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From Bottom Bitch to Top Literacy Scholar: Academic Othermothering Depicted in a Young Adult Street Literature Memoir Text

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Prelude

In *PHD to Ph.D.: How Education Saved My Life* (2013), Dr. Elaine Richardson reflects on her tenacity, resilience, and determination rooted in her Caribbean ancestry while growing up on the tough streets of Cleveland, Ohio. Elaine's young adult street literature memoir¹ highlights the social positioning of Black girls in America and in school spaces (Morris 2-3). Dr. Richardson is a world-renowned scholar whose research focuses on Black girls' literacy and language practices. "The citizenship of Black girls is tied inherently to their socio-political identity as members of a historically oppressed and marginalized group" (R. Brown x). Given this, Black girls are confronted with various forms of oppression that work in conjunction with other forms of oppression to produce social injustice and marginalization (Collins 22). Black girls' intersecting race and gender identities position them at the lowest caste within society, resulting in Black girls' experiences being deemed invisible or hyper-visible in ways that are pathologized, which leaves them silenced.

Elaine² details her trajectory in her youth as a victim of sex trafficking, a drug user, a hood dweller, and a young mother of two children and the seemingly insurmountable odds that she overcame to go from bottom bitch³ to a top literacy scholar (Richardson, *PHD to Ph.D.* 213). Centered in Elaine's experiences were academic maternal supports designed to combat these

¹ Young adult street literature memoir is a collection of culturally conscious, coming of age, first-person texts that graphically depict inner-city life and vividly illustrate Black youth living in marginalized societies. Black adolescent girls are drawn to the genre because the protagonist tends to be a female who often navigates interpersonal relationships and faces traumatizing life experiences, including sexual abuse, teen pregnancy, and physical abuse (Morris 2-3). Young adult street literature is both location- and language-specific, situated in urban metropolitan cities and drawing upon elements of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Hip-hop dialect. *A Piece of Cake: A Memoir* by Cupcake Brown (2006) is another example of a young adult street literature memoir.

² Since Dr. Richardson reflects on earlier periods in her life and references herself and is referenced by others throughout the memoir as "Elaine," "Elaine" is used in this article.

³ A bottom bitch is a pimp's main girl who typically has been with him the longest and assumes mid-level control within the hierarchy, ranging from