God speaks to me through the Holy Spirit." For example, she believes her spirituality is what grants her the right words to say to comfort students in challenging circumstances.

Athena

When Athena first began her career in higher education, she was primarily interested in Student Affairs. She initially wanted to be Dean of Students. "I needed to be a good soldier," she said, so she focused her career on being a student affairs supervisor, taking jobs in residence life. She did a lot of counseling centered work with her students, and she also worked in disability services, supporting transitioning students with individualized education plans. "I am a better faculty member because I was in student affairs," she stated. "Student affairs has allowed me to really massage the ethic of care and compassion… taught me how to deal with the bodies…the individual bodies in the classroom."

Athena prefers the word "Black" for her race and ethnicity. "I define myself as a Black woman, a little bit country, a little bit city," Athena stated. She moved from Cleveland, OH to Arkansas in the late 1980s. It was extremely segregated, extremely racist in her experience.

From this time in her upbringing, she learned coping skills and survival strategies. Athena's self-described gender and sexual identities are "cisgender female and heterosexual." Athena also identifies as a "Black feminist thinker," elaborating that she "sees herself…as a thinker, as solution oriented, as an activist, as a change agent, as a pioneer, and a trailblazer."

Athena also shared that while she understands Black feminism, "I identify more as Black womanist. It allows me to critique the world from a lens where I am at the center." She stated, "I consider myself spiritual, not religious. I celebrate Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I am a Christian, but I am very much pro-choice. Spirituality is something that I define; it has to do with me operating my life." In addition, Athena also recognizes her Christian privilege as someone who "does bring it [her Christian identity] into everything I do in some shape, form, or fashion," however, she was adamant that when she does talk about faith in public, Athena centers the message of "love your neighbor as yourself." She is very specific about when and where she uses these messages of faith because she doesn't want people thinking she is trying to indoctrinate them.

Co-Researcher Consent and Compensation

It was an emotionally challenging decision for me to ask my co-researchers for their support in completing my study, especially considering the time commitment of completing an individual interview and the four phases of data collection. Black women, in particular, are disproportionately expected to perform service-oriented and uncompensated labor through advising, mentorship, emotional support, and presence for and with graduate students, especially other Black women graduate students such as myself (Porter et al., 2020). Therefore, practicing the qualitative research tenet of "fidelity to my participants" was a high priority for me even

before the formal launch of the study. Two important ways that I embodied this commitment

were: 1) by obtaining my co-researchers' informed consent to engage in all parts of the study,

and 2) in the prorated compensation I offered them. On the consent form, I included the

following information about compensation for participating in the CCP:

> The five stages of data collection are 1) individual interview; 2) Group meeting 1: planning; 3) group meeting 2: taking action; 4) group meeting 3: observation and 5) reflection questionnaire. Participants who complete the interview and participate in all 4 group meetings will be eligible to receive $250 paid in $50 increments for each milestone that they complete. Payment will be distributed electronically via Venmo, Ca$hApp, and/or Zelle. I will track the participants' completion and payment distribution for each milestone in a 2-factor authenticated, password protected Google spreadsheet.

To view the full consent form, please see Appendix A. More information about the process I

underwent to ensure I could compensate my co-researchers as I intended is discussed later in this

chapter.

Data Collection

Data collection followed the four phases of PAR according to Merriam and Tisdell

(2016): plan, act, observe, and reflect. This data collection process was appropriate for my study

because my immediate goal was to undertake iterative problem-solving with my co-researchers

aimed at improving postsecondary teaching and learning. My co-researchers and I collaborated

during each step in the PAR cycle and utilized the CM to facilitate an emergent study through a

cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting in all of our conversations. During each of

our meetings, I acted as both a participant, contributing to our conversations and exploration of

the research question, and as a facilitator working to ensure that we addressed each step of the

PAR cycle.

I chose to facilitate data collection virtually to support the flexibility of my co-researchers and to intentionally replicate the teaching and learning conditions of pandemic pedagogy, which my study seeks to explore, engage, and respond to. In the next sections, I will outline the steps my co-researchers and I took to explore my research question and address pandemic pedagogies for the lens of our identities and experiences as Black women, postsecondary instructors, and spiritual persons.

Data Collection Methods

In the next sections, I will describe the three primary data collection methods that I used in the order in which they were deployed: first the individual interviews, then the intro questionnaire, then the four CCP "convenings" or focus groups, and lastly the reflection questionnaire.

Individual Interviews

The interview protocol is included in Appendix B. Interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom which is a virtual video conferencing platform. After each interview, Zoom generated a transcript of our conversation. The recordings and transcripts are all securely stored in my two-factor-authenticated and password-protected Zoom account. As I stated earlier, the purpose of the interviews was for my co-researchers and I to get to know each other better, and for me to begin assessing and identifying themes for what my co-researchers would like to get out of the CCP and the directions they were initially interested in exploring in the study. I ultimately met my goal for the interviews: to welcome my co-researchers to the study and learn more about who they are and what they care about in relation to my research question.

I conducted individual interviews with each of my participants to get to know them better, to give them a chance to get to know me, and to learn about their interests and reasons for

participating in the CCP. These semi-structured individual interviews were completed before the first focus group meeting. Although the individual interviews I conducted are sources of data, they were not the primary form of data collected; the most important data came from the four CCP focus group meetings, also called "convenings," which correspond with each of the four phases of PAR: plan, act, observe, and reflect.

Intro Questionnaire

I administered two questionnaires: an intro questionnaire to collect data about my participants from their perspective, and a reflection questionnaire to give them space to elaborate on key themes from our meetings. Both the intro questionnaire and the reflection questionnaire were created and administered using Google forms. Each Google form was made securely through my two-factor-authenticated and password-protected Google account. The purpose of the intro questionnaire was two-fold. First, to allow potential co-researchers to share information about their backgrounds, teaching experience, initial understanding of the study's core concepts, and questions about the CCP with me. Second, the intro questionnaire also served as the second form of data I collected. The contents of the intro questionnaire are shown in Appendix C. The intro questionnaire was deployed and completed after my individual interview with each participant, and prior to the first CCP convening. All four CCP members completed the intro questionnaire.

Focus Groups

I facilitated four focus group meetings, which I also call convenings of the CCP, in alignment with the four phases of action research—plan, act, observe, and reflect (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These convenings were the primary source of data collected for this study; they

served as the space where my co-researchers and I shared in the dialogues and experiences that comprise the CCP. Each of the four focus groups lasted about two hours. Focus groups were also conducted and recorded via Zoom. After each convening, Zoom generated a transcript of our conversation and provided a downloadable record of any links or comments shared in the chat box. All recordings and transcripts are all securely stored in my two-factor-authenticated and password-protected Zoom account. A breakdown of the date and time of each focus group meeting and who was in attendance is shown in Table 2 below. A detailed description of the context, conversations, and findings of each CCP meeting is included in the next chapter.

Challenges With Scheduling CCP Convenings. One of the biggest challenges I encountered as lead facilitator of the CCP convenings was coordinating schedules. I sent out a Doodle poll in the beginning of the summer in the hopes that we could attain firm dates for all four of our convenings that would match with all five CCP members' schedules. What ended up happening, however, was that we were unable to meet as a complete group until phase three of data collection. I chose to conduct meetings with partial attendance to keep data collection going and ensure that we would be finished by summer's end because I thought this would be the best solution to ensure that mine, and my participants' schedules would be more open for our commitments during the academic year. During phase one of PAR, Leigh and Athena's schedules aligned at a time when Tisha and Melba's did not, and vice versa, so we met in separate groups to complete the planning phase. Our meeting for phase two of PAR was initially scheduled at a time when all five of us were available, but Tisha couldn't make it due to a family emergency, so we conducted the convening without her. Similarly, the initial date we scheduled to meet for Phase three of PAR was available for everyone, but then Leigh and Athena couldn't

make it due to unforeseen circumstances. In this case, I went ahead and canceled the meeting.

Finally, our last two convenings to complete phases three and four of PAR had all CCP members

present.

Table 2. Focus Group Dates, Times, Attendees, and Phases of PAR Completed

Phase of PAR	Focus Group Meeting Date	Co-Researchers Present
Phase 1: Plan	Jul 1, 2022, 11:58 AM Central Time	Leigh & Athena
Phase 1: Plan	Jul 11, 2022, 12:01 PM Central Time	Tisha & Melba
Phase 2: Act	Jul 15, 2022, 12:02 PM Central Time	Athena, Melba, and Leigh
Phase 3: Observe	Jul 27, 2022, 09:01 AM Central Time	Tisha and Melba
Phase 3: Observe	Aug 18, 2022, 09:05 AM Central Time	Athena, Melba, Leigh, and Tisha
Phase 4: Reflect	Aug 26, 2022, 10:00 AM Central Time	Athena, Melba, Leigh, and Tisha

Lead-Facilitator Memos and Reflexive Journaling and Observation Notes

During each focus group, in addition to recording the meetings and generating a

transcript of our conversation, I also took observation notes. Observation is not only a phase of

PAR; it is also an embodied and evidence-based method of pedagogical evaluation (Donnelly,

2007). My notebook of memos and reflections from my perspective as both a participant and

lead facilitator in the CCP is another form of supplemental data I collected throughout this study.

My dissertation notebook, which I purchased after a brunch date with my dear friend, has been a

space for me to continuously think and reflect, noting new questions and implications of the

study that arose throughout my writing process and in my interactions with my co-researchers in the CCP. It has given me a private space to practice reflexivity and to record my observations of what stood out during the individual interviews and focus groups.

Reflection Questionnaire

The purpose of the reflection questionnaire was to provide space for CCP members to reflect on their experiences and consider what they will do next or what changes they may make in their pedagogy because of their engagement in the study (Kressler, 2020). I also used the reflection questionnaire to allow CCP members to choose their own pseudonym to help with protecting their identity during data reporting. The contents of the reflection questionnaire are shown in Appendix D, and it was deployed after the final CCP meeting. Only three out of the four CCP members completed the reflection questionnaire.

Data Analysis

In this section, I will describe the process I underwent to analyze the data I collected. It is important to note, that although this is a PAR study, my co-researchers did not engage in data analysis with me. This was due primarily to challenges with scheduling and in the interest of expediency for me to complete the project, dynamics which are common in PAR studies (see Cahill, 2007). However, my co-researchers did weigh in on the themes that emerged from my data analysis in our member-checking process which will be discussed a little later, however I completed data analysis by myself.

Inductive Analysis

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) "qualitative data analysis is primarily inductive and comparative" (p. 202). Although comparative data analysis is generally attributed to the development of a grounded theory (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967), this method of analysis is also

considered inductive because it relies on clustering data that seem related to each other and then giving a name to that cluster, which can also be called a "finding" or "theme." I used these themes to explain and describe the actions taken by myself and my co-researchers as we endeavored to answer the research question (Cahill, 2007; Kemmis et al., 2014; Gardner, 2020; Gustavsen, 2005; Clemons et al., 2019; Guishard et al., 2021). In my analysis process, I focused on highlighting moments where we made progress toward naming the final output of the study: the formation of The Steal A/Way Collective. I also highlighted embodied moments from my observation notes and moments of poignancy and affect that I could see and hear from re-watching and re-listening to our meeting recording videos. I analyzed the interviews and focus group transcripts via single-person inductive, open-coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I also completed observational analysis of all the video recordings from each interview and focus group session. The steps I took in each of these methods of data analysis are discussed in the next sections.

Open Coding of Transcripts

My system for coding the data was not through the traditional method of assigning a "short word/phrase" with a larger symbolic meaning to a portion of the data (Saldana, 2013, p.3). Rather, I coded as I re-read each transcript and questionnaire response, and, using Google Docs, highlighted important or impactful moments and statements, especially those that stood out to me personally. Although it is common in qualitative data analysis to develop a codebook from the theoretical framework, I engaged in open coding, led by my intuition (Saldana, 2013). Open coding is "the process of making notations next to any bits of data that strike you as potentially relevant for answering your research question…because you are being open to anything possible

at this point" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 204). I also went with an open coding approach

because it aligns with my theoretical framework, the Black feminist ethics of care (BFEC),

which is an embodied paradigm. In accordance with this theory, I re-read the transcripts with

attention to the impactful embodied moments where my participants and I demonstrated personal

expressiveness, displays of emotion, and empathy (Collins, 2009). When I re-read a part of the

transcripts that made me feel or emotively respond to the data, through a sensation of awe,

consternation, or excitement, for instance, I noted those timestamps in the meeting transcripts,

highlighted them, and copy-pasted those segments of the transcripts into a separate Google Doc

where I was compiling the highlighted data to later sort into themes.

Observational Analysis

Observation is crucially important in teacher education and faculty development

(Donnelly, 2007). Bartanen and Kwok (2011) described how rubric-based observational data is

often used in teacher education programs at postsecondary institutions to evaluate pre-service

teacher development and signal their burgeoning areas of pedagogical strength and weakness.

Eddy et al. (2015) discussed how they developed a tool called PORTAAL to assess instructor'

application of evidence-based practices in their course design and facilitation. Middendorf and

McNary (2011) also used observational analysis to develop a rubric on the perceived authority of

white female postsecondary educators as a way of explaining the feedback these instructors

received from students in end-of-course evaluations. While my purpose in analyzing the data was

not to develop a rubric or assessment tool, I did use approaches similar to these authors to

substantiate my data analysis process through observation of the video footage.

After open coding the transcript data, I re-watched the Zoom recordings to pinpoint moments in the footage data where my co-researchers and I were embodying the Black feminist ethics of care (BFEC). As encouraged by Lincoln and Guba (1985), I freely made "tacit judgments" of the presence or absence of the tenets of the BFEC during my analysis (p. 340). I used a retrospective approach to analyze this video data because, as is often the case when analyzing data from teacher observations, "it is not practical to implement [analysis] in real time" (Eddy et al., 2015, p. 9). By marking the areas in the highlighted sections of the transcript where the embodied behaviors of me and co-researchers demonstrated the BFEC, I was re-analyzing the data for potential themes that connected to my theoretical framework. This process, along with my observational analysis process, connect my approach to coding with my overall methodology.

Developing Themes

Next, I grouped the data I highlighted together into possible emergent categories. At first I had 12 categories: (1) Institutional Barriers; (2) Black Women's Cyclical Struggle Across Space and Time in the Academy; (3) Defining Black Feminism; (4) Our Transformative Teaching Strategies; (5) Exploring and Understanding How Black Women Strategize to Thrive; (6) Exploring Black Feminist Impact; (7) Teaching Modalities in the Pandemic Era; (8) Safeguarding Our Work; (9) Black Women's Interiority; (10) Offering Support to Others; (11) Offering Support to Each Other; and (12) Naming and Exploring Black Feminist Space-Making.

Once observational analysis was complete, I shared this list of emergent themes with my co-researchers in a process called member-checking to assess the validity and reliability of my

findings. My co-researchers expressed agreement with my burgeoning themes. I asked for their assistance with clarifying a theme about "Gendered Experiences." After discussing this in our member-checking meeting, we agreed that rather than presenting "Gendered Experiences" as a theme unto itself, it could be analyzed in future works to illuminate the relationship of gender to all of the other themes. We decided that an in-depth analysis of the impact of our gender on the CCP's PAR process is important, due to our groundedness in Black feminist thought, yet beyond the scope of the present study.

After gaining clarity in the member-checking process, I completed analytical coding to narrow down and merge together the initial themes I developed. "Analytical coding goes beyond descriptive coding; it is coding that comes from interpretation and reflection on meaning" (Richards, 2015, p. 135). Through completing analytical coding, some of these categories were subsumed under others. To better capture the essence of meaning in my conversations with the CCP, I decided to rename my themes by pulling short phrases from direct quotes in each of our convenings (Saldana, 2013). Finally, I arrived at the four themes that I will discuss in the next chapter: (1) "Getting What We Want Out of It"; (2) "The Urgency of Being Vulnerable"; (3) "A Tendency to Think Bigger"; and (4) "I Say Go For It." Altogether the aim of my data analysis was to assess the critical context that informed our action steps and to develop themes that capture the impact of our coming together as the CCP in effort to address the central question: *How do Black feminist instructors who identify as spiritual define and embody pandemic pedagogy?*

Notating Context and Action in the Data

The purpose of PAR research is to make an impactful difference in the lives of participants, or in this case, my co-researchers (Cahill, 2007; Kemmis et al., 2014). As a critical PAR study, the CCP's work was also attuned to the context and power dynamics present in our convenings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, in addition to developing themes through my analysis of our interview and focus group transcripts, I also made note of the context of each of our meetings and how it contributed to the emergent themes. As I analyzed the data, I also noted and highlighted key moments of decisive action that addressed each phase of the PAR process, advanced the CCP's progress toward the formation of The Steal A/Way Collective, and incorporated Black feminist thought, critical interfaith dialogue, and pedagogical development as points of emphasis. The ways that these actions and context worked together to shape each theme is discussed in Chapter Four.

Pre-PAR Context: Navigating Loss and Obtaining IRB Approval

So far in Chapter Three, I described my methodology and detailed the methods I applied to create and facilitate a critical qualitative study grounded in critical action research, Black feminist action research, participatory action research, and critical interfaith dialogue. I provided an overview of action research methods and introduced the novel approach I used to investigate my question, the Curtis Method. I also describe my targeted approach to recruiting the co-researchers who led the study with me and shared information about their backgrounds and demographics, as well as my own. Now that I have described the data collection methods I applied and explained my process for analyzing the data, I will provide some additional contextual information about the process of receiving approval from the Institutional Review

Board to conduct my study, as well as how I went about selecting participants compensation. These events took place during the Pre-PAR phase of my study. To reiterate, this phase is called "Pre-PAR," because it is not one of the four action steps of PAR (plan, act, observe, reflect) that we undertook as a group, but it was still a crucial step for laying the foundation for our work.

I decided to report on the events of Pre-PAR for two reasons. First, and foremost and as lead facilitator of a critical PAR study, I have a responsibility to report on the personal context of my findings. Ravitch and Carl (2020) stated, in critical, qualitative research "the identity of the researcher is viewed as a central and vital part of the inquiry itself and must be engaged reflexively in order to address the methodological implications of this" (p. 10). In other words, as the lead facilitator, I am also the primary instrument of the study. Thus, it is important for me to include more personal narrative to contextualize the process of enacting my methodology, especially because I designed this study according to my personal identities as a Black feminist and spiritual person, as well as my professional identity as a Learning Designer and authority on pandemic pedagogy. Secondly, as the first person to ever apply the CM, I want to enhance its validity, replicability, and reliability by sharing as much detail as I can about the challenges, I encountered using it, and how I navigated those to successfully complete my study.

As I stated from the outset, I was intent on practicing fidelity to my co-researchers through adaptiveness and commitment to protecting the authenticity of co-researchers' experiences and responses (Ravitch and Carl, 2020). Unfortunately, this priority seemed to be at odds with those of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at my institution. In the next section, I

will describe the months-long process I went through to obtain IRB approval to conduct my

study in effort to narrate the nuance, complexity, and contextualization of my methodology.

Life (And Death) Happens

On Monday, April 11, 2022, at 8:28 AM, I received the following message from the

IRB:

> "Dear Sydney Curtis,
> You have started an IRB application (Application #8109) for Project #3456 – Pandemic Pedagogies: Fatalistic or Black Feminist?. As a courtesy, I would like to remind you that at this time the application has not been submitted to ORS for IRB consideration. You can access the application online using the CAP system at any time to complete and submit it.
> If you no longer wish to submit the application, you may have the option of permanently deleting it at the bottom of any page."

Although it was meant as helpful, to me this note was a nagging reminder of how much I was at

risk of falling behind on my data collection timeline. Sometime much later in the night that same

day, my paternal grandfather James Curtis II died after living for months with kidney failure. My

dad broke the news to me the next morning, Tuesday, April 12, as I was on my way to work. I

had to give a presentation about high-impact practices in online learning to the President of the

University of Chicago that day at 9:30 AM. Even though it was successful, I was running on

adrenaline for the entirety of my talk, and immediately after I was running home to pack and fly

home to Texas to be with my family, and later to Washington D.C. for Granddaddy's funeral

service. While I ran myself ragged, both literally and figuratively, the IRB's "courtesy" reminder

sat in my inbox; I chose to focus on taking care of myself and showing up for my family.

Navigating IRB

Unbeknownst to me, my struggle to obtain IRB approval began several weeks before

those intense and eventful days. After successfully defending my dissertation proposal in late

February 2022, I failed to get all the signatures of my dissertation committee members on my proposal ballot. This misstep, which I was unaware of for six weeks, until April 19, 2022, the first day of my grandfather's funeral service, prevented me from sending my application to the IRB. After finally completing this form, I was able to submit the first draft of my IRB application and one week later, my study was conditionally approved. The IRB gave me the following feedback and asked me to "revise the application accordingly and resubmit it for consideration":

- "Are your co-researchers also collecting data with you? If so, they would need to complete CITI training and be listed on your team.

- Please provide information on the process for distributing compensation (. e.g., cash payment, electronic payment, electronic gift cards, etc.)"

Addressing these two points in my IRB application were the biggest hurdles I had to overcome to achieve approval.

"Co-Researchers" vs. "Participants"

In my IRB application, I maintained framing my participants as equal co-researchers alongside me in this study, rather than participants who were more distant, or perhaps even beneath me and under my direction. The term "co-researcher" itself, seemed to be the issue. I further explicated my intention to engage my co-researchers in a participatory manner to the IRB and they ultimately released the assumption that this would expose the institution to ethical liability for my co-researchers' choices and decisions as full and equal members of my study. Still, this was a very telling moment for me that confirmed an assertion I included in my description of Black Feminist Thought in Chapter two: that institutions can react fearfully to the

insistence on autonomy expressed by me and other Black feminist thinkers (Smith, 1983). The IRB would rather I separate myself as the "principal investigator" from the other CCP members, and I refused. To satisfy their revision, I changed the language of "co-researcher" in my application to "participant." However, throughout data collection I still engaged the CCP members as co-researchers in keeping with critical PAR.

Methods of Compensation as an Equity Issue

As I discussed in Chapter 3, I knew from the time that my proposal was accepted that I would not move forward with data collection until I had secured funding to compensate my co-researchers for their time and expertise. As a full-time employee without any doctoral research funding, I was unsure where I would get the money to pay my co-researchers. I did know that it was against my personal code of ethics to request time and energy from my co-researchers if I had no way of compensating them. Thankfully, I was able to obtain funding through a Fellowship from the Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. Though I am not studying theology or pastoral care, with the help of my recommenders I was able to effectively narrate how my identity as a Catholic Black feminist would show up in my research, and that their funds would indeed be used to advance the Catholic Intellectual Tradiation even though my study does not have that explicit focus. I submitted the Fellowship application on Friday, April 15 and hoped for the best. I waited six weeks, battling through my IRB application in the meantime, before receiving the news that I'd been funded and was free to use the money for any aspect of my research that I wanted over the next year, including compensation for my co-researchers. I was overjoyed and eager to begin outreach to build the CCP community.

Initially, I included in my first IRB application, submitted on Friday, April 19, 2022, that I would pay my participants by distributing payments from my Hank Fellowship money to compensate them electronically via "Venmo, Ca$hApp, and/or Zelle" which are all mobile banking applications. I chose these methods because they are accessible and expedient (Różyńska, 2022). Accessible because unlike with a gift card, with a cash payment my co-researcher would be free to spend the money however they see fit, and expedient because these mobile banking apps enable immediate transfer of funds. As soon as my co-researchers completed a stage of the study with me, I would send them $50. Furthermore, providing compensation incrementally and dispensing it with each milestone met in the study is a more equitable approach than approving or denying payment for research participation altogether (Różyńska, 2022). I explicated my reasoning in my IRB application, however, when I received my it back from them, they stated the following:

> The university restricts the distribution of cash compensation via electronic apps to one University approved app for cash compensation for grant and graduate school funding of research. The University does not approve of using Ca$hApp. Please provide more information and confirm approved university electronic cash apps.

Based on their feedback, I reached out to the Special Projects Accounting department at my institution. They recommended that I compensate my co-researchers by sending them a check or gift cards to be in accordance with University Policy, although the same policy stated that "Alternative Method(s)" of payment were available as an option to provide compensation using "cash equivalents," which is exactly what sending money electronically is. To me, this was a

clear indication that my IRB application review was unaware of this policy. For weeks of going back and forth via email, I explained repeatedly that I would not compensate my participants using gift cards. On May 31, 2022, after receiving yet another message from the IRB falsely stating that "[the University does not allow for cash distribution of compensation through electronic apps" and "it is suggested that PI consider using electronic gift cards for compensation," I decided it was time for me to bring together the various soloed departments involved with issuing and approving research compensation methods for a chat (see Appendix E). Three weeks later, my institution changed its research compensation policy:

- **"Cash Advance:**

  Cash advances can be used in such a way to have the University deposit funds into a researcher's bank account via ACH. At that point, the PI can distribute funds to study subjects by:

  - providing study participants with cash (withdrawn from their bank account); and

  - using such peer-to-peer apps as Ca$hApp."

The new policy was approved by the Office of the Vice Provost for Research on June 10, 2022, almost two months after my initial IRB application, and was developed and reviewed in consultation with SPA, ORS and Purchasing, the three departments I brought into conversation with my email in (see Appendix E).

I took on the extra work of advocating for a policy change to allow direct payments to my co-researchers because I considered it part of my effort to accurately and authentically apply my methodology. Furthermore, it was aligned with my commitment to practicing "fidelity to my co-

researchers" by doing everything I could to ensure equitable compensation for them. Even though I encountered frustrating administrative hurdles that tempted me to change paths, in the end it was more than worth it to know that I did the best I could to compensate my co-researchers for their time commitment, energy, expertise, and the spiritual guidance that they gave throughout the study. I reported on these Pre-PAR events to add more personal context to my findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). I also hope that sharing this information can help others anticipate or circumvent the challenges I encountered when applying the CM should this methodology be used by more scholars in the future.

Chapter Three Conclusion

In Chapter Three, I laid out the overall research methodology that I designed to answer the central question of my study: *How do Black feminist instructors who identify as spiritual define and embody pandemic pedagogy?* I began by giving a rationale for why qualitative research methods were the most appropriate way to address this question. Then I gave an overview of action research, including a description of the phases of PAR. After that I introduced my novel study design, the Curtis Method, which contains the core components of BFAR, PAR, CID, and FLCs applied to the structure of the CCP. Then I described the recruitment process I underwent to recruit co-researchers to participate in the CCP with me and gave a brief introduction for each of them. After that I recapped the data collection steps and described and justified my data analysis process. Finally, I concluded Chapter Three by offering additional narrative and context into the application of my methods by sharing my positionality and some of the key events of the Pre-PAR phase of my study. The emergent "themes" or "findings" that arose from my data analysis will be listed and described in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Descriptive and analytic reporting is a key component of qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). In this chapter, I will report the findings, or "themes," that arose from my data analysis by using descriptive language to narrate the learning experience that my co-researchers and I created. In the next few paragraphs, I will describe the flow of the findings chapter and the order in which I will detail each CCP convening, including the context of our process and the decisions we made throughout.

Before recounting the events of each meeting, I provide a brief introduction to the meeting's context. By reporting and reflecting on the broader context of each of our meetings, I am seeking to connect the research findings with the complexity of mine and my co-researchers' lived experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). After I describe the context of each CCP convening, I describe the key actions we took toward advancing through the four phases of PAR: plan, act, observe, and reflect.

Our action steps unfolded through dialogue. Therefore, what I am reporting includes direct quotes from our conversations during the convenings. We discussed numerous topics during each of our two-hour meetings, some of which were unrelated to what this study is focused on. Thus, the parts of our conversations which I am reporting on are those that are most germane to the central research question: "How do Black feminist instructors who identify as spiritual define and embody pandemic pedagogy?" Although our meetings were more capacious

than prescriptive, as lead researcher and facilitator I endeavored to ensure that we took some concrete steps toward completing each phase during our time together.

Each section of Chapter Four will also include a narrative description of the theme that arose from my analysis of the data and some of the key embodied moments that occurred during our convenings which reify that theme. Attuning to the emotions and expressions of myself and my participants is one of the core components of the Curtis Method. Therefore, accounts of particularly illuminating and affective parts of our conversations in the CCP, along with my reflections on how those moments made me feel, are included. I position these expressions of embodiment that I felt and observed as data that bolster or reify the validity of the theme. I will conclude Chapter Four by introducing The Steal A/Way Collective for Empowered Pedagogy and briefly describing our mission, vision, and proposed program design.

Phase One of PAR: Plan

Unlike the information I shared earlier about the Pre-Par phase, which was for additional context, the beginning of phase one of PAR was the point in the study when the most important part of the data collection process officially started. To repeat from Chapter Three, although the individual interviews I conducted are sources of data, they were not the primary form of data collected; the most important data came from the four CCP focus group meetings, also called "convenings," which correspond with each of the four phases of PAR: plan, act, observe, and reflect.

The first step I took in the planning phase of PAR was scheduling times for our group convenings via Doodle poll. I also shared an overview of the study with my co-researchers via

email and included a recap of the research question and a model to outline the process of action

research. The CCP convenings for the planning phase took place over two separate meetings.

Leigh and Athena's schedules aligned at a time when Tisha and Melba's did not and vice versa,

so we met in separate groups. We used our first CCP convening to set norms and discuss ideas

for what our subsequent action steps could be.

Context of Phase One, Meeting One: Sydney, Athena, and Leigh

The first CCP convening of the planning phase occurred on July 1, 2022, at 11:58 AM

Central Time. Me, Leigh, and Athena were in attendance. We began the meeting with greetings

and check-ins to see how one another were doing. When it was my turn to speak, I shared that

the reversal of Roe v. Wade, a United States Supreme Court ruling that guaranteed the

Constitutional right to abortion, which happened earlier that week was weighing heavily on my

mind, body, and spirit. I expressed to Leigh and Athena that I felt like I didn't have anyone to

talk to about it. Athena and Leigh both agreed with me that "it feels real tough right now." We

all expressed feeling physically stressed about the decision. Athena and Leigh both spoke about

how reproductive access has always been exclusively for and by white women and how Plan B

and The Pill, which are forms of contraception, are both under attack. Leigh sliced her hand

across her neck in a gesture to emphasize that the U.S. government has "no guardrails right now"

in terms of the ways they can roll back reproductive rights.

When Athena and Leigh asked me whether I felt supported through my doctoral program,

or if I had people there, I could talk to, I shared about my experience of being alone a lot and

trying to insulate myself from stress. I talked about not being close to my cohort to which they

both replied, "wow!" They then went on to share examples of how they experienced a supportive

community within their own doctoral cohorts. Leigh reflected on her graduate school experience and the close-knit relationships of the community she was part of; she even shared that she lived with one of her professor's houses for a few weeks. For her, experiencing that level of support "was unique and foundational to the way that I roll." Athena reflected on how she always had a family-like guide on the faculty, staff, or colleagues in her academic programs to support her, even if that person was not always a Black faculty member.

Action Steps Taken in Phase One, Meeting One: Sydney, Athena, and Leigh

As we moved on to the action planning part of our meeting, we began by setting norms, or the values and community agreements we wanted to put in place to guide how we intended to spend our time. Leigh remarked "I like flow. Can we just flow and have a conversation and not be so trying to fit into the structure?" Athena affirmed that her priority was that we could "be our genuine selves." She expressed that she is usually quiet unless she has something specific to say but will often say "yes" to co-sign what others are saying. "I just want us to honor this space that you've created for us Sydney, and um, you know, be okay with that we're all still learning," Athena said. I thanked her and expressed that I felt nervous because this was the first CCP convening. When she noticed my shoulders were tensed up, Leigh encouraged me. "Let it go! You're just with some girlfriends, hanging out," she giggled.

When I asked what our work should be for the research project and how we should disseminate it, Leigh said:

> You know I struggle with that. The work that we do amongst ourselves for ourselves, and all the work we do for other people, you know all the freedom, all other people's freedoms that have to pass through us right like and then, at the same time …. I don't

want to have a conversation with white women about the strategy of black feminists you

know. Like I want to write about it because I want to, I want to create the Community,

but I don't want our work to be used against us."

She had a tired and exasperated expression and was leaning her face into her hand. I exclaimed

"oh my gosh! That's scary." To which Athena replied, "No Leigh, but that's real. Because,

historically, our work has been used and turned into something that it's not and even when we're

on point with something, it's been twisted… it's like when you play chess, 'do I move, or do I not

move'?" We ended our conversation on a positive note, looking forward to our next convening.

Context of Phase One, Convening Two: Sydney, Tisha, and Melba

The second CCP convening of the planning phase occurred on July 11, 2022, 12:01 PM

Central Time. Me, Tisha, and Melba were in attendance. I was feeling very shaky on this day.

My voice was shaky, and my presence was shaky. I was calling in from the office and had asked

my supervisor to step away from my work to facilitate our meeting in a private room. I arrived to

work early that day and stayed late to make up for the time I was away from my desk to conduct

the meeting. I had bags and puffs under my eyes when I opened the Zoom meeting.

After we logged on and greeted one another, Tisha shared that her uncle had recently died

a few days earlier. She was in the middle of multi-state funeral arrangements between St. Louis,

Missouri, her home, and Dallas, Texas, where more services were to be held. After asking for

Tisha's consent to be prayed over, Melba and I both took some time to say a prayer aloud for her

and her family. I felt a little unsure of myself before I began to pray, but I did so with the

permission of Tisha and Melba in an effort to offer support to her. Melba helped me to start the

prayer and said she would chime in after I finished. I gestured to my chest and reiterated that this was a space intended to promote healing. Taking a deep breath, I closed my eyes and said:

> I invite everyone to take a few deep breaths. Father God, we ask that you join us in this space. That our time together would be peaceful and helpful. We ask that you would comfort Tisha and, as she grieves the loss of her uncle as well as all those who loved him and her family. That, even though we're far apart from one another, we would join hands together in spirit. To not only support each other intellectually, but spiritually.

Action Steps Taken in Phase One, Convening Two: Sydney, Tisha, and Melba

Later in the meeting, I asked Tisha about her ideas for the PAR process and our work together as the CCP. She noted:

> I think you know, like establishing that like even on this call today like we said that we established norms and common goals of what we wanted to accomplish and how we want it to conduct our business today. Like some of that also has to be present for the fellowship piece in order to begin to build that trust becomes a space where you feel comfortable falling apart, if you need to. Or sharing difficult things. It is easy to share like highlights, or you know good things or your mountaintop experiences, if you will, but creating spaces, where you can also share the valley experiences or the not so good things.

Melba asked if I wanted to develop pedagogies explicitly around the process that Tisha was describing. I confirmed that I was interested in something like that at first, but then I added "What came out of my meeting with the other two women, though, was a desire for fellowship, as a response in itself to the stressors of teaching and pandemic pedagogy. The four of us being in community and having our own private exploration that is contained to us, rather than a new theory that is then disseminated. And there were some interesting reasons behind that."

I expressed to Melba that my first instinct was the same as her, like "Oh, we should have a teaching guide, or we should create a resource," but then it was brought up that, "well what if

we just want to be together in community and have our fellowship be the action we take? And I thought that was interesting," I stated. Tisha responded:

> Yeah, I think that's interesting. I also think it is like, for me it names what I already do. When I think about my pedagogy and the support that I provide students, like the care work that I do. It can be draining even now, like the things that I'm doing to help my family, like there are things that are necessary right, like things that have to be done. But then I'm also going to need a space where I can just grieve my fall apart and not be strong for everybody, so I think about when I'm teaching, especially like in the height of the pandemic everything was happening to the students. And I was their support and providing care for them but then I needed that fellowship space right so kind of like fall apart… so I can continue to do the work. So, I think this is interesting, making something like fellowship as the outcome, and I think it puts a name to what so many people do too, so that they can keep going.

Melba agreed and wondered, "Could you create a toolkit that facilitates fellowship informed by different experiences and understandings around fellowship?" She illuminated how the toolkit would be useful with this example:

> I think definitely be useful, because you know we have those conversations about feminist ethics of care, and I mean I did a seminar, along with a couple of colleagues not last week, the week before while we were exploring, 'what does a belief in a black feminist ethics of care actually mean in practice when you are conducting research?' And not just the ethical approval, you get in order to do the research, but you know how that applies to your research methods, for example. And your selection of students and so

forth. Do we actually have those conversations around fellowship? And, and what do we mean by an understanding of the ethics of care. And so, I think the fellowship toolkit, informed by an ethics of care, has a wider purpose. Not just in pedagogy but everything that we do.

At this point in the conversation, as I was confirming that this is what Tisha and Melba wanted to do, Melba turned the question back onto me: "yeah you know, ultimately, what would you want, at the end of it?" This question gave me pause. I admitted to Tisha and Melba that I was unsure of myself in my career after receiving a rejection that morning from an adjunct teaching job. I said: "I'm really grateful for how we started our meeting and how we ended it. I'm going to take it seriously. I need to reflect; I need to kind of work on my courage to really step up and kind of believe in myself. I think I feel a little low today." And then at the very end, Melba hit me with the most challenging and caring call to action of the meeting.

She stressed to me that "the fellowship bond that we're creating [as the CCP], it's meant to be about an ethic of care." She challenged me to answer, saying "What do we want from the fellowship from these meetings that we're creating? It's interesting for me that you didn't share how you're feeling right at the beginning. But clearly, you had healing needs. So, it's interesting again for me, what do we, what do we see as being needs that need healing? Did you not share how you're feeling because you didn't see it as being, in inverted commas, 'a traditional need for healing'?" Melba was placing it back on me to reframe the deficit language I'd used about myself, and to make my dissertation my own. At this point I had a whimpering expression on my face and was very close to tears. Tisha and Melba both offered their encouragement. After we ended the meeting, I went back downstairs to my work desk.

Theme One: "Getting What We Want Out of It"

The theme that emerged from the planning phase of PAR was the notion of "getting what we want" out of our work as the CCP and as Black feminist educators. I arrived at this theme because in our first meetings, we each had the chance to express what we "wanted to get" out of our meetings. Even though this question gave me pause when Melba initially asked me, I spent several days afterward reflecting on it. While I had already gone through the process of naming the spiritual, pedagogical, and embodied contours of my study in writing, I had not yet shared those with the group, or disclosed why these were my priorities. At this stage in the project, it began to dawn on me that identifying "what I wanted" out of the study would be essential for us to "get what *we* wanted out of it" as a whole group.

Practically speaking, we all contributed collectively to our conversations and efforts to name the values and norms that guide our engagement with one another as CCP members. From Athena's desire to simply "honor the space [we've] created," to Leigh's poignant observation about "[wanting] to create community, but [not wanting] our work to be used against us," ensuring that we had a self-directed and self-made space was and urgent matter to us. "Getting what we want out of it" expresses a clear priority to not only co-create a space which we are all respectful of, but also to protect that space and ensure that it is shaped around *our* ideas and concerns. Fellowship also emerged as a key component of this theme.

For example, for Tisha, fellowship as part of "getting what [she] wants" out of the CCP would be creating and participating "in space where you feel comfortable falling apart, if you need to." Melba also considered exploring and engaging in fellowship an important part of "getting what [she] wants" from participating in our space. For example, she urged "Do we

actually have those conversations around fellowship?" and "What do we want from the fellowship from these meetings that we're creating?" Therefore, while the question of "getting what we want out of it" as participants in the CCP is specific to identifying our desired outcomes from the action research, it is also a charge for and from all of us to show up and participate in the group in a way that reflects our commitment to self-determination and ethics of care, all of which are Black feminist values.

Embodied Moments That Reify the Theme

The embodied moments that stood out most from my meeting with Athena and Leigh were the laughs that we shared. We also talked about seeking out mindfulness practices and how psychosomatic skills like meditation and breathwork were helpful, supportive and eye-opening for us. For example, Leigh talked about how she responded to the chaos of the world with meditation. "After listening [to a guided meditation recording], I think, even after the first episode, really the first session, it was like you know how sometimes you can feel it in your body when your energy just shifts. It was like I could feel it, just a total change in the energy in my body, and I was like 'Okay, you know. I need to redirect my energy.'" Conversely, the many, many emotions that were expressed and that I experienced in my meeting with Tisha and Melba were impactful in a more somber way.

For example, after I finished praying for Tisha, I looked visibly tired and deflated. I swayed in my chair the whole time while praying. I kept my eyes closed. When I revealed to Tisha and Melba how disappointed I was about not getting the adjunct teaching job, I gestured to my heart with my eyes cast down and said:

It's just a painful kind of feeling because I work with instructors every day and I help

them with their teaching like as an instructional designer and also in my freelance where

I'm partnering with all kinds of people who have a mission and an idea and I'm helping

them create the learning materials to see it through. But with my own mission and idea I

haven't had the opportunity to pursue it. I feel like teaching is such a privilege that it's

become so competitive to have a chance to do it.

I cried and admitted to feelings of stress and inadequacy. I was grappling with a spiritual wound, the stark realization that I was *not* getting what I wanted out of my career.

However, even while I felt defeated, I was also touched by the encouragement Tisha and Melba offered me, especially from Tisha who was in her own time of need. The feelings of sadness and desolation, along with Tisha's verbal encouragement and Melba's urgent questions, impressed on me that to "get what I want" out of the CCP, I would need to be more forthcoming about my personal challenges and desires. I decided to make that a key action step as we moved into the next phase of PAR.

Phase Two of PAR: Act

Our CCP convening for phase two of PAR, Act, began at 12:02 PM Central Time on July 15, 2022. Our convening was initially scheduled at a time when all five of us were available, but Tisha couldn't make it because she was still in the middle of traveling and making arrangements for her uncle's funeral. She called to let me know she needed to cancel, so we conducted the convening without her. Leigh also had to arrive at the meeting about 30 minutes late due to a commitment she had at work. "We're still working out scheduling, trying to get everyone together," I remarked. I expressed how challenging it has been to get everyone together. And

how although we would eventually need everyone's consensus, we could still proceed with the convening. "There's room in the action research framework for all kinds of forward motion, even if it is not linear," I said. From there, we began to focus more intently on deciding on the actions we wanted to take to address the research question.

Context of Phase Two CCP Convening

We began this meeting with greetings and check-ins, as well as another round of introductions since Leigh and Athena had never spoken to Melba before. As an icebreaker, we each shared a bit more detail about why we got into academia and chose to do this work. Athena shared that she was inspired because she had mostly Black teachers growing up. Melba wanted to study the entrenched stereotypes around Black students' academic success in the UK and why they "persistently underachieve." Both of them wanted to train teachers to unlearn racial biases and serve Black students better. Melba stated that there are only roughly 40 Black female professors in all of the UK. "You can get a doctorate," she said, "but from getting a doctorate to becoming a professor, that's a huge step." She also remarked that Black students often receive less funding for their doctorate studies and "are more likely to be funding themselves." At this point, because Melba's previous comment related so much to my experience, and because of the conversation I'd had with her and Tisha earlier in the week, I asked the group if I could have the floor. I wanted to take the time to share more about why I got into my work.

"I typically just see myself as just a facilitator," I said, "but I recognize the urgency of being vulnerable in this work." I talked about how I do not take for granted how much work and energy it takes to show up in the CCP and share about our experiences. I talked about funding myself, working full time, having a tuition waiver, but not stipend, while other white students in

my Master's and Doctoral cohorts were fully funded and had assistantships. I shared a little bit

with the group about the significant hurdles I encountered and the emotional energy I expended

during my 3-month struggle with the IRB to get my dissertation approved. I also shared about

the administrative turmoil in my doctoral program, how we'd had three program directors in my

three years of study. I talked about how confused I felt regarding why my dissertation advisor, a

Black man, was removed as chair of our program by the Dean, a Black woman, without much

explanation. I explained that with the scarcity of mentorship and community-building in my

program, especially during the years of the pandemic, "I've internalized [my doctoral work as]

an individualized thing." I took a few seconds to pause and breathe.

"There's just been a lot of chaos and turmoil," I continued. "And also, in the world. So

much of this experience I have weathered totally in isolation. I've been alone taking classes here

in my house, alone during the pandemic writing my comprehensive exams, and it has led me to

view myself as less of a participant and more of a facilitator, who moves the pieces and sends the

emails to get the work done, but who doesn't have like a significant role to play other than that

because it takes a lot of work, just to do the things like that." I decided to also share a bit more

about my personal background.

"I am a pretty 'traditional' person in a lot of ways," I said, explaining that I am cisgender,

heterosexual, and have always been middle class. However, I also expressed that I was

struggling with this normativity. For example, I told the group how much I love academic

writing, but I questioned if this was due to a sense of "internalized capitalism." "What if I don't

feel like an artist?" I asked, questioning my creativity. "What if I don't feel particularly like what

a Christian is? Politically, I am a radical with a leftist perspective. So, what does it look like for

me to be me and show up here as well?" From there I mentioned my involvement with the CRPT group of scholars, and how they taught me to name and critique Christianity as a power structure.

I shared a recent story from my faith journey, stating that even though I was born and raised Catholic, and was still practicing my faith, I decided to leave the church temporarily after the reversal of Roe v. Wade. I expressed that I was dealing with the stress of Christian oppression in my body, even dreaming at night that I was in Church, terrified, though I had not been in a few weeks. "I don't feel safe," I said, harkening back to my experience of the uprising of 2020 and how I weathered that "alone in my house." I shared about the intense anxiety and stress I felt due to my proximity to police violence in Chicago. I finally paused to take stock of all the analysis and self-reflection I'd been doing over the last few years, which led me to be able to articulate myself in this way. "All of this has led me to feel that who I am, and my strengths are being a writer and a thinker," I concluded.

Athena and Melba listened patiently for the entire time that I spoke. After I shared more from my experience to participate more fully in the group Melba remarked, "Today is the first time I really feel a sense of who you are and where you're coming from while you're doing this research, which is really helpful." Athena remarked on how "it never seems to change" and some of the things I'm dealing with, she dealt with as a doctoral student in the 1990s. Melba agreed and added:

> While I'm based in England, there are still similarities… challenges we face in our academic credibility." which you know, is really important, and also gives me greater confidence to continue the work I'm doing. Because again like Athena said nothing seems to change, [it's] the same kind of challenges. And The fact that you are coming from a middle-class background and you're still having these challenges, suggests that it's not

just it's not just it's not a class issue, it definitely is a race issue and it's also, you know it is very much a gendered issue as well.

Melba continued:

> And I think we're connected, also, with you. I think, a few years ago I got really tired of going into schools to research constantly being questioned as to why I was there, you know. Even though I'd had conversations with the head teacher on the telephone I'd send emails, but when I physically turned off in that school space, there was always a question. There's still a negative perception of who you are so at that point, I just wrote an article and once I started to put down on paper, the kind of experiences I've had, you know, it brought me to a new understanding about the challenges I was encountering but also the greater need for us to share those experiences with others. You know, it cuts. It doesn't matter your subject area, the challenges are the same for us as black academics, so I really value you sharing.

I thanked Melba for what she said. We then pivoted to discuss the particulars of the action research project a bit more.

Action Steps Taken in Phase Two Convening

To begin this part of the meeting, I re-situated that we were in phase two of the action research framework, and that we needed to determine what specific steps we wanted to take in our project. I also reiterated that I had about $3,000 available from my Hank Fellowship to support our work.

Leigh talked about wanting to all be together in Chicago. "I don't know if spirits fly across the internet waves," she said. "Whatever we do, it would be great to be in each other's presence. I know that's a tall order." Athena suggested creating our own conference or having a one-day curriculum fair and opening the experience up to other Black women. She said this idea came to her from reflecting on "my isolated journey" as a doctoral student and the desire to do some "lifting as we climb" to support younger academics. "I am leaning toward setting up something that we do for Black women graduate students," she said.

Based on this idea Leigh suggested a retreat to bring together the whole idea of spirituality and wellbeing. "What does it look like to bring different generations of young women together to do this wellness work?" she mused. Melba chimed in "I like the idea of the retreat or the conference," with workshops to generate ideas around the resources or toolkits we think would be important, ultimately with the angle of supporting early career scholars. She mentioned using the money from my Hank Fellowship to fund the conference. "I like the idea of us coming together, because I have been wondering how it would work. I would also like to understand the impact of the location and what it is bringing to the discussion," Melba stated.

At this point, I spoke up again. "My question is in terms of feasibility," I said. I suggested that maybe just the four of us could get together and create the framework for a bigger thing in the future. Leigh suggested the next step of writing a grant. "I know Spencer usually has these conference or research grant opportunities where we can meet up to plan or meet up to write a book. Or we can do the retreat as a celebration of Sydney's graduation!" she exclaimed. Circling back to our ideas around Black feminist pedagogy, Leigh asked "What does it look like to do a virtual session that becomes a precursor to the conference or retreat on decolonizing pedagogy, or Black feminizing the curriculum and pedagogy." I agreed and mentioned that Black feminist pedagogy was the key driver for me in bringing us all together in the first place. The question I am interested in is: "What is the healing needed there?"

Melba expressed that while she does not intentionally consider teaching healing work, she was interested in what that can look like in practice. She reflected that especially for the young women she teaches, "most of the time I am trying to boost them up." She gave a deep sigh, in what was perhaps a moment of exasperation, and repeated what she says to her students

about how "black people are meant to suffer but it's our faith that helps us overcome that." She acknowledged that there are a range of ways to do this work. Our elders "have been teaching us how to survive for a long time," she said, "and that we are adding to that range of ways." I put forward the idea of using all the myriad ways that we come together, that we will need to garner resources, but it wouldn't be prohibitive to do so. Leigh agreed: "we will have to explore how to create a budget, doing little pieces that add up to the bigger picture."

About 90 minutes into our meeting, Melba asked what specifically I needed to fulfill the dissertation requirements of my degree program. At this point, I realized that I had not thoroughly explained the premise of my research to the group before. So, I spoke about the background of my project. I began by saying "I am writing about online learning from a Black feminist lens." I explained how in many ways "this is a study within a study… about faculty learning communities" and that I planned to report back on just how engaging an online learning experience can be from a Black feminist standpoint. I connected my description of the project back to my work as a learning design in online education as well, and how my goal was to frame online education as more than simply a change in interface or modality. I stated that for me, "the proof [of how impactful online learning can be] is in the pudding of how you feel when you leave these spaces." This gave the group lots to think about. Athena had been quietly thinking, writing and reflecting for a while. She also had been affirming and contributing to the Zoom chat box.

Leigh nodded her head and expressed her understanding. "There is a certain sense of communing that is happening within our circle," she said, "but is this really a thinking that can be translated into other spaces?" I nodded and elaborated. "My question is basically 'can the

expansiveness of our approaches as BF expand into online?' My hypothesis is yes, if we frame it in a Black feminist way." Finally, Leigh concluded: "Then I think the central question is 'how do we translate Black feminist pedagogy in online environments?" I replied, "Honestly, I don't have the answer at all. And this study is my first step."

Leigh the suggested that we pivot, not to give up at all on her idea of us getting together, but perhaps to be more attentive to my specific project, she suggested that we pivot to the construction of a Black feminism online course. She talked about how much she enjoys MasterClasses and that she "likes the idea of capturing really helpful and meaningful pieces of learning in nice, discreet mini courses." Her suggestion was not necessarily creating courses in a traditional way, but perhaps actually a series of mini lessons. "I never get through a whole fleshed-out course online," she laughed. "Especially asynchronous ones." Leigh emphasized: "The question is really about synchronous, bringing embodiedness into the synchronous online space. Are there things that are more possible, instead of less possible in this space?"

I emphatically agreed with Leigh. "Of course, that's of interest to me, but it's important that it is like a benefit to you all." I asked Leigh, Athena, and Melba if they see themselves taking advantage of online education. Leigh exclaimed: "Oh my gosh, there are just so many different possibilities and ideas. So, I think we should just keep talking it through." She emphasized that our work should talk about and demonstrate "how we do what we do" so that other upcoming Black women scholars can see that and be that, as Leigh did from the example of bell hooks. "For me, I can see a whole website," she mused, "passing on the legacy of the work."

Theme Two: "The Urgency of Being Vulnerable"

I began this meeting by saying "I typically just see myself as just a facilitator, but I recognize the urgency of being vulnerable in this work." Embracing vulnerability was an important outcome of the action that we took in our CCP convening for phase two of PAR. At the urging of Melba and Tisha in our previous meeting, I answered the call to share more about myself, my background, my experiences, and my motivations for creating and participating in the CCP. The way that they urged me to show up more fully, and the tenderness that they expressed are embodiments of the Black feminist ethics of care and Black feminist pedagogy.

By being more vulnerable, I also became a more effective lead facilitator to the group. My self-disclosure provided us more guidance through background information on why I wanted to pursue this research question in the first place. When Melba remarked, "Today is the first time I really feel a sense of who you are and where you're coming from while you're doing this research, which is really helpful," I realized that sharing more personal information about my struggles as a doctoral student and my feelings of isolation during the pandemic gave the group more clarity on the urgency of our work.

Lastly, being vulnerable also led to several positive embodied feelings for me. For example, when I responded to Leigh and demonstrated my willingness to say, "I don't know" when she asked, "how do we translate Black feminist pedagogy in online environments?" I experienced a moment of not only vulnerability, but also clarity, release, and joy. It was a moment of clarity to feel like we were all on the same page about the central question we're exploring and why it mattered. It was a moment of release because I was able to let go of the fear that we were spinning our wheels, or that I was doing a poor job as lead facilitator. And it was a

moment of joy to discover that in sharing more about myself, I was able to help guide the group back to the central question of this entire study, in such a way that Leigh could actually paraphrase it back to me.

Embodied Moments that Reify the Theme

In this meeting, for the first time, I actually considered myself a full participant in the group, and not just the group convener. I was calling in from home instead of work and looked a lot more refreshed on this day, however, even though I was in a more comfortable environment, my shift in perspective was mostly reflected in my body language throughout our meeting. For example, I was smiling for the entire six minutes that I spoke about myself and shared more about my background with the group. I also remember feeling relieved and freed during and after speaking. I felt encouraged to keep talking through the eye contact, head-nodding, and verbal "mm-hmms" that Melba and Athena shared with me as I spoke. Finally, I spoke confidently, and gestured with my hands to be better understood throughout our conversation.

Phase Three of PAR: Observe

The observation phase of PAR typically focuses on describing and reporting on the results of actions taken up to that point in the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For the present study, the observation phase was more like an "action phase part II" because it was in this phase that we settled on what we wanted our output of the study to be. Thus far, I have accounted for how the decisions of the CCP relate to the initial inquiry guiding the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, I will observe how we affirm and support each other through the decision-making process itself.

Context of Canceled Convening

Despite all of the good progress we were making in our CCP convenings, we were still unfortunately plagued by unforeseen challenges and scheduling issues. Our convening to complete the third phase of PAR, Observe, was initially scheduled for July 27, 2022, at 9AM Central Time. Although everyone reported in the Doodle Poll that they were available to meet at this time, ultimately this meeting was cut short because Athena and Leigh, both couldn't make it. Athena's son had a health emergency and Leigh was in the middle of traveling for a conference. Melba and Tisha and I met briefly to check in with one another. Tisha was still in the middle of navigating the loss of her uncle and all of the funeral arrangements. She looked very tired and not like herself. She sighed a lot as she spoke:

> Trying to recover from everything, it's been a lot to navigate. Caring for my family and all the family who had [traveled] for the services... And then, like readjusting to being home and taking care of family here. That has been an adjustment, this week, like things just started going back to normal, I guess. I guess yeah just readjust to like my life at home because … I haven't really been at home with the kids with my spouse and doing the day-to-day stuff that I would normally do at home.

Melba responded to her, saying:

> You look tired and that's understandable, but you know you must take some time for yourself. Before you rush back into checking your work and whether or not you're you've kept up to date or not, that doesn't matter, because you bought to put yourself in your family first. Put you first for a while and until you gradually ease yourself back into what can, if you do, you have to do emails doing you know, maybe a couple, three, four, but don't try and rush to do everything can say everything's fine and you know you want to take have space to cry, cry. God, you know, is there for all of us, and He will support you and help you to get through this hurdle in your life, you know and get you back onto the path where you were before. But just take that time and reach out to people that can support you as well, don't be afraid to do that as well, I just wanted to say that to you.

Tisha thanked her and said:

> I appreciate that. It's been the thing I've been trying to unlearn. I know I need time for myself, but it's like this, I don't know, like, conditioning that I'm fighting not to do, like I should be doing something, I should be busy, I should be catching up on work. But I

know I also need to take care of myself, so it's just been like giving myself permission…
part of healing and part of what my work needs to be right now is to just not do anything.

I nodded and responded to Tisha, saying:

I empathize with how hard that is to do. I think, at least for me, sometimes that work isn't
like a comfortable wonderful [thing like] sitting under a blanket, but it helps me to
compartmentalize like pain or confusion to feel like I'm being productive. But at the same
time, I recognize that that's also not me stopping to care for myself in the way that I may
need. I empathize with how challenging it can be to put those things into practice.

After about 30 minutes it became clear that Athena and Leigh were not going to join the us, so I

decided to give Tisha a brief recap of the things we discussed in our last meeting since she

couldn't make it then. We agreed that we would not be able to conceptualize the work further

without the other two women, so we ended the meeting by trying to get our schedules and

calendars aligned to find a time when we could all be together again.

Context of Phase Three Convening

It turns out that we would not be able to get all five members of the CCP together for our

phase three convening until several weeks later. We did not meet again until August 18, 2022, at

9:05 AM Central Time. But when we did, it was a very triumphant moment. Finally, for the first

time in all of our data collection meetings, all five members of the CCP were present over Zoom

together! Looking at all of us gathered together on the screen, I beamed and declared:

This is the CCP. This is the Community of Care and Practice. I am so thankful to each of
you for making the time, battling through the different storms that have already rained
upon us this summer, to be here with everything you have going on. I realize that this is
our first time all together. It's also the halfway point of our data collection. Maybe we
start back at square one having pushed and patched our way thus far, with some intros.
In this meeting, Tisha looked radiant and beautiful. She had on red lipstick and a t-shirt

that said "research-her" with her hair in beautiful curls. She talked about her kids being back in

school and how that was a helpful relief. Athena, who was meeting Tisha for the first time today,

smiled at her and said, "that's when the universe be looking out for us, and we don't even

recognize it." Athena shared that she, too, had a child in school. She had dropped her son off at college the night before. "It was beautiful, it was wonderful, I'm feeling blessed and highly favored," she said cheerily. Ironically, Leigh had also dropped her son off at college a few days prior to our meeting. "It was so much fun!" She exclaimed. Melba talked about how much she was enjoying her summer vacation. "I've chosen to be in this space, but on other things, I am definitely 'Out of Office,'" she said with a grin.

Action Steps Taken in Phase Three Convening

At this stage I pivoted to talk about "this group and the action research" that we want to take on "which is yet still undefined." I started by saying, "Just thinking about feasibility with the time that we have, but also creativity, which is such a core value to the group. I feel that to do something too traditional would not be reflective of our values, for an output. Because this is our penultimate meeting, I was thinking about getting something down as far as what we wanted to do." From there I shared some options that I had come up with between meetings: (1) Creating an asynchronous toolkit that would support Black women graduate students and early career faculty with all of the challenges that we'd discussed; (2) I expressed my willingness to write an academic paper about our experiences; (3) Creating an asynchronous video to share our perspectives, or (4) Developing a fellowship toolkit to guide the creation of Black feminist community.

Leigh was the first person to chime in. She said:

> OK I have a tendency to think bigger than whatever time I have. Check this out, I like the idea of asynchronous videos. For me, we can leave this here, being an action research project, Sydney gets what she needs, and we can leave it here, or we can build. So, in my mind, why don't we just be the foundation of a collective? 'The Steal A/Way: A Black Feminist Collective' you know 'for empowered pedagogy' or whatever we want to call it.

She mentioned that in her experience, it is hard for her Black women students' whose

dissertations she supervises to "get them unstuck from [studying] what our problems and what

our challenges are" and while she thinks we should call those things out, "there are more

affirming ways to talk about the value and importance of our presence in these institutions." She

then connected her idea of a collective to support Black graduate students and early career

faculty back to the experiences of those of us in the group:

> And I feel like we have a variety of things going on here. We have you know, a brand-new professor in Tisha you know, we have you know senior professors in [Melba and Athena] we have a graduate student in Sydney… I feel like we, and we have an international perspective with Melba, like, I feel like we have a variety of things to sort of build on…I think it would be unfortunate to just let it go."

Athena expressed her agreement and said:

> I'm not down with letting y'all go. Coming to these meetings and just being in your presence, and knowing, like I tell people all the time, knowing you're not the only one. Knowing that you not crazy, knowing that your instinct is on point, and you are feeling the physical stuff that the universe, is telling you in your body about the dysfunction junction is for a reason…it affirms that I am not losing my mind, I am not overreacting I am not being too sensitive, [because] you know what is also. Every time I come away from these meetings… y'all helped me to feel like I got something to say I guess, something to contribute and I don't have to have somebody to hold my hand to do that. I'm 55 years old. I've been teaching for a long, long time for me to just now feel that because of meeting with y'all and Sydney I want to thank you for convening us.

Tisha chimed in and gave the example of a conference session that she hosted as "a space for

"Black women to just be and rest." She said the session was standing room only, and its

popularity "opened [her] eyes to just how much Black women are thirsty for spaces like that."

She added:

> I was thinking about whether this collective could be a place where from time to time, like maybe we're not necessarily producing a product right, but we are creating a space where black women could gather together and be in community with other black women. I think about how powerful, that is, that you know, because a lot of people, may be the only faculty or staff member or graduate student in their program or one of a few black

women, right. So, creating a space where other black women can, you know just find rest, find a safe space within us to share their problems, or you know, whatever difficulties may we have topics like sister circles on it, so to speak. Similar to this group.

Since everyone else had expressed some agreement on our ideas up to this point, I asked Melba

to share what she thinks, and she said, "I support the ideas that are being suggested." She also

shared these key questions:

> What is that that we are trying to say as to who we are, what we represent? Because I don't think that we have all the answers, and I wouldn't like to be part of a collective that was saying 'we have all the answers. But you know, how do we in a small community, what do we have to offer and then, if it is being expanded into a larger group, again, collectively, what are we drawing from each other, you know and the strengths that we got from being part of the group? That's what I'd be interested in."

Leigh added:

> Yeah, I think that's a really good point about us not having all the answers, and this is the power of presenting ourselves is giving testimony and making space for others to come around. Not only sharing testimony but you know problem-solving with each other, not for each other. Because the other thing is, you know, everybody is in different contexts, too, and I think that's a really important point. And so that to me the storytelling is … a basis for opening up discussion, rather than presenting a full on you know packaged answer to anybody's challenge. You know, I think that what will make this thing different and stand out is that we're not doing it as a package sort of professional development thing, but as a live kind of you know 'sister circles' is the only word that keeps coming to my mind, but like when we're together.

I chimed in, emphatically:

> I love that. I absolutely love that because of that differentiator from booking like 45 minutes, one on one with someone. And it de-conflates it with some of the more traditional or Western relationship patterns, so I love the notion that what we create we would always be gathering and community and inviting people to work [things] out in a group. And I appreciate that more than like a 'you can book me' link with like 45 minutes here, 45 minutes there. And the other thing that, at least for from my research angle, it plays in directly to my thesis about virtual spaces and black feminist pedagogy.

At this point, we decided to put our idea of forming a collective to a vote!
> Sydney: "I would definitely give a 'yes' for that. I'm from my end so I'll mute so others can vote."

Leigh: "I would say yes, and the other thing I would say is, we should absolutely look into trying to apply for a Spencer grant to do some of this work. I think that can be very helpful."

Tisha: "Yeah, I also say yes and I'm also thinking about how…we'll be able to market ourselves [the Collective], but like present ourselves [to Deans and Departments] like…buying into this collective will allow you to provide something to your black faculty, staff, and students…am avenue of support that maybe you're not able to provide on campus."

Athena: "Yes, I vote yes to whatever we decide to do."

Melba: "Yes, I'm happy, I will vote, and I like Leigh's idea of all say going for Spencer grant to support the activities that we do."

I cheered, with a big grin on my face, "Awesome, we did it!"

We then began to talk about how to gather resources and support for our next steps.

Leigh said, we "definitely" needed one or two graduate students who can help us develop the

concept, but who may also be able to organize their own dissertations around our work. I

prompted the group to begin thinking about or drafting a name, mission, and vision statement for

our group independently before we met again a week later. Athena, agreed and shared the

following to help us get organized for our next steps:

> Not to rush but to just to try to be on point and be a little purposeful, maybe each of us come with our own brief write up of what we think, from what we heard and what we gathered today and throughout our sessions together, what our vision, mission and name could be, and then we, as a collective next Friday, talk about that, think about that, so that at least maybe we can walk away next Friday with some kind of solidification of what that is as we go into the next steps.

We ended by talking transparently about our different workstyles, strengths, and challenges, and

shared affirmations for one another in the group.

Theme Three: "A Tendency to Think Bigger"

Phase Three of PAR prompted all of us to think and reflect more on the desired outcome

of our work in relation to the time and resources we had and needed. As I stated early in the

convening, we were "thinking about feasibility with the time that we have, but also creativity,

which is such a core value to the group." The idea of forming "The Steal A/Way: A Black Feminist Collective for Empowered Pedagogy" is an idea that reflects our commitment to building community, providing support, and inspiring innovative ways for Black women to persist and thrive in academia. It was inspired by Leigh and her "tendency to think bigger than whatever time I have" as well as what she sees as a need to have "more affirming ways to talk about the value and importance of our presence [as Black feminists] in these institutions." The Steal A/Way Collective is a tangible example of how by thinking bigger, we opened up an avenue to explore Black feminists' impact.

Thinking bigger for us as Black feminists means considering the impact of our work beyond the time that we are doing it. In other words, it means that we account for our legacy. For example, after we agreed to form the Collective, we simultaneously began brainstorming about how our work would be useful for future generations of Black women in academia. Tisha said, "Yeah, I also say yes and I'm also thinking about how…we'll be able to market ourselves [the Collective], but like present ourselves [to Deans and Departments] like…buying into this collective will allow you to provide something to your black faculty, staff, and students…an avenue of support that maybe you're not able to provide on campus." I also shared that by forming the Collective, I might be able to mentor another student who works with us, and Leigh suggested that other Black women graduate students could even shape their dissertations around our work.

As we position ourselves to have a broader impact, "thinking bigger" underscores the need for us to clarify our intentions and identity. As Melba noted, we do not necessarily "have all the answers" to the questions and challenges we want to explore in our Collective. But as we

consider our strengths and innovative approaches to problem-solving and community building as Black feminists, specifically through storytelling, sharing testimonials, and "sister circles," we recognize that we have an intentional opportunity to "provide an avenue of support" for other Black women in academia, as Tisha mentioned. To expand further on intention and identity, Athena helped guide us to "be purposeful" as we continue to collaboratively develop what our vision, mission and name could be as a Collective.

Lastly, thinking bigger means that there is a greater need to garner resources for our Collective's endeavors. Many in the group mentioned the Spencer Grant as an upcoming funding opportunity we should apply for as an important next step in moving the Collective forward. I also called out that time and commitment would be **"**the thing that would be required…for continued engagement over the coming months…because I do think when you 'press go' on something like this people start to engage."

Embodied Moments that Reify the Theme

The theme that arose from this meeting is "A Tendency to Think Bigger." The contemplative work at the center of this theme is an embodied practice in itself. However, as I noted in the beginning of this section, some of my primary observations of embodiment in the CCP are of how we build community by affirming one another and providing support and resources to each other. For example, Athena shared how being in community with us affirmed her instincts and the physical cues of her body when navigating academia. She shared:

> Coming to these meetings and just being in your presence, and knowing like I tell people
> all the time, knowing you're not the only one. Knowing that you are not crazy, knowing

that your instinct is on point, and you are feeling the physical stuff that the universe is

telling you in your body about the dysfunction junction is for a reason.

This is an example of how, for Athena, her embodied instincts are affirmed in our community

and allow her to "think bigger" about what her body is telling her, rather than dismissing that

intuitive form of cognition. Furthermore, throughout this meeting, we offered tangible resources

to each other via referrals to colleagues doing similar work, links to resources in the Zoom chat

box, and verbal guidance all to support us as we continue to "think bigger," in our Black feminist

praxis. These are all examples of the innovative, embodied ways that we persist and thrive in

academia.

Phase Four of PAR: Reflect

PAR is an iterative cycle (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The final phase of that cycle is

reflection. The reflection phase of PAR is typically a time for the co-researchers to take stock of

their experiences and lessons learned while participating in the action research, as well as

consider what they will do next as a result of the action steps taken thus far (Merriam & Tisdell,

2016). For the CCP, our process of reflection led to the development of a new scholarly

collective called The Steal A/Way, because we realized that more spaces like the CCP were

needed for Black women to thrive in the academy. We also began the process of critically

reflecting on who we are as a Collective, who we want our core audience to be, and why. This

process kicked off another round of planning ways to follow through on garnering resources and

beginning the cycle of our Collective action again.

Context of the meeting

Our fourth and final full CCP to complete the Reflection phase of PAR occurred on August 26, 2022, at 10:00 AM Central Time. When I began this meeting, I reflected with the group on what felt like a full circle moment for me from the time we began. In my first meeting with Melba and Tisha, I was in tears because I'd just been rejected from a job. But at this meeting I was able to share that I'd just been hired as a part-time curriculum developer. I also told the group about my plan to take a leave of absence from my full time-job to focus on writing my dissertation and defending on Friday, December 16, 2022. "OK, girl," Leigh said with a laugh. "That's ambitious." Melba nodded and stated, "That will leave you three months, effectively. I responded with a laugh:

> Yes, three months to analyze every conversation we've ever had. Three months to hopefully launch what we want to do with The Steal A/Way Collective, [and] to apply for the Spencer Grant. I think I can do this. I just can't do it and work full time. This is my one window of time to not prioritize my full-time job, and actually prioritize being a doctoral candidate for the first time at the very end of the process.

Even though I knew I had my work cut out for me, I felt very encouraged by their support.

Action Steps Taken that Correspond with PAR

Knowing that this was our final data collection meeting, we set about drafting The Steal A/Way Collective's mission, vision, and scope. To get us started, I put the food for thought questions from the last meeting into the chat box:

1. What is the scope of The Steal A/Way Collective (The Collective)?

2. What is our mission, and what is our vision?

3. Have any of you participated in a project like this before, where you're setting out to say who we are and setting out your mission and vision. And how did you do that before?

Leigh got us started with an answer to the third question. She gave an example from her work as

co-chair for a steering committee where she helped develop a framework for the tools and

support, they offer to other Deans in Education:

> We spent a whole day and a half, really just trying to narrate ourselves, so to speak, and
>
> talk about, you know, mission and vision. But I think for us it really started with what
>
> kinds of things are we offering? Why would somebody want to join the organization?
>
> And in talking through why somebody would want to join the organization, I think,
>
> helped us talk through what it is we're actually offering, which then helped us map out
>
> sort of mission and vision.

To pick up on the thread of using our ideas for the Collective's offerings to help us shape our

mission and vision, I re-read an in-depth description of ideas for our offerings that we'd

discussed previously. I said:

> Well, based on what we discussed last week we were thinking about offerings that would
> live on a website, and would not be static, but very interactive. So um, not a database of
> PDF documents, maybe a handful of creative infographics. But a database that would
> include testimonial videos of [us] storytelling, pre-recorded and posted. Then there's the
> live Sista circle sessions where a user could click a zoom link and be in a space like we're
> in right now and be with us. Then there are the actual workshops which are different from
> sister circles, because there's some like topic at hand in that we're teaching back from our
> experience on how we overcame [challenges]. I have a list of topics we talked about. And
> then there's like a contact form where someone can reach out to stay in touch. The idea is,
> it's a space where Black women in academia can just be and can get resources. But again,
> not static resources, resources that are animated by us with our personal presence stories,
> experiences from that vantage point, offering a workshop like once per semester and
> maybe working our way towards [offering] in-person meetings.

"So, starting with that," I concluded, "I think some of what I just said would start to trickle into

the questions of who we are, what is our mission, what is our vision."

Based on this clarification, Leigh said that the Collective's mission and vision were centered around "creating circles of solidarity and support." She referenced back to Brittney Cooper who says that "black feminism is ultimately the practice of friendship." Leigh added "and I mean for me, it's really about how do we help and support each other through the experience of being Black women in white academic spaces?" I agreed. "Yeah, I think it could be just that simple, But also expansive right? Because we have representation from Melba. Who is, for example, a Caribbean woman living in the UK. [So] how do we also name that level of expansiveness with our colorful language of how we introduce ourselves?" At this point I opened up a Google Doc to try and capture more of our thoughts and information in real-time and collaboratively. Tisha added:

> Boiling down who we are in a clean sort of snapshot, we're black women supporting other Black women in the Academy to persist, to thrive, to create spaces where we can experience joy and fellowship, and professional development right like where we can grow together, where we can learn from each other. I think that is what we have been doing during our time together [in the CCP], and I think that… based on the conversations we heard today, and what I heard last time when we were all together, that's what we want to do…Overall kind of identity of the collective is Black women supporting Black women.

I expressed how much I appreciated the framework that Leigh offered and the overall identity of our Collective that Tisha offered. And then I asked what I thought was a tricky and specific question, one that had been burning in my mind since I initially completed my recruitment of these women to participate in the project:

> Is there anything we want to specify about the specifics of inclusivity here like? ...Who can participate? Who are black women? Are we thinking about transgender participants? What is black? Um, Again, I'm not proposing that we dive into that because that's not really the focus of my work. I don't know um, but what do you think? Is it important to spell out this stage for what we want to do, or is what we want to do irrelevant to like someone's proclaimed identity?

When Melba spoke up, I was troubled by what she said, as I initially thought her remarks were transphobic. Yet, when she concluded, I was also struck by how honest and vulnerable she was, and the amount of trust she had to share her viewpoint with the group. She said:

> I'm not sure how comfortable I would be in a transgender space. You know…if the transgender women have not actually transitioned, then I don't think I would feel as comfortable, because I think men have spaces. They have lots of spaces to communicate in ways that women don't have those protected women-only spaces. Yeah, just being honest, I don't think [if] the person hasn't fully transitioned…I wouldn't be as comfortable if it were, you know, whereas if it was a woman-only space. I'd feel a lot more comfortable, and that's maybe where I am generationally. But yeah, I just think I need to be honest. Yeah, about my thinking, thinking that.

I nodded and thanked her for sharing. At this point we all paused for almost 30 seconds with our chins in our hands thinking intently about language and inclusivity for Black women who identify as trans in our Collective.

Leigh responded "My feeling is, be as open as possible. And again, I think part of this is about all of us being together, and another part of it is about us breaking it off into the groups that we need." I interpreted what Leigh said as a recommendation that our Collective could be "as open as possible" as a whole group, while also possibly offering specific groups for specific needs, kind of like "affinity groups." To me, Leigh was expressing a trans-inclusive conception and practice of black feminism for our Collective. She continued:

> [This] is a Black feminist collective, as in black women, as in black women in the diaspora, as in black, transgender women, and…there's this other thing. Like I have a couple of the male students who are using black feminist frameworks to do their own. So, there's this black feminist thinker, is the way I usually refer to it, and I use that to refer to people you know, who think through black feminist lenses.

Leigh went on to emphasize the importance of also protecting ourselves and keeping some space for us as Black women. "We can't just be all the way closed, and we can't just be all the way exposed," she said. "Because you know, then we lose the thread that's really about. You know

who we are and how we're moving through the world. Making sure we keep some space for ourselves, like ourselves, as in black women writ large in the diaspora, you know, doing this work." I thought that this was such a key moment as we considered what it means to be a "Black feminist thinker" in terms of our participation and inclusivity in spaces and how this framing can make room for others of like minds, without policing their gender or gender expression as a condition of joining the Collective.

Tisha agreed, "Yeah…and I think like in the programming piece there would be space for Black feminist thinkers, but not everything is for everybody all the time." She then clarified, "Black trans women are black women. So, I try not to separate the two, because to me it feels like we're saying you're somehow less than we are, because we're born as females. So yeah, we can be open, but be explicit [in] our programming [about] what our target audience is**."** After Tisha spoke, I said: "No, I really appreciate that. Everything that you just said, because to me it informs the mission statement. Like we safeguard the space as a Collective. We. [take] responsibility for one another by safeguarding the space and offering specific programs to many different audiences."

At this point, I transitioned the conversation back to mission and vision again. "Thinking about mission, what I have is 'We support black women writ large in the diaspora. We support black feminist thinkers, and we safeguard the spaces we create, protecting them and watching.'" Then I introduced a finish-the-sentence- practice exercise to help us continue to brainstorm about the Collective's vision.

I introduced the prompt: "As The Steal A/Way Collective, we envision a world where…" Leigh answered, "where there are spaces where black women can feel free and empowered to be

themselves fully. A world where we can appreciate what black women contribute to our understandings of, you know, humanity in the human condition." Melba responded, "...A world where black women can rise to the top without experiencing racism or having their gender being viewed as being problematic in order to achieve those goals." Tisha simply stated, "I envision a world where Black women can thrive and rest."

Theme Four: "I Say Go For It"

The final phase of PAR, Reflect, was an opportunity for us to do just that. We worked together to further shape our Collective's identity by discussing mission, vision, and scope. We also engaged in intense critical dialogue about what our principles of gender inclusivity looked like. While not all of what we discussed was shared in this section, our reflections around the Collective also provided a kind of sending forth and a space of communion for us to enjoy each other's company as friends and colleagues before we ended our formal CCP convenings.

The essence of the theme "I Say Go For It" is affirmation. This theme initially emerged in our conversation when I shared with the CCP that I planned to take an unpaid break from my full-time job to have more time to complete my dissertation. The group unequivocally offered their support for my decision. The support they offered me is a clear example of what we also hope to offer through The Steal A/Way Collective by creating "circles of solidarity" for other Black women in the academy.

The spirit of "going for it" also reflects our creativity and openness. We repeatedly stated that we would be "creating" spaces or taking the initiative to shape them and imbue them with our values of "joy and fellowship", as Tisha stated, while also fostering professional development. At the same time as we endeavor to remain "as open as possible" while creating

these spaces, we also recognized the need to "safeguard" the spaces that we create and invite others into. This reflects our understanding of the responsibility to be inclusive in our work, which we take on by agreeing to "go for it."

Embodied Moments that Reify the Theme

The embodied moments that reify the theme of "going for it" were reflected in our expressions of affirmation and invitation. For example, our nonverbal language, such as nodding while each other spoke, and taking pregnant pauses to reflect, especially during our conversation on gender inclusivity. These behaviors encouraged and invited the speaker to continue sharing. Affirming each other and inviting each other to contribute also took tangible forms, such as the prompting exercise I guided while we shaped the Collective's vision statement. Although I did not detail these moments in the chapter, we also directly affirmed one CCP member who critiqued her appearance during the meeting, lifting her up and telling her how beautiful she was via the Zoom chat function. Finally, the solemnity of our final CCP convening was reflected in the way each woman bowed our heads and closed our eyes as we offered up final affirmations and closing remarks of thankfulness and praise for one another and the time we shared together. In this way, the invitation to "go for it" was also an invitation to "go forth" into the world, carrying the experience of the CCP with us into whatever may lie ahead.

The end of our CCP convenings also marked the beginning of a new venture. We all agreed that founding The Steal A/Way Collective for Empowered Pedagogy was a project that we wanted to initiate. Although I wasn't able to go for the Spencer Grant in 2022 like we planned, I am still committed to finding a way to get our work for The Collective off the ground after I finish my doctorate. In the next sections, I will introduce what The Steal A/Way Collective is, and how we envisioned it would work. I will also briefly talk about related

concepts and spaces for Black feminist exploration and inquiry that are similar to The Steal A/Way Collective, namely Sister Circles and Black feminist discourse sites online through social media.

As I stated in the preface, I concur with Nash (2019) fighting for and defending Black feminist intellectual contributions, though important to preserving our history, can be a hinderance to Black feminism's "visionary and world-making capacities (Nash, 2019, p. 3). I believe in a non-competitive Black feminist praxis that seeks authenticity and capaciousness over singularity or defensiveness of our concepts and contributions. Compassion and openness, rather than competitiveness, shaped our interactions in the CCP, as each one of us contributed to our shared project and built upon the ideas of each other. In that spirit, my purpose in providing information about the mission, vision, and structure of the Steal Away Collective is not to argue the Collective as a singular, unique, or unprecedented space for Black feminist praxis in postsecondary education. Rather, in the spirit of collectivity, I am sharing information about our Collective while also acknowledging some of the natural linkages and similarities between The Steal A/Way Collective and other spaces that Black feminists participate in.

Introducing: The Steal A/Way Collective for Empowered Pedagogy

Gustavsen (2005) defines innovation as "applying, exploring, or exploiting" advancements in knowledge (p. 267). According to this definition, The Steal A/Way Collective is an innovative space because it applies the new knowledge, we created from our shared experiences in the CCP to explore strategies and interventions that support Black women in academia by exploiting best practices and strategies for synchronous and asynchronous learning

in postsecondary education. Below is the tentative mission, vision, and program outline for The Steal A/Way Collective.

Mission

The Steal A/Way Collective for Empowered Pedagogy is a group of Black women supporting Black women to persist and thrive in the academy. We create spaces where we can experience fugitivity, joy, fellowship, and professional development as we grow together and learn from each other. We support and welcome all Black women writ large, throughout the diaspora, in doing this work. We support and welcome Black feminist thinkers. We are our sisters' keepers. We safeguard the spaces we create, watching the front door, and the back, protecting each other from harm and promoting each other's healing.

Vision

The Steal A/Way Collective for Empowered Pedagogy envisions a world where Black women in academia have a space to feel free and empowered to be themselves; where we are appreciated for our contributions to understanding humanity and the human condition; where we can rise to the top in our field without experiencing racism or being problematized for our gender or typecast into gendered roles; and where we can thrive and rest.

Program Outline

We want to kick off the Steal A/Way's programming by inviting all the founding members back to record a testimonial video as an introduction of themselves and a way of stating our intentions for the collective. Then we imagine using these testimonials as an invitation to other Collective participants to join in an opening webinar, where we will explore a specific theme for that season. From there, we would invite participants to fan out into small groups to

create their own Sista Circles, book clubs, in-person meet ups, or other ideas. Then we would repeat the cycle for the next season: testimonial, topical introduction, webinar, and programs. The purpose of this program structure is to facilitate togetherness among Black feminist thinkers by orienting the whole group around a theme from our lived experience, and then to support small groups that support the members' specific needs with a target audience for each small group program.

Sister Circles

Sister circles are closely related to the structure and function of the Steal A/Way Collective. Throughout our process of designing The Collective in the CCP, we referenced "circles of solidarity" as spaces where we found support in the academy and wanted to offer something similar to other Black women. Neal-Barnett et al. (2020) and others (see Boyd, 1993; Giddings, 1984) define Sister Circles as spaces that "provide Black women with help, support, knowledge, and encouragement" (Neal-Barnett et al., 2020, p. 267). The authors offered this helpful overview of the various conceptions and applications of Sister Circles:

> Over the course of time, the term sister circle has come to mean different things to different people. For some, a sister circle is a group of women within an organization (e.g., church, service club, and workplace) who are brought together by a common theme, such as healthy eating, greater spirituality, love of books, etc. For others, a sister circle is a group of women experiencing the same health concern who come together for education and support. For example, the term sister circle has been used to designate breast cancer, diabetes, and stroke support groups. Under this definition, the sister circle may be led by a professional (e.g., nurse, health educator, and therapist) or by a survivor, that is, someone who has lived or is living with the health concern. (p. 267).

Neal-Barnett et al. (2020) and others' work (see hooks, 2015) demonstrates how Sister Circles can help Black women maintain their mental and physical health while navigating intersectional challenges to their wellbeing.

In addition, many authors have explored the role of Sister Circles in postsecondary education from different lenses and perspectives including:

- Black women graduate students seeking mentoring relationships and intra-departmental networking support while matriculating through their terminal degree programs (Teasdell et al., 2021)

- Undergraduate Black women seeking informal spaces, student organizations, and Greek sororities where they can be themselves as well as to connect with likeminded peers and role models (see Croom et al., 2017); and

- Black women faculty who have trouble finding and connecting with each other due to their systemic underrepresentation in the academy (Henry & Glenn, 2009).

Although The Steal A/Way Collective is not a Sister Circle per se, it could be when broadly defined as in Croom et al. (2017), where the authors conceded "these spaces are not all Sister Circles…but we describe them as such because they serve similar purposes" (p. 217). The Steal A/Way Collective is another space that could serve the goal of promoting connectivity and support among Black women in academia.

Black Feminist Discourse on Social Media

In addition to sharing a common purpose with Sister Circles, The Steal A/Way Collective is also a space for Black feminist discourse online. Although I am not active on social media, I am aware of numerous webpages, virtual groups, and threads where Black feminists convene. Formal and informal support groups on Facebook, for example, are spaces where Black feminists in academia can share their trials and triumphs and receive the kudos, input, support, and advice of folks from all over the world.

Jones (2019) offers a poignant examination of Black feminists' presence online in their

book *Reclaiming Our Space: How Black Feminists are Changing the World from the Tweets to the Streets*. Jones (2019) asserted "some of the best-loved devices of our shared social media language are a result of Black women's innovations"—such as the well-known movement-building hashtags #BlackLivesMatter, #SayHerName, and #MeToo—and "for some, these online dialogues provide an introduction to the work of Black feminists." Jones (2019) goes on to say, "complex conversations around race, class, and gender that have been happening behind the closed doors of academia for decades are now becoming part of the wider cultural vernacular— one pithy tweet at a time," and "for [some] this discourse provides a platform for continuing their feminist activism and scholarship in a new, interactive way." I recognize and receive this important note of critique of the academic gatekeeping that impacts discourses on Black feminism. My hope, though, is that healing the bifurcation between "the closed doors of academia" and the public spaces of the internet could be another outcome of the approaches used in The Steal A/Way Collective as an online community. By acknowledging the contributions of Black feminists in other arenas such as Jones (2019), we endeavor to resist competition, gatekeeping, and other divisive practices that are common in academic life by edifying, supporting, and working in solidarity one another. Chapter Five will discuss the healing implications of these collective strategies in greater detail.

Chapter Four Conclusion

In this chapter, I reported the findings, or "themes," that arose from my data analysis. I used descriptive language to narrate the learning experience that my co-researchers and I created in the CCP. I provided a brief introduction to the meeting's context, described the key actions we

took in each of the four phases of PAR, and described some of the key embodied moments that occurred during our convenings which reify the themes that arose. I also provided information about the outcome or product that the CCP created through our PAR process: The Steal A/Way Collective for Empowered Pedagogy.

In the final chapter of this paper will connect the key findings of Chapter Four to the overall contribution of this study: *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy*. In addition to outlining how *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* is a new construct that developed from the key themes of our work in the CCP, I will also describe how it can be applied to promote transformative pandemic pedagogies in postsecondary education. Chapter Five will conclude with recommendations for future research and recommendations for healing.

Post-PAR Context

I concluded Chapter Three by describing the "Pre-Par Context" of my study, wherein I share about some key events that occurred in the beginning of applying the Curtis Method. To bookend my experience applying the Curtis Method, I will end Chapter Four by describing the Post-PAR context of my study to share about my process of recovery and recuperation as part of the actions I took as lead facilitator.

Though it is not a formal phase of data collection in PAR, Post-PAR actions I took included setting up follow-up meetings with one of my participants, sharing about my progress and the milestones I met with others in my professional community, and dealing with feelings of stress and exhaustion after employing such an intensive method. I stated previously that as lead facilitator, I am the primary instrument in this study in addition to being the main organizer of all its moving parts and people. Furthermore, I designed this study according to my personal

identities as a Black feminist and spiritual person, as well as my professional identity as a Learning Designer and authority on pandemic pedagogy. Bearing all of this responsibility felt like having an outsized role in the success of the project sometimes. Although some of the pressure I felt can likely be attributed to the rigor of participating in a doctoral program, a lot of it was also internal as a wrestled with how to be vulnerable with my co-researchers.

As discussed in Chapter Four, it took me several weeks to fully engage my co-researchers in a participatory manner rather than approaching them from an administrative lens. Even though I fought the IRB in the beginning of this study to insist that I would not separate myself as the "principal investigator" from the other CCP members, this proved much more challenging when I was called on to embody togetherness with them. Now from a Post-PAR lens, I am proud that throughout data collection I engaged the CCP members as co-researchers in keeping with critical PAR. I think one of the ways that I know I was successful in this is through the embodied moments of vulnerability, power-sharing, and support that I experienced after going past my comfort zone.

From the beginning, I took on extra work of to be an advocate for myself and my co-researchers by pushing for a policy change to allow direct payments to my co-researchers, and by designing an empirical study that reflected my identities and beliefs. Because I considered this all part of my effort to show up authentically, I did not always plan for how I would contend with the tool it was taking on me. However, as the study progressed through each stage of PAR, I wrote off my growing feelings of exhaustion as part of what it means to be a scholar and apply my methodology. I thought that the stress and isolation I was navigating was something that comes with the territory of a doctoral program, even while meeting with my co-researchers. Even

after we concluded the final stage of PAR since I continued to encounter frustrating hurdles that made me question whether I could finish the writing process with my sanity. I finally felt more relief from these mental trials when I started to really rely on my co-researchers, Athena in particular, for support. We wrote together, strategized for how I would navigate problems with my committee, and talked about our feelings, things we were both hopeful for and frustrated by in our work. It was then that I began to encounter the commitment, energy, expertise, and the spiritual guidance of my co-researchers less in the abstract and more as real support.

The darkest and most challenging moments of my doctoral process occurred after the conclusion of out CCP meetings. Things got better when I took some time away from writing and accepted Athena's offer for writing support. Looking back now months later, my Post-PAR recovery is still ongoing. I think I need time to continue exploring my ideas and conceptions about Black feminism and embodiment without the scrutiny of the dissertation process. This experience has made me stronger and more resilient, but I'm afraid it won't be the last time I grow weary in an academic setting. As I continue to rest and think about the future, one thing I've learned from this experience is not to rush. There will always be more questions to explore and more challenges along the way. But from now on, my goal is to operate on my own timeline and be more OK with taking breaks.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research question I pursued is: How do Black feminist instructors who identify as spiritual define and embody pandemic pedagogy? Sub-questions included:

1. How do these instructors sustain their Black feminist pedagogical praxis as we continue to navigate the neoliberal pandemic?

2. What new directions for teaching and learning in postsecondary education do these instructors envision amidst the ongoing pandemic, in the 2022-2023 academic year, and beyond?

As a reminder, pandemic pedagogy is a term that is used to describe the experiences of teachers and students at HEIs and K-12 schools as they navigate ever-changing teaching and learning modalities during the pandemic (Schwartzman, 2020). There are two general categories of literature on pandemic pedagogies in postsecondary education: "fatalistic" literature that centers on the challenges faced by teachers and students during the pandemic, and "responsive" literature that describes attempted solutions to these challenges. Going further, I define "transformative" pandemic pedagogies as strategies that situate the necessary subversion of power dynamics in the classroom and the role that the instructor plays in facilitating this disruption as part of their solutions.

To study what "transformative" pandemic pedagogies could look like, I used qualitative methods to examine the distinct yet related realms of online postsecondary

education, Black Feminist Thought, spirituality, and embodiment through the formation of a faculty learning community (FLC) called the Community of Care and Practice (CCP). We definitely embodied our expressions of pandemic pedagogy, but throughout our CCP convenings, we did not exactly define it. In the CCP we never really said "pandemic pedagogy is..." because we were busy living the embodied practice of our spiritual and pedagogical strategies and never explicitly paused as a group to discuss the semantics of this new term. Instead, using the Curtis Method (CM), we addressed my research questions by observing, analyzing, and later describing how Black feminist educators apply Black feminist pedagogy (BFP) and spirituality to their teaching practices during the ongoing pandemic. By the end of our process, we also came up with the idea of creating a new group of Black women postsecondary educators aimed at affirming and supporting Black women graduate students and early career faculty called The Steal A/Way Collective for Empowered Pedagogy (also referred to as The Steal A/Way Collective, or simply the Collective).

Through the process of completing the phases of PAR, four themes emerged: "Getting what we want out of it"; "the urgency of being vulnerable"; "a tendency to think bigger"; and "I say go for it." These short phrases, which are snippets from our conversations, linguistically encapsulate four key findings from my analysis of the discourse, action steps, and embodied moments we engaged in throughout our CCP convenings. These findings provided an answer to my research question. Piecing these themes together literally, Black feminists instructors who identify as spiritual define and embody pandemic pedagogy by centering ourselves and what we want to get out of the learning experiences that we shape and participate in; practicing vulnerability with ourselves and with the people we encounter in the learning environment;

thinking bigger and innovating to create participatory learning processes and spaces online; and finally, by affirming and encouraging ourselves and others through our spiritual practices. These behaviors constitute a new term for teaching and learning in the COVID-era: *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy.*

Black Feminist Pandemic Pedagogy

As stated in Chapter One, I am using Perlow et al.'s (2018) definition of Black feminist pedagogy throughout this study to capture the capacious ways that Black women engage in teaching and learning within and beyond formal education spaces. My aim is that the construct of *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* would become situated in the broader lexicon of the Black feminist pedagogical tradition and would be broadly applied. However, for the purposes of this paper, contextualizing the application of *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* in the online environment is the first step toward enacting its impact on virtual teaching and learning in postsecondary education. There is a general understanding among teaching and learning professionals that the best practices in online pedagogy are the same for other learning modalities, too, and can be applied through a number of high-impact teaching and learning frameworks (US Department of Education, 2010). Thus, the principles of *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* that I will outline are meant to be applicable across modalities.

The three tenets of *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* are: *(a) edification through fellowship, (b) offering spiritual support, and (c) collective embodied vulnerability.* In the following sections, I will define and describe these three tenets, name how each tenet emerged from its corresponding finding or theme from Chapter Four, list the ways that each tenet

responds to the problems and challenges in pandemic pedagogy, and outline what each tenet contributes to extant literature on similar topics.

Edification Through Fellowship

The theme that emerged from the planning phase of PAR was "getting what we want" out of our work as the CCP and as Black feminist educators. "Getting what we want" out of our participation in the CCP expressed a clear priority to not only co-create a space which we are all respectful of, but also to protect that space and ensure that it is shaped around *our* ideas and concerns. In that vein, the practice of fellowship also emerged as a key component of the theme. For example, during our conversations about what the CCP's purpose and outputs should be, Melba wondered: "Do we actually have those conversations around fellowship? And what do we mean by an understanding of the ethics of care? And so, I think [fellowship], informed by an ethics of care, has a wider purpose. Not just in pedagogy but everything that we do." Melba's comments capture the openness of the way we understood fellowship in the CCP, not as a term applied only to our religious or professional practice, but as something we value in all facets of our life.

Edification in the CCP's Practice of Fellowship. Our practice of fellowship defined how we wanted to show up and participate in the CCP, and how we wanted to support each other and hold each other accountable in alignment with our spirituality and ethics of care as CCP members. Our practice of fellowship disrupted the bifurcation between academic advancement and spiritual wellbeing through the process of edification. White (1998) describes the process of edification as "calling or challenging [individuals] to become their better, braver, nobler, more virtuous selves." (p. 130). In the CCP, we edified each other by affirming and supporting one

another in our healing and our learning. For example, Melba and I prayed over Tisha in her time of need, and a few moments later, we discussed and debated the challenges and limitations of teaching and learning online. This demonstrated our ability to continue to work toward our goals as we navigated the challenges of learning together, while also preserving care for one another and providing spiritual support to each other.

Edification is what "shaped the character" of our practice of fellowship because it supported a focus on wellbeing concurrently with the process of learning (White, 1998, 125). Unlike some responsive pandemic pedagogies that advocate for halting learning to tend to wellbeing (see Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020), when applied through *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy*, our practice of fellowship did both at the same time. Through the transformative process of edification, we disrupted of the traditional confines of strictly academic fellowship or strictly Christian fellowship that could have shaped our engagement by maintaining our function as a faculty learning community, rigorously explored pedagogical concepts together, while also making space to support and uplift each other emotionally and spiritually.

Our practice of fellowship also affirmed empathy, emotionality, and personal expressiveness, or the BFEC. In one of our convenings, Tisha pointed out that an important aspect of fellowship for her is "having space to fall apart." This is another example of how as Black feminists our value of emotionality shapes our understanding of what it means to be in fellowship. Yet, through our process of edification, this emotional support does not come at the expense of learning or progress toward our academic or professional goals. This became clear after my first convening with Melba and Tisha where they urged me to open up more to include myself and participate more fully in shaping the CCP's direction, even while I was having an

emotionally challenging day at work. They not only provided emotional encouragement, but also urged me to focus on "getting what I wanted" out of the project to meet my academic goals for the dissertation.

Edification through fellowship is indispensable to *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* because it is a process that does not separate centering wellbeing from the process of learning. The presence of these two essential components is what makes the fellowship that emerged in the CCP a unique approach to the challenge of transforming responsive pandemic pedagogies. By edifying one another, we practiced fellowship in a way that did not sacrifice wellbeing to focus on learning or learning to focus on wellbeing. In the next sections, I will situate this process of edifying fellowship within the existing concepts of academic fellowship and Christian fellowship and describe what made our practice of fellowship in the CCP different from strictly academic fellowship or strictly Christian fellowship. Finally, I will explain how we experienced edification through fellowship to facilitate learning together and center our wellbeing without sacrificing either.

Academic Fellowship. Academic fellowship is understood as an opportunity for professional development in higher education that "provides extensive training without having scholars take a sabbatical or be away from other professional responsibilities for an extended period of time" (Searle et al., 2006, p. 936). Academic fellowships typically follow a cohort model with an established set of learning goals that the group pursues together over a set period of time (Searle et al., 2006). Academic fellowships, according to Lown et al. (2009), "are grounded in the principles of adult and experiential learning, reflective practice and humanistic philosophy" (p. 1089). The goal of academic fellowship is to "help faculty develop and advance

their skills as educators" (Lown et al., 2009, p. 1089) and "to build a cadre of educational leaders for the institution" (Searle et al., 2006, p. 936). While the CCP was structured as a faculty learning community (FLC) which is similar in some ways to academic fellowships, our fellowship practice was different because it was primarily shaped by our shared commitment to exploring and embodying the Black feminist ethics of care (BFEC).

As discussed in Chapter Two, the BFEC are a set of strategies that outline the specific ways that care and concern for others are applied to dialogue for knowledge development and meaning-making processes within a Black feminist framework (Collins, 2009). As a reminder, embodiment is the affirmation or expression "of the whole of the person so there can be no separations" (Argyle & Shields, 1996, p. 68). In the CCP, we embodied the BFEC in our laughs, tears, cheers, and other chapter threxpressions of emotions and empathy which helped strengthen and clarify our learning. We also prioritized care, concern, and support for one another throughout our convenings. For example, Melba stressed the point in phase one of PAR that "the fellowship bond that we're creating [as the CCP], it's meant to be about an ethic of care." The practice of embodiment and ethic of care differentiates our practice of fellowship from academic fellowship.

Our practice of fellowship in the CCP also included many instances where we engaged in some of the traditional applications of Christian fellowship (Balge, 1994; Lawrenz, 1954). To acknowledge those expressions' origins, I will briefly describe what Christian fellowship means. Then, bearing these tensions in mind, I will discuss the meaning of our practice of fellowship as divergent from Christian fellowship through an intentional focus on critical religious pluralism and spirituality.

Christian Fellowship. Balge (1994) writes, "fellowship is a fellowship of believers in Christ, not a mere external association of voluntary adherents to a society or institution" (p. 7). From a Biblical perspective, Christian fellowship is a prayer for and practice of unity between Christians that Jesus offered to God the night before the Crucifixion (Lawrenz, 1954). He said: "[May] they all may be one: as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." Lawrenz (1954) adds clarification saying, "this prayer is fulfilled in the growth, expansion, and preservation of the invisible Church of believers. The blessed work of leading men into this fellowship with Christ and with one another and of preserving them in this unity" (p. 3). This clarifies that the goal of Christian fellowship is "to render spiritual service to fellow believers" in Christ (Balge, 1994, p. 14). In the CCP, expressions of Christian fellowship showed up in the ways that we "rendered spiritual service" to each other. For example, when Tisha shared that her uncle had recently died, Melba and I both took some time to say a prayer aloud for her and her family. We did so with Tisha's permission in an effort to offer support to her. Other ways that we embodied spiritual support and care for ourselves and one another are discussed later in this chapter. However, I am differentiating our practice of fellowship in the CCP from Christian fellowship because the fellowship we engaged in was informed by spirituality, not religion.

According to Balge (1994) and Lawrenz (1954), Christian fellowship is only available to "fellow believers" (p. 14). This conception excludes those who are not Christian from participating in fellowship. Because Christianity is a hegemonic force in the West and at HEIs (Blumenfeld, 2006; Small, 2020) Black feminists have a responsibility to maintain a critical awareness of this hidden dynamic to proactively resist reproducing it. Furthermore, our practice

of fellowship emerged from our lived experiences in the CCP, which was a space rooted in critical religious pluralism theory (CRPT). CRPT urges "a pluralistic inclusion of all religious, secular, and spiritual identities, recognizing the liberatory potential of these identities upon individuals' lives" (Small, 2020). This imbued our practice of fellowship with a commitment to resisting oppression and domination in all forms, including religious oppression.

The CCP was purposefully created as a space where spirituality was prioritized. Our emphasis on spirituality is what enabled us to resist a strictly Christian interpretation of our fellowship experience and supported us in creating a transcendent learning environment. In the next sections, I will describe how we used spirituality to resist transactional teaching in the CCP and why it is a core tenet of Black feminist pandemic pedagogy.

Offering Spiritual Support

In an article discussing HEIs' pandemic response efforts, Stewart (2020) urged Black feminists to focus on "radical actions" that "transform material conditions" in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis (p. 265). They stated,

> Now is our opportunity to live the values of a Black feminist ethic, which requires radical action that disrupts the very foundations of the social order. Black feminism asks that we work to transform material conditions that help foster social change. Black feminism would require us to name and recognize that we are in a crisis, and our action to manage should first, foremost, and always be about the people, particularly in the margins. p. 265.

The process of recognizing that we are in a crisis and taking action to "transform material conditions" for ourselves and others can be facilitated through spiritual practices. For example,

practicing mindful awareness of how we are experiencing stress in our bodies and spirits, as well as attending to that stress and through means of contextualized transcendence are all examples of how Black feminists offer spiritual support to ourselves and others.

Spiritual Support as Resistance to Transactional Teaching. Another problem that I outlined in Chapter One which can be addressed through *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* is the neoliberal practice of transactional teaching (Giroux, 2013). These practices, which began long before the onset of the pandemic, developed as HEIs continue to monetarily devalue the work of teaching and cut down the amount of time instructors have to prepare to teach (Kezar et al., 2019). Tisha experienced this firsthand when she was given "only one week to move her courses online" at the start of the pandemic. Cultures of transactional teaching undergird fatalistic conceptions of pandemic pedagogy wherein instructors' have a perceived lack of control over the experiences they create for their students in online learning (Zheng, 2020). While disrupted access to structured teaching environments and the inequalities of the digital divide are very real challenges, presenting these as a reason to completely discount teaching and learning online furthers neoliberal fatalism. Offering spiritual support to ourselves and others, as well as practicing spiritual self-determination are two forms of resistance to transactional teaching that we embodied in the CCP. In the next sections, I will describe why *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* includes offering spiritual support as an approach to resisting transactional teaching and fatalistic pandemic pedagogies. I will also discuss spiritual self-determination as a result of operationalizing Hull's (2001) definition of Black feminist spirituality in this study.

The theme that corresponds with offering spiritual support as a tenet of *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* is "I say go for it." This theme emerged during phase four of PAR. "I say go

for it," is not only an affirmation; it is a declaration of our faith and spirituality as Black

feminists. From Melba's example of sharing blessings, encouragement, and well-wishes with her

students and colleagues via WhatsApp, to Athena's practice of manifestation and communication

with her ancestors, the CCP members embodied the application and purpose of Black feminist

spirituality which Dillard (2022) urges: "using it to address, break down, and work to abolish

structures and conditions that hamper liberation and freedom for Black people" (p. 3). Using

spiritual practices to affirm and support ourselves and others is indispensable to practicing *Black*

feminist pandemic pedagogy, especially as we continue to navigate and survive during the

ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

In the CCP, when we used spiritual practices to affirm and support ourselves and others,

we were reclaiming them as strategies that help us experience transcendence and offer those

experiences to others. Therefore, offering spiritual support in our practice as educators is

reflective of and grounded in the tradition of spiritual pedagogy. As discussed in Chapter One,

spiritual pedagogies are teaching and learning approaches that are rooted in a practice of

contextualized transcendence (Chavez, 1997). According to Love and Talbot (2009), practicing

"transcendence" emphasizes inner transformation by imagining and believing in possibilities

beyond one's current "locus of centricity" (p. 367). For example, Athena shared a story about

how she used spirituality to support a student who was facing a tough decision about her career.

Athena encouraged the student to "pause, reflect, and pray" to her ancestors to "lead and direct

her path." Athena was supporting her student to practice transcendence by calling on the spirits

of ancestors who were no longer living to help her imagine the possibilities of what her future

could look like based on her career decisions. She expressed how much she valued "being able to

pray together" with her students as a way of supporting and "giving back" to them. This example illuminates one way that Athena enacted transformative, rather than transactional teaching by offering spiritual support to her student.

We also discussed how as Black women the ways we offer spiritual support to others are shaped by the racialized challenges we endure in the academy. For instance, Melba talked about how she uses her faith to support and encourage her Black students who are torn down by racially motivated barriers in the academy such as unfair evaluations and assessments between her Black women students, whose work she sees as superior to their peers, but fall short of being passed along to the next doctoral milestones, while White male students, whose work is not as good, are passed along. Melba said she once had a student who experienced this racism, and she "bent over backwards" by going with the student to meetings to advocate on her behalf in the predominately white organization where she was conducting her study. The student in this case was Muslim. She and Melba connected over WhatsApp, a digital messaging platform, where Melba offered her encouragement and prayers for her strength and success. "It's about my belief in the student," Melba said. "I am holding the student up with my faith. I've literally put my hands together and I am raising the student up." She gestured with one palm over the other and lifted her arms in a posture of prayer. "I'm going on this journey with them. As a Black woman with a Black student, we are going on this journey together. And it's a spiritual journey to preserve them." Melba's example is an embodied illustration of how spirituality can resist transactional teaching and fatalistic pandemic pedagogies. She not only identified the structural reason for what the student was going through, which was racism, she also accompanied the student into the spaces where she was experiencing this structural harm and advocated for her.

Furthermore, she then affirmed the student through prayer and spiritually joined together with her in the challenges she was facing. All of these acts exemplify the ways that Black feminists embody the "transcendence" of spiritual pedagogies to offer spiritual support to others as part of *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy*.

   Practicing Spiritual Self-Determination. The central question I am exploring in this study is "How do Black feminist instructors who identify as spiritual define and embody pandemic pedagogy?" As discussed in Chapter One, to answer this question I operationalized Akasha Hull's (2001) definition of Black feminist spirituality and put it in conversation with mine and my participants' spiritual identities and practices. Hull (2001) defines Black feminist spirituality as our politics, our spiritual consciousness, and our creativity with "each dimension impacting the others and all of them together generating tremendous power" (p. 3) The conversations and actions taken in the CCP add nuance to the political aspect of Hull's definition of Black feminist spirituality, specifically through our insistence on self-determination within our spiritual identities and practices. Furthermore, this added nuance about the politics of spiritual self-determination clarifies its role in *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* through the ways that we offer spiritual support to ourselves and others.

   To define spiritual self-determination, I turn to the example of Lakeesha J. Harris (2018) who explicitly connects her spiritual practice of Black witch magic to the practices of her ancestors. By "[doing] whatever we have to do to help [the Black community]" through the practice of witchcraft, Harris, other Black witches, and her ancestors who came before her embody "decolonization, self-determination, and the awareness of [their] own agency and capacity as change agents" (p. 257). As Black feminists, we understand that to support our

wellbeing we have to consider our bodies, minds, and spirits, holistically (hooks, 1994; 2003). However, we are also committed to disrupting all forms of oppression, which includes Christian hegemony. Therefore, it is critically important from a Black feminist perspective not to situate Christianity as the authority on what spirituality is or can look like. Offering spiritual support without limiting it just to Christians can help make room for spiritual, secular, and non-religious perspectives and individuals to practice their beliefs and be supported in them.

In the CCP, one way that our value of self-determination was evident in our spiritual practices was in our efforts to resist Christian hegemony and consciously avoid reinforcing Christian domination onto others. In other words, spiritual self-determination, for us, was a value that we wanted to offer to others. Although all of the CCP members are culturally Christian or have a Christian religious identity, we also teased out, at length, the differences between our religious identities and practices and our spiritual identities and practices. We each expressed being very careful to live out our Christian faith by embodying it, rather than espousing it, in effort to allow others to feel supported by us rather than judged from the lens of our Christianity. For example, in conversations with each CCP member about how they embody their spirituality, almost all of them said something to the effect of "Faith is lived and not spoken." In one instance, Melba explicitly stated "Faith is inward." Tisha concurred: "I don't lead with saying "I'm a Christian, my husband is a minister." And Athena shared that, when she does talk about her faith in public, she centers the message "love your neighbor as yourself." She is also "very specific" about when and where she uses these messages because she "doesn't want people thinking she is trying to indoctrinate them." All of these instances demonstrate the group's

awareness of Christian privilege and hegemony, and a desire to mitigate its impacts in our interpersonal interactions.

Self-determination also shapes and informs the creative ways that we embody our spiritual practices and use them to offer support to others. Atta (2018) describes Black feminist creativity as "taking something, going with its rhythm, and making it greater for self, family, and community" (p. 240). In the CCP, our creativity was evident in the ways that we engage our spiritual practices, often by "going with the rhythm" of traditional Christian practice such as prayer and reading scripture, and then "making them greater" through self-determined, embodied, and pluralistic applications. For example, Leigh understands religion as "a tool." Although she was raised Catholic and is still culturally Christian, she does not conflate her whole sense of spirituality with Christianity. "Religion is not something you are. It's something you use," she stated. Leigh gave the example of her prayer and meditation practices as strategies she "uses" to nurture her spirituality in creative ways like using applications on her phone with pre-recorded meditations or receiving daily affirmation text messages from a Black women centered wellness company. Similarly, Athena discussed her practice of "manifesting" and practicing mindfulness of the physical sensations in her body to support her decision-making. "I think that's how my Black feminism as well as my faith shows up," she said. This example illuminates Athena's embodied awareness and the ways it informs her choices, which is one way she expresses spiritual self-determination.

Offering spiritual support to others and making space for spiritual self-determination are two strategies that Black feminist educators use to resist transactional teaching; however, I want to underscore that these practices can also be applied outside of postsecondary education.

Stewart (2020) reminds us that, from a Black feminist standpoint, it is a spiritual act whenever we pause to recognize that when we are in a crisis or some other state of need and take then steps to seek help and support to transform our "material conditions" (p. 265). Additionally, in the same way that our value of self-determination was evident in our efforts to consciously avoid reinforcing Christian domination onto others, this consciousness of hegemonic forces could be practiced in other dominant and subordinate relationship dynamics.

It takes self-awareness and vulnerability to execute these spiritual strategies. Throughout my experience with the CCP, I made numerous connections between Black feminist pedagogy, spirituality, and vulnerability, especially when I shared more about my religious background and experiences as a graduate student with the group during phase two of PAR. Some additional ways that Black feminists and educators traditionally practice vulnerability and the way we did so in the CCP are discussed in the next section.

Collective Embodied Vulnerability

Vulnerability, or the practice of-self-disclosure, is a well-explored concept in the literature on feminism and pedagogy (see Kishimoto & Mwangi, 2009; Ross & Copeland, 2021; Stern & Denker, 2020), so it was not very surprising to me that it played such an important role in the CCP. One manifestation of responsive pandemic pedagogy that *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* addresses and transforms is the practice of vulnerability in the learning environment. In responsive pandemic pedagogies, instructors practice vulnerability by naming and describing their personal challenges and struggles with their class (Núñez, 2021) and holding space for students to express their fears and feelings of loss and grief (Mehrotra, 2021) amidst the stressors of the pandemic. Bhattacharya (2015) similarly describes "discourses of vulnerability" as:

> [Those] in which we unmask, allow ourselves to be genuinely seen, without the need to wield weapons for our safety. Discourses that enable us to work with honesty; to address prejudices, belief systems, and pain; and to discuss possibilities for discovering a way forward based on connection, interrelatedness, and our shared humanity. (311)

Although these behaviors are well-intentioned, they do not explicitly address the embodied vulnerability of instructors and students' experiences. In contrast to these responsive approaches, Hill's (2017) definition of embodied vulnerability directly connects with bell hooks' (1994) definition of embodiment operationalized in this study.

Where Núñez (2021), Mehrotra (2021), and Bhattacharya's (2015) descriptions of vulnerability center on discourse and self-disclosure, Hill's (2017) discussion of vulnerability emphasizes its relationship to Black women's bodies, and Black feminist pedagogy (BFP), especially for queer Black women who teach. Hill (2017) stated, "embodied vulnerability [is] a Black feminist practice [and] an educative tool for mediating and celebrating the power of the body, invoking identity and mobilizing the body in the teaching/learning process" (Hill, 2017, p. 433). Hill's definition of embodied vulnerability deeply resonates because it centers the body as central to creating and communicating knowledge in the Black feminist tradition. However, shifting away temporarily from focusing on such personal acts of vulnerability, or the vulnerability of our individual bodies as Black women, I also noted the emergence of *collective* embodied vulnerability while participating in the CCP.

Collectivity is the process of challenging, learning from, and empowering others through shared responsibility, rather than competition (Lane, 2017). Collective embodied vulnerability is a critical, black feminist approach aimed at the subversion of power dynamics in the classroom by going beyond the practice of self-disclosure to invoke identity and mobilize the body. In the

CCP, we practiced vulnerability in the traditional way of self-disclosure during our meetings, but also in collective and embodied ways as we connected and shared space with one another.

For example, through our practice of fellowship in the CCP I realized that I needed to be more forthcoming about who I am in order to help shape who *we* are as the CCP. This experience, which emerged from our convening in phase two of PAR, revealed the second theme, "the urgency of being vulnerable." Later, during phase four of PAR when we were discussing our standpoint on gender inclusivity within The Steal A/Way Collective, I demonstrated "traditional" vulnerability when I asked the group to consider whether we were explicitly welcoming queer and trans Black women into the Collective. I was afraid that the group might espouse exclusive or transphobic viewpoints during our dialogue, and of being misconstrued as expressing those views, myself. The discourse that ensued was certainly one of "honesty" aimed at "addressing prejudices, belief systems, and pain; and to discuss possibilities for discovering a way forward based on connection, interrelatedness, and our shared humanity," but it was also a poignant example of how by evoking the power of the body, and in this case the question of which bodies we were intentionally inviting into our Collective space, we shared an experience of embodied vulnerability (Bhattacharya, 2016, p. 311). From our furrowed eyebrows, tight with concentration while thinking and reflecting, to our attentiveness while listening to one another, giving each other direct eye contact with our chins in our hands, our collective embodied vulnerability also showed in our physical expressions and postures.

When we courageously invoked identity, Tisha, Melba, Leigh, and I *all* shared and disclosed more about our own perspectives, assuming the risk of being exposed and potentially misunderstood in our effort to create the perspective and identity of the Steal A/Way Collective.

We also embodied collective vulnerability in this work by actively considering the vulnerability of those who we welcome into the Collective, especially for queer and trans women because their bodies and identities may differ from ours in the CCP. We were practicing collective embodied vulnerability, specifically by "mobilizing the body" in our teaching and learning process together (Hill, 2017, p. 433). In doing so, we spurred one another to "think bigger," a concept which emerged as a key theme during phase three of PAR.

Collective embodied vulnerability is essential to *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* because it encourages instructors and students to collectively invoke the body, shifting the locus of power from the instructors' perspective alone to the identities and embodiment of everyone in the learning environment. This is contrasted with individualistic expressions of vulnerability which are exemplified in responsive pandemic pedagogies. For instance, in the work of Núñez (2021) and Mehrotra (2021) instructors are described for practicing and encouraging vulnerability primarily through self-disclosure, without centering collective or embodied expressions. Black feminists enact collectivity through "our interactions not just with ourselves, but also with our students, co-investigators, colleagues, and others" (Richardson, 2018, p. 293). Thus, collective embodied vulnerability is a necessary tenet of *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy*.

Edification through fellowship, offering spiritual support, and collective embodied vulnerability offer a new way of understanding transformative teaching practices during the pandemic from a Black feminist lens. Practicing edification through fellowship disrupts the separation between academic learning and promoting wellbeing. Offering spiritual support allows instructors to resist transactional teaching and tap into practices that help them and their

students transcend their locus of centricity. Lastly, by facilitating collective embodied vulnerability, instructors can promote more regard for the experiences of all persons in the learning environment and support themselves and students through meaningful acts of vulnerability. In the next section, I will give a few recommendations for how these tenets can be applied for further study in research and to promote healing in postsecondary teaching and learning.

Recommendations

In Chapter One, I quoted Osei-Kofi et al. (2010) to situate higher education as a site for social justice where I and other scholars (see Kramer & Hall, 2018; Strunk, et al., 2020; Pulcini, 2018; LePeau, 2019) work "as part of a greater struggle for liberatory education that not only spans primary, secondary, and tertiary education but also is fueled by transnational material realities of social injustice, in which education is heavily implicated" (p. 329). Additionally, I specifically said that I would try to facilitate healing in my work by striving to collectively bring together groups, externally, and the internal fragments within ourselves, as individuals, to create positive change in my life and in the lives of those who experience oppression and marginalization. In alignment with these stated goals, in the next sections I will offer the traditional "recommendations for research," by describing some ideas for future studies based on this one, along with "recommendations for healing" that offer strategies to promote wholeness in postsecondary teaching and learning. My recommendations for future research are grounded in the literature gaps that I identified, and areas where other scholars could add onto, or tweak the approaches that I used to address those gaps via the CM. The recommendations for healing that I offer are grounded in the central contribution of this work, which is the novel construct of *Black*

feminist pandemic pedagogy and its three tenets. The audience for both sets of recommendations are Black feminists; scholars of teaching and learning in postsecondary education; faculty development practitioners; postsecondary faculty and instructors; and critical pedagogues. I am focusing on these groups because they reflect my identities and the spaces that I occupy and am accountable to in this work. They are also the writers, thinkers, and change agents whose work I draw on and whose work I hope to commune with as a scholar and educator.

Recommendations for Research

In future studies, Black feminist scholars can use the framework of the CM to apply more Black feminist tenets not discussed in the present study. The work of the CCP focused on Black feminist pedagogy (Perlow et al., 2018), BFEC (Collins, 2009) and Black feminist spirituality (Hull, 2001). There are many, many other arenas in Black feminism that we did not exhaustively engage. For example, the collective meetings of the CCP were modeled after faculty learning communities. In other work, that element could be replaced with community organizing meeting frameworks, as in Charlene Carruthers paradigm for Black queer feminist political movement-building (2019). A sample research question could be: "How do Black feminist instructors who identify as activists embody their politics in their pedagogy?" Another example would be replacing the framework of Black feminist pedagogy in the CM with Black feminist rage as in the work of Brittney Cooper (2018) to center Black women's emotionality as the primary teaching strategy. A sample research question could be: "How do Black feminist instructors embody their rage in their pedagogy?" Additionally, more research will be needed to study the impacts of practicing Black feminist pandemic pedagogy during non-crisis times, or in contexts of institutional or pedagogical homeostasis; such studies are necessary to determine how

impactful the pedagogical practices of *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* are without being explicitly situated and applied in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. I would encourage more scholars to explore these topics to continue to nuance Black feminist pedagogy broadly, and *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* specifically.

In the present study, I endeavored to address literature gaps present in postsecondary research on spirituality and spiritual pedagogies in postsecondary education, specifically by engaging Black feminist instructors who identity as spiritual and by operationalizing Hull's (2001) definition of Black feminist spirituality. Additional qualitative studies, perhaps focusing on in-depth interviews, would be helpful, especially to gain insight on the spirituality of Black feminists who are not Christian. A sample research question could be "How do Black feminist instructors who are not Christian practice spirituality in their pedagogy?" Curtis (2021) outlines a model for spiritual teaching strategies in postsecondary education that could support this exploration.

Relatedly, additional research utilizing CRPT as a theoretical framework would be useful in adding nuance to the applications of this new theory (Small, 2020). In the present study I used CRPT to acknowledge "the central roles of religious privilege, oppression, hegemony, and marginalization in maintaining inequality between Christians and non-Christians" throughout our discourse in the CCP (Small, 2020, p. 7). I applied CRPT to guide my practice of critical interfaith dialogue with my participants, and to inform my posture of religious inclusivity through this study, but there are five other tenets of the theory that can also be used to resist reproducing Christian hegemony in academic research. These are 1) Naming that the subordination of non-Christian (including nonreligious) individuals has been built into the

society of the United states, as well as institutionalized on college campuses; 2) Embracing an intersectional analysis of religious identity with all other forms of social identity; 3) Advocating for a pluralistic inclusion of all religious, secular, and spiritual identities; 4) Utilizing a religiously pluralistic lens in all areas of research, policy, and practice, accounting for power, privilege, marginalization and oppression; and 5) Prioritizing the voices of individuals with minoritized religious identities and those with pluralistic commitments in the work toward social transformation through higher education (Small, 2020). Sample research questions that focus on religious pluralism in postsecondary teaching and learning could be "How, if at all, do postsecondary educators demonstrate religious pluralism in faculty learning communities?" or "How, if at all, do postsecondary educators resist the subordination of non-Christian groups in faculty development programs?" More studies that the tenets of CRPT to the theoretical framework would contribute to making religious inclusivity a priority for social justice in postsecondary education research.

Future research on critical pedagogy should urgently consider applications of embodiment as essential to critical praxis in postsecondary education. In the present study, the CM operationalized embodiment through engagement in participatory action research via a faculty learning community. Future studies could operationalize embodiment in a more literal way. For example, a sample research question could be "How do postsecondary educators acknowledge the body in Higher Education M.Ed. programs that espouse social justice as a value?" This sample question focuses on social justice to further highlight the relationship between centering the role of the physical body and challenging systemic oppression in postsecondary education.

Recommendations for Healing

Throughout this study I operationalized a four-part definition for the word "healing:" 1) healing is collective; 2) healing is wholeness; 3) healing is transformative; and 4) healing is embodied. The three tenets of *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy*—edification through fellowship, offering spiritual support, and collective embodied vulnerability—epitomize these qualities of healing by promoting communal experiences of reunification. Practicing healing using these tenets is one way to actualize "contemplative pedagogy to reflect more deeply on the politicized narratives" impacting our bodies, minds, and spirits that often go unacknowledged in teaching and learning spaces (Berila, 2016, p. 9). Berila's (2016) emphasis on the politics of healing underscores the need for critical reflection on the application of healing practices within the context of the harmful structures and systems that we need to heal from, otherwise they will "miss the mark" of their transformative potential (p. 9). In the next sections, I will highlight how practicing the tenets of *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* can promote healing in postsecondary education. In doing so, I will call back to the harmful structures I named in Chapter One, and how these healing strategies can be applied to mitigate their impact.

Edification Through Fellowship for Healing

Practicing edification through fellowship can promote healing by helping us become more whole. As I discussed in Chapter One, I think one of the most essential definitions of "harm" is that it separates us from ourselves and others, and in doing so disrupts wholeness, collectivity, and unity. Edification through fellowship helps us reunify the parts of who we are that feel separate, or that we are encouraged to keep separate by the institutions in our lives. For example, in the CCP our practice of edification helped bring together the academic purpose for

our work, which was ultimately to complete the PAR cycle, and the care-centered purpose that

we shared through our focus on supporting one another. We also were in fellowship with one

another as we tended to each other's spiritual needs. Both actions contributed to the reunification

of our academic, emotional, and spiritual selves which allowed us to experience healing.

Reflecting on the importance of this holistic approach to feminist pedagogy, Val (1996)

wrote:

> As a holistic practice, pedagogy can act as a model of integration of mind/ body/ spirit, reconnecting specialized knowledge to wider contexts of living. Holistic pedagogy owns and uses its own ambiguous and multiple origins, its hybrid, marginal identity, to resist, dilute, and intercept the academy's drive of sexual polarity, purity, and absolute control, working to replace these with a more tender and tentative stance, towards self and others, and our environment. (206).

This quote perfectly encapsulates the healing impact of edification in fellowship spaces. My

recommendation for postsecondary instructors is to practice edification, with the intention to

challenge and support ourselves and our students, with an emphasis on promoting fellowship and

holistic care. For example, assuming the posture of "peer" or "guide" to students, rather than

disseminator of knowledge, can support postsecondary educators in resisting the separation of

academic practices from care-centered pedagogy (Croom et al., 2017).

Offering Spiritual Support for Healing

Before completing PAR with the CCP, I argued based on my literature review that

postsecondary instructors have the agency to center spirituality in their pedagogical practice. My

stance was affirmed throughout this study by the stories of spiritual support my participants and I

shared. To advocate for spiritual support as integral to *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy*, I used

Hull's (2001) definition of Black feminist spirituality—which includes Black feminists' politics,

spiritual consciousness, and creativity with "each dimension impacting the others and all of them

together generating tremendous power"—to actualize spiritual self-determination. All these values—instructors' spiritual agency, Black feminist spirituality, and spiritual self-determination—can be applied to promote healing in postsecondary teaching and learning (p. 3).

As discussed in Chapter Two, many studies of spiritual pedagogy affirm the praxis of postsecondary instructors who use their spiritual agency to foster healing for themselves and their students. With a focus on supporting healing though wholeness, these instructors practice contextualized transcendence (Chavez, 1997), employ teaching strategies that quiet the mind and activate the senses (Rendon, 2009), and promote nonduality, interdependence, impermanence, and intentionality in themselves and their students (Kaufman, 2017). Black feminist spirituality also includes our politics and our creativity as integral to embodying our spiritual practices (Hull, 2001). All these are ways that postsecondary instructors can offer spiritual support in the learning environment, even without explicitly engaging in religious prayers and practices as we did in the CCP.

Black feminist spirituality expands the on pedagogical practices above by engaging spirituality "to address, break down, and work to abolish structures and conditions that hamper liberation and freedom for Black people" (p. 3). As discussed in Chapter One, Christian hegemony is a harmful system that marginalizes persons from minoritized religious groups, the nonreligious, and atheists (see Schier-Happell, 2020; Peek, 2005; Shaheen, 2020; Yousafzai, 2020; Smith, 2011; Reisner & Mulvhill, 2020). Thus, I recommend that postsecondary educators leverage the practices above to promote spirituality and resist overtly Christian expressions of

spirituality in the teaching and learning space to foster inclusion of nonreligious, secular, and atheist students.

Collective Embodied Vulnerability for Healing

One of the central problems that Black feminist pandemic pedagogy disrupts is the tendency of postsecondary educators to be responsive, rather than transformative in their pandemic pedagogy. Instructors' responsive pedagogical behaviors may be well-intended, such as sacrificing students' wellbeing in favor of attaining learning outcomes (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020); unilaterally sharing their personal challenges and struggles with their class (Cutara, 2021); and cursorily allowing students to express their fears and feelings of loss and grief (Mehrotra, 2021). However, these approaches fail to explicitly center the subversion of power dynamics in the classroom and the role that the instructor plays in facilitating this disruption (Ladson-Billings, 1998; 2021).

Collective embodied vulnerability is a Black feminist concept that moves the act of being vulnerable beyond the necessary practice of radical honesty and self-disclosure, and more into the space of embodied risk-taking with the aim of creating more just and accountable spaces. It means choosing to collectively take the risk of naming and advocating for our bodily realities in the teaching and learning space. As Berila (2016) stated:

> Sometimes just having a language to describe and understand the eruptions of internalized oppression is an important part of the healing process. Feminist and antiracist pedagogy has long noted that one of the first steps in unearthing internalized oppression is naming its existence.

Thus, practicing collective embodied vulnerability, and being prepared to challenge and support others in this practice, is a healing act. I recommend that postsecondary educators invoke their identity and mobilize the body by naming how their lived experiences and embodiment informs

their perspectives and pedagogical experiences, while also inviting and holding space for students to do the same.

Limitations

In their article "What We Not Finna Do: Respectfully Collaborating with Skinfolk and Kinfolk in Black Feminist Participatory Action Research," Guishard et al. (2021) advocate for the necessity of humility in academia. They state that when sharing "interconnected stories" through Black feminist action research it is important to "dynamically exercise humility and unsettle our reliance on academicease" (Guishard et al., 2021, p. 20). I agree with the authors about the necessity of humility when trying to tell complex stories in academia, and about the need to de-emphasize academic language and implications in our work to promote transferability between our efforts as scholars and the efforts of others not in the academy. In keeping with this practice, I am sharing a few key limitations that I've identified in my work. My aim in sharing these is to demonstrate academic humility and acknowledge areas for growth through a posture of inclusivity, rather than competitiveness about the strengths of my contributions as a Black feminist scholar. The three main limitations that I want to name, and address are: 1) the vague definition of pandemic pedagogy applied to this work; 2) the lack of intersectional analysis of race and gender in my findings; and 3) the limited potential impact of my findings due to the small number of homogenous contributors.

I chose to study pandemic pedagogy because at the time I was completing this study, the COVID-10 pandemic was an all-consuming problem and unprecedented circumstance the world over. However, the concrete definition of pandemic pedagogy is limited because of the subjective and unclear start and end points for the pandemic experience. This nebulousness raises

the question of whether or not the teaching practices characterized by it are tied to the actual presence of the COVID-19 virus.

The definition of pandemic pedagogy that I used throughout this study is the experiences of teachers and students at HEIs and K-12 schools as we adapt to ever-changing teaching and learning modalities, and the interpersonal dynamics of face-to-face, screen-to-screen, and mask-to-mask education during the pandemic (Schwartzman, 2020). However, some could argue that the pandemic is effectively over. For context, the U.S. declared the COVID-19 pandemic emergency a public health emergency on March 1, 2020, and did not rescind the declaration until May 11, 2023. While there are existing studies that focus on "crisis pedagogy" (see Walker, 2009; Giroux, 2015; Khan, 2010) which circumvent the issue of naming the specific crisis which the teaching and learning practices are responding to, in this study I wanted to contribute to understanding the impact of the pandemic with more nuance and with an eye toward healing. Even though this study may not contribute a conclusive definition of what pandemic pedagogy is, it does add greater perspective to why its challenges arose, how those challenges persist, and ways those challenges can be mitigated from a Black feminist lens.

A second limitation of this work is the lack of intersectional analysis in my methodology. Although my co-researchers and I agreed that analysis of our sexuality and the gendered experiences we shared would be best addressed in a separate study, leaving out a robust analysis of how our gender impacted our experience is an important limitation to acknowledge. While we discussed things like the impact of gender roles in our academic and household labor, I did not recount these conversations in detail in Chapter Four, because I wanted to keep the focus on our teaching and learning strategies. Furthermore, the dynamics of sex and sexuality came up

frequently in our convenings. I am very interested in the implications of sexuality in Black feminist pedagogy, and especially in a study focused on Black feminism and embodiment, think that these topics important to generating insights on the experiences of Black women. Future research could address these limitations by exploring more about how sexuality informs the fellowship practices of Black women or how Black feminist pedagogy is impacted by our sexual expressions and embodiment.

This study also has potential limitations in impact due to the small number of participants; data were collected from just five individuals. Furthermore, there are potential limitations because the recommendations I offer are tailored to Black feminists; scholars of teaching and learning in postsecondary education; faculty development practitioners; postsecondary faculty and instructors; and critical pedagogues. These groups are a small subsection of the persons in academia who are impacted by pandemic pedagogy (Henry & Glenn, 2009). Future research could address the impact limitations of my study by creating a pedagogical rubric or observation tool to measure the effectiveness of the tenets of *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* when applied by persons within or outside of these target groups. Such work would yield valuable insights into the effectiveness of these approaches at disrupting the practice of transactional teaching and promoting healing in the learning environment.

Chapter Five Conclusion

Critical pedagogues can enact transformative education through course design models and facilitation strategies that support "learning through mind, body, and spirit, in contrast to the almost exclusive privileging in these contemporary times on cognition" (Atta, 2018, p. 240). For example, Curtis and Wilkinson (in press) illuminate how instructors' critical consideration of

embodiment as a way of examining and transforming power dynamics in the virtual classroom. Okello et. All (2022) also urge educators to practice attunement to the body in the process of teaching and learning. It is essential for research in critical pedagogy to center embodied learning *as* learning, and as critical to the process of examining context, reflecting, and acting, and experiencing ongoing conscientization.

There are very few empirical studies that investigate pandemic pedagogies at this time. Based on the literature I reviewed, this study is among some of the first works to use a heuristic approach to understanding pandemic pedagogy. By centering Black feminist instructors at HEIs, my study provides a narrow analysis of the pedagogical approaches of a small, but impactful subsection of Black feminist postsecondary instructors. In addition to centering Black feminists' pedagogical practices, my study also empirically explored Black feminist instructors' spirituality. While it is almost always considered key to Black feminist praxis, studies of Black feminist instructors (see Porter et. Al, 2020) and Black feminist pedagogy (see Perlow et. Al, 2018) seldom situate Black feminist spirituality as central to Black feminist teaching and learning in postsecondary education. Furthermore, the aspects of spirituality that have been historically explored the most in postsecondary education research center on college students' pursuit of purpose and meaning (Chickering et al., 2006; Parks, 2000; Lindholm & Astin, 2008). Thus, my study adds to the literature on postsecondary instructors' spirituality and Black feminists' spiritual pedagogies.

The contrasts that I draw between religion and spirituality throughout this study demonstrate a more inclusive posture toward the increasing number of individuals worldwide who do not identify with religion, and instead embrace spiritual identity development and

spiritual practices as a separate phenomenon (Baker, 2014). Furthermore, by operationalizing two of the tenets of CRPT, my study contends with Christian hegemony with the aim of calling out and challenging notions of spirituality that are centered in Christianity. In doing so, I endeavored to set an example for other scholars on ways to actively resist Christian hegemony in research, even as a Christian-identified person, by challenging exclusively Christian perspectives as the determinant or authority on spirituality (Small, 2020).

This work purposefully offers embodied examples and potential strategies for spiritual and holistic healing in postsecondary teaching and learning. By engaging the pandemic, and pandemic pedagogies, as an ongoing phenomenon, rather than something that can be neatly dealt with or recovered from with a "resumption" to normal life, the findings of this study offer HEIs yet another opportunity to operate as a site for social justice. While I can't say for sure that I've found the key to unlocking healing and wholeness for myself and others, creating and participating in *Black feminist pandemic pedagogy* through the CCP was a liberatory experience for me. To reiterate Boff et al., (1980) the spirituality of liberation requires solidarity, participation in community decisions, loyalty to the solutions that are defined, and "the capacity to see beyond the immediate present and to work for a society that is not yet visible" (p. 376). Through our practice of fellowship, collective embodied vulnerability, and offerings of spiritual support for one another, we embodied a liberatory educational praxis in the CCP, even while in an online environment.

Online education in postsecondary teaching and learning not going anywhere (Shankar et al., 2021). My hope is that this study helps illuminate the role of critical, spiritual and embodied pedagogies in resisting transactional teaching (Giroux, 2013). In addition to practicing these

strategies for healing, instructors in higher education should also continue advocating for additional resources to support students' access to equipment, adequate learning spaces, and high-speed internet, as well as for additional time, training, and support for instructors to design their courses and teach online (Zheng, 2020; Schwartzman, 2020; Rippé, 2021). It would behoove institutional leaders to resist drawing "overly pessimistic conclusions about online teaching in higher education" (Shankar et al., 2021, p. 1), especially if they are failing to adequately address the root causes of neoliberal divestment in teaching.

I chose to center healing in my dissertation because I thought it was abundantly clear healing is desperately needed in postsecondary education. It turns out that, I too, "had a healing need" as Melba noted in one of our convenings. The events of the last few years were the most traumatic collective experiences I'd ever been through. Yet, even as I could name, critique, and attempt to resist higher education's relentless need to "return to normal," I was markedly less successful at placing *my own* humanity above my need to produce as a student and a worker in the field (Stewart, 2020, p. 261).'By exploring pedagogical strategies that promote healing, wellbeing, and wholeness in postsecondary education during the COVID-19 pandemic from a Black feminist lens, I was actively trying to integrate the fragmented pieces of my identities. And, frankly, I didn't want to be alone anymore. So, I sought out to build a learning community with some of the most inspiring writers I could find by reaching out to contributors to the most impactful book I'd read to date: *Black Women's Liberatory Pedagogies: Resistance, Transformation, and Healing Within and Beyond the Academy.* Our experience and approaches as a Community of Care and Practice led to the formation of a new group of Black feminist educators called The Steal A/Way Collective, whose goal is to continue to provide a space and

an avenue of support for Black women in the academy that affirms our humanity and honors our impact and contributions to teaching, learning, and equity in higher education. My biggest lesson of this experience is to include myself in their number, as a Black feminist, Catholic intellectual, and scholar of embodiment and spirituality who is also contributing to the legacy of Black feminist innovation and impact in education.

In the end, pushing myself to be vulnerable and incorporating the salient aspects of my political, vocational, and spiritual identities into the very fabric of this work, particularly through The Curtis Method, was the key which unlocked my ability to be in solidarity with the CCP members and participate more fully in the development of our discoveries and contributions to pandemic pedagogies. Going forward, I hope to practice "loyalty to the solutions that [we defined]," not only by seeking the sources needed to launch The Steal A/Way Collective, but also, and perhaps more importantly, by embodying our solutions and remembering the part I played in shaping them. As HEIs continue to navigate the ongoing pandemic, continue to whether the strain of neoliberalism, and continue to demand that we bifurcate ourselves into mind and body, privileging the former over the latter, I hope that through the solutions and strategies we derived in the CCP, I can resist the habit of discounting my contributions to liberation in education and continue to offer the insights of Black feminists' liberatory practices to others in the field.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Pandemic Pedagogy: Fatalistic or Black Feminist?

Researcher(s): Sydney Curtis, M. Ed.

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Demetri L. Morgan, Dissertation Chair

Introduction:

You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Sydney Curtis for a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education under the supervision of Dr. Demetri L. Morgan in the School of Education at Loyola University of Chicago.

You are being asked to participate because as a contributor to the 2018 edited volume "Black Women's Liberatory Pedagogies: Resistance, Transformation, and Healing Within and Beyond the Academy," I would like to invite you to participate in an action research study exploring the pedagogical and spiritual strategies of Black feminist educators as we continue to navigate the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and work toward embodying healing pandemic pedagogies. Using critical participatory action research, data will primarily be collected through a series of recorded virtual meetings with 6-8 self-identified Black Feminist postsecondary instructors over the summer. Our goal as a Community of Care and Practice (CCP; similar to a "faculty learning community") will be to explore the following questions:

1. How do Black feminist instructors who identify as spiritual define and embody pandemic pedagogy? Sub-questions include:

a. How do these instructors sustain their Black feminist pedagogical praxis as we continue to navigate the neoliberal pandemic?

b. What new directions for teaching and learning in postsecondary education do these instructors envision amidst the ongoing pandemic, in the 2022-2023 academic year, and beyond?

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to explore the pedagogical and spiritual strategies of Black feminist educators and support our growth and wellbeing in the process of navigating teaching during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. My hope is that together we can create a space which centers wholeness, healing, and embodiment as we explore our inherently innovative and transdisciplinary pedagogies.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to:

· complete 2 questionnaires, one at the beginning of data collection and one at the end

· participate in one 60-minute semi-structured one-on-one interview with me

· and attend 4 group meetings lasting 2 hours each.

Should you agree to participate, the total amount of time for your commitment is between 10-12 hours. A summary of the project milestones and the compensation offered for completion of each one is shown below:

Milestone and Tentative Completion Date

1. Intro questionnaire completed independently via Google Forms May 1-June 1, 2022

2. One-on-one interview (1 hour) via Zoom, recorded June 2022

3. CCP group meeting one (2 hours) via Zoom, recorded July 1, 2022

4. CCP group meeting two (2 hours) via Zoom, recorded July 15, 2022

5. CCP group meeting three (2 hours) via Zoom, recorded July 29, 2022

6. CCP group meeting four (2 hours) via Zoom, recorded August 12, 2022

7. Reflection questionnaire completed independently via Google Forms August 26, 2022

Risks/Benefits:

While I acknowledge the ongoing challenges raised by the COVID-19 pandemic and that this study will attempt to address some of them, there are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

There are many potential benefits to participating in this research. Participants will have the opportunity to serve as co-researchers and shape the methods and aims of data collection to address the research question. Participants will also have a chance to be in community and solidarity with other Black feminist postsecondary educators as we share our experiences living and working during the pandemic and develop creative, embodied solutions to challenges together. Special care and attention will be paid to how this study can support Black feminist postsecondary educators' healing and wellbeing not only through the study methods, but also in our continued practice as pedagogues.

Compensation:

Participants will be compensated a minimum of $250 for participating in this project. The $250 will be prorated across 5 data collection stages in $50 increments for each stage of data collection that they complete. The five stages of data collection for participants who are selected are 1) individual interview; 2) Group meeting 1; 3) Group meeting 2; 4) Group meeting 3; and 5) reflection questionnaire. I will track the participants' completion and payment distribution for each stage in a 2-factor authenticated, password protected Google spreadsheet.

Confidentiality:

All data from questionnaires will be stored in the cloud via Qualtrics and protected by two-factor authentication. It will not be confidential, but only the lead researcher will have access to it. Video recordings of one-on-one interviews and focus groups conducted via Zoom will be stored in the cloud and protected by two-factor authentication. When the research is completed, only anonymized findings will be shared in publications and presentations. All data will continue to be stored in two-factor authenticated, password-protected cloud accounts.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Sydney Curtis at scurtis3@luc.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature   Date

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Background Information.

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me and participate in this study! With your consent, I am going to go ahead and begin recording this meeting. My name is Sydney Curtis, my pronouns are she and her. I am a doctoral candidate in the Loyola University Chicago higher education program. I also work full time at the University of Chicago as Associate Director of Learning Design in the processional education department. This interview is the first step in a multi-part data collection process for my dissertation study, which is exploring Black feminist, spiritual, and embodied perspectives on pandemic pedagogy, or the experience and conditions of teaching and learning in this present moment of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of this study is to promote much-needed healing *for* Black feminist educators in postsecondary education and *through* our Black feminist pedagogical practice.

The purpose of this informal, semi-structured interview is for us to get to know each other better and explore how we each understand the three core concepts I mentioned earlier which will animate and guide this study (Black feminism, spirituality, and embodiment). To give you the opportunity to share any additional thoughts and reflections, as well as we keep our time today to only 60 minutes, after we finish, I will send you a link to a questionnaire form where you can reflect in writing on the items we discussed as well as additional questions, thoughts, or ideas you have for the study going forward. A similar questionnaire will be administered at the end of data collection this summer to give you space to reflect on your experiences in the study and any new learnings or future directions for the work that linger on your mind. At the end of this interview, I will also request your availability to schedule the four large-group meetings of the community of care and practice (CCP) which will convene over the summer to explore our pedagogical practice as a collective.

So, to get us started I would like to ask you a few questions for background information on yourself, your institution, and your teaching experiences. You can opt out of answering any of these questions at any point!

Background Questions.

1. Name

2. Pronouns

3. Education background

4. Name of institution(s) where you teach currently

5. Other teaching positions held

6. Name of the school, college, or department where you teach

7. Racial identity

8. Ethnic identity

9. Gender identity

10. Sexual identity

11. Spiritual, secular, and/or religious identity

Pedagogy.

1. Have you taught at least one complete postsecondary course in the last two academic years (2020-2021 or 2021-2022)?

2. *What were the names and disciplines/departments of your two most recently completed courses?*

3. One Black feminist educator whose work guides my study, Dr. Kirsten Edwards, wrote in 2017 that she embodies Black feminism in her teaching by "promoting a multiplicity of meanings, forms, and outcomes through intellectual inclusion of [herself] and [her] students." Does this perspective on Black feminist pedagogy resonate with your own teaching practices? Why or why not?

Black Feminist Identity.

The working definition of a "Black feminist" that guides this study is*:* a person of any race or gender who defines themselves as a Black feminist and who ascribes to and embodies a Black feminist politic and worldview; this definition is inclusive of those who identify as womanist. So first, I would like to ask you:

1. Do you identify as a Black feminist?

2. What factors or experiences contribute to your answer?

3. How do you understand Black feminism in relationship to womanism?

Christonormativity.

My next questions aim to narrow in on the topic of religious, secular, and spiritual identities. In this study, I am interested in exploring Black feminist educators' spiritual practices and how

these might inform our pedagogy. Due to the hegemonic presence of Christianity in the West, where this study is being conducted, I am asking participants to reflect on their proximity to Christian privilege. My first question is:

1. How familiar are you with the concept of Christian privilege?

Growing up, I participated in Christian traditions such as attending Christian worship services, celebrating Christmas or Easter, and abstaining from work or school on Sundays.

1. Did you also engage in these Christonormative practices in your childhood? If not, what were common religious traditions or practices you engaged in, if any?

1. How about now, do you still engage in these practices?

The organization of society, and higher education institutions (HEIs), around Christian religious observances, rituals, symbols, and ideologies as opposed to all other religions, or no religion at all, are all structural examples of Christian privilege (Seifert, 2007).

Christianity in the west is also hegemonically coupled with whiteness and imperialism-- forces that Black feminists explicitly resist. By intentionally naming Christian hegemony and singling it out in my study, instead of allowing it to be hidden in the conversation on spirituality, I hope to challenge and "call out" this oppressive system as a way of resisting it (Small, 2020).

1. You mentioned earlier that your religious/secular/spiritual identity was _____. Do you understand yourself as someone who currently benefits from Christian privilege?

Spirituality.

The working definition of "spirituality" that guides this study is: the internal process of seeking personal authenticity and wholeness; transcending one's current locus of centricity; developing greater connectedness to self and others through relationships and community; deriving meaning, purpose and direction in life; and openness to exploring a relationship with a higher power or powers that transcend human existence and human knowing.

1. Do you identify as spiritual? In what way?

2. Can you please share some examples of your spiritual practices and what they entail for you?

Embodiment.

Embodiment is "[affirmation] of multiplicity, multiple layers of being, a way to be in the body at all times, [and] to express the whole of the person so there can be no separations" (Argyle & Shields, 1996, p. 68). My position around embodiment for healing is directly informed by the teachings of bell hooks and specifically her theory of "engaged pedagogy" (hooks, 1994, p. 17). bell hooks, to "see yourself always as a body in a system that has not become accustomed to your presence" and to attempt to deconstruct traditional biases by asserting yours and others' bodily presence through tone, word choice, movement, and pedagogical processes (hooks, 1994, p. 135).

1. How do you define and/or understand embodiment?

2. Can you give an example of an embodied experience you may have had while teaching?

Availability.

The tentative dates I scheduled for our full group meetings are:

Milestone	Tentative Completion Date
One-on-one interview (1 hour)	June 2022
Intro questionnaire	June 24, 2022
CCP group meeting one (2 hours)	July 1, 2022
CCP group meeting two (2 hours)	July 15, 2022
CCP group meeting three (2 hours)	July 29, 2022
CCP group meeting four (2 hours)	August 12, 2022
Reflection questionnaire	August 26, 2022

Can you confirm if you are available on these days, and, if possible, provide a general time range when you would be able to meet with the group?

tWrap-Up

Do you have any additional questions, concerns, or ideas you would like to share at this time? As a reminder, I will be following up with a link to a questionnaire form where you can reflect in writing on the items we discussed as well as additional questions, thoughts, or ideas you have for the study going forward. I ask that you please submit the questionnaire by no later than Friday, June 24, 2022. Our first group meeting with the other members of the CCP will be on July 1, 2022!

APPENDIX C

INTRO QUESTIONNAIRE

SC_Dissertation_Intro Questionnaire

Please take some time to complete this questionnaire as a way of facilitating continued reflection on the topics and questions we discussed in our interview. Feel free to write as much or as little as you choose, or as your time will allow. The purpose of this form is to give you a space to continue to journal and reflect individually in advance of our group meetings where we will dive more deeply into these topics as a group. Please complete this questionnaire and submit your meeting availability to the Doodle Poll by Friday, June 24. Email me at scurtis3@luc.edu if you have any questions!

* Required

1. Name*

2. Pronouns*

Background Information

Feel free to elaborate on how you define your race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and religious, secular, and spiritual identities.

3.Race*

4. Ethnicity*

5. Sexuality *

6. Gender*

7. Religious, Secular, and/or Spiritual Identities*

Pedagogy

One definition of Black feminist pedagogy that informs this study comes from Dr. Kirsten Edwards, who said that she embodies Black feminism in her teaching by "promoting a multiplicity of meanings, forms, and outcomes through intellectual inclusion of [herself] and [her] students" (2017).

8. How do you embody Black feminism in your pedagogical practice?

Black Feminism

The working definition of a "Black feminist" that guides this study is: a person of any race or gender who defines themselves as a Black feminist and who ascribes to and embodies a Black feminist politic and worldview; this definition is inclusive of those who identify as womanist.

9. Do you identify as a Black feminist? What factors or experiences contribute to your answer? How do you understand Black feminism in relationship to womanism?

Christonormativity/Christian Privilege

In this study, I am interested in exploring Black feminist educators' spiritual practices and how these might inform our pedagogy. Due to the hegemonic presence of Christianity in the West, where this study is being conducted, I am asking participants to reflect on their proximity to Christian privilege. For instance, the organization of society, and higher education institutions, around Christian religious observances, rituals, symbols, and ideologies as opposed to all other religions, or no religion at all, are structural examples of Christian privilege (Seifert, 2007). Christianity in the West is also hegemonically coupled with whiteness and imperialism-- forces that Black feminists explicitly resist. By intentionally naming Christian hegemony and singling it out in my study, instead of allowing it to be hidden in the conversation on spirituality, I hope to challenge and "call out" this oppressive system as a way of resisting it (Small, 2020).

10. How familiar are you with the concept of Christian privilege? Based on your religious/secular/spiritual identity do you understand yourself as someone who currently benefits from Christian privilege?

Spirituality

The working definition of spirituality that guides this study is: "the internal process of seeking personal authenticity and wholeness; transcending one's current locus of centricity; developing greater connectedness to self and others through relationships and community; deriving meaning, purpose and direction in life; and openness to exploring a relationship with a higher power or powers that transcend human existence and human knowing."

11. Do you identify as spiritual? In what way? Can you please share some examples of your spiritual practices and what they entail for you or others in your community?

Embodiment

Embodiment is "[affirmation] of multiplicity, multiple layers of being, a way to be in the body at all times, [and] to express the whole of the person so there can be no separations" (Argyle & Shields, 1996, p. 68). My position around embodiment for

healing is directly informed by the teachings of bell hooks and specifically her theory of "engaged pedagogy" (hooks, 1994, p. 17). bell hooks defines embodiment as "to see yourself always as a body in a system that has not become accustomed to your presence" and to attempt to deconstruct traditional biases by asserting yours and others' bodily presence through tone, word choice, movement, and pedagogical processes (hooks, 1994, p. 135).

12. How do you define and/or understand embodiment? Can you give an example of an embodied experience you may have had while teaching?

Additional Questions/Concerns/Thoughts/Ideas?

13. What questions or comments do you have about this survey or the project in general at this time?

Availability

14. It is time to find a time to schedule our four meetings for over the summer! Have you completed the Doodle Poll shown below to share your availability? Doodle Poll Link: https://doodle.com/meeting/participate/id/e0gL5kNd*

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

I will do so ASAP! :)

APPENDIX D

REFLECTION QUESTIONNAIRE

SC_Dissertation_Reflection Questionnaire

Please take some time to complete this questionnaire as a way of facilitating continued reflection on the topics and ideas we discussed in our group meetings. Feel free to write as much or as little as you choose, or as your time will allow. The purpose of the reflection questionnaire is to provide space for CCP participants to reflect on our experiences and consider what we will do next or what new questions or changes to our pedagogy arose during our meetings together. Please complete this questionnaire and submit your meeting availability to the Doodle Poll for our monthly re-connects by Friday, September 9. Email me at scurtis3@luc.edu if you have any questions!

* Required

1.

Name*

2.

Please write in the pseudonym you would like me to use to protect your anonymity in my dissertation findings and other publications.

Black Feminism

Some of the things that came up as we explored Black feminism together included:

- Navigating oppressive systems and departmental politics, while still working to support upcoming Black women in academia.
- Refusal to choose between our race or our gender.

- Caring for others in a radical, healing way as Black feminists.

    1. How did participating in the CCP shape, inform, or change the way you think about Black feminism, if at all?

Spirituality

Some of the things that came up as we explored spirituality together included:

- Feeling seen and supported by the Universe as we pursue our work.

- Constructing our resistance by nurturing our interiority.
- Parsing out what aspects of our spiritual practices and understanding are or are not explicitly shaped by Christianity.

4. How did participating in the CCP shape, inform, or change the way you think about your spirituality, if at all?

Some of the things that came up as we explored embodiment together included:

- How our pedagogy is shaped by physical presence with students and with each other.
- Times that we shared laughing, and smiling together in our meetings.
- Holding space for our emotions and how this is not always an option in other settings.

5.

How did participating in the CCP shape, inform, or change the way you think about embodiment, if at all?

6.

Please share any other insights, opinions, or takeaways from your experience as part of the CCP.

We decided to continue to meet monthly for the rest of the year. We will check in with each other, collectively review (member-check) the findings from my data analysis, talk through our Spencer Grant application, and count down the days to my dissertation defense! Lastly, save the date for Friday, December 16 at 12pm CT for my dissertation defense!

7.

Have you completed the Doodle Poll shown below to share your availability for our monthly meetings? Link: https://doodle.com/meeting/organize/id/e7LXgyra*

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

I will do so ASAP! :)

APPENDIX E

EMAIL REGARDING PARTICIPANT COMPENSATION

From: Curtis, Sydney <scurtis3@luc.edu>

Subject: Dissertation Participant Compensation: Guidance Urgently Needed

Tue 5/31/2022 4:12 PM

To:

- GRNTCON <GRNTCON@luc.edu>.
- Loeb, Laura <lloeb1@luc.edu>.
- Canning, Justyna <jcanning@luc.edu>

Cc:

- Morgan, Demetri <dmorgan6@luc.edu>

2 attachments (285 KB) SC Award Letter.pdf; Policy on Research Study Participant Payment.pdf

Dear SPA, Laura (IRB), and Justyna (CAS Finance Office),

I am reaching out to you all for urgently needed guidance on the best, university-approved method for me to pay my dissertation research participants in cash electronically (NOT via gift cards) using a fellowship award I received from the LUC Hank Center for Catholic Intellectual Heritage. Award letter attached.

I am currently receiving conflicting information about this cash payment process that is hindering my ability to receive IRB approval for my dissertation study.

Laura: The IRB reviewer working on my application has said that "[the] University does not allow for cash distribution of compensation through electronic apps"

However, from Justyna, I received the policy document attached outlining the 1.) "Preferred Payment Method, as well as the 2.) "Alternative method" both of which point to the process of paying participants in cash

SPA: The payment option I am asking to initiate for compensating my participants is:

1. Alternative Method: Cash advance, using funds awarded by my fellowship, to distribute to study participants.

My questions for each of you are as follows:

1. Laura: Is it possible to make my IRB app reviewer aware of their mistake in stating the LUC policy does not allow participants to be paid in cash?

2. Justyna: Can you somehow inquire or provide an update about my ability to participate in the University-wide pilot program for compensating participants using Pay Pal (NOT gift cards)?

3. SPA: Can you please help me initiate the steps for "the "Alternative method" for paying my participants?

Please let me know as soon as possible if you can help me with the questions I indicated to each of you. I greatly appreciate your support.

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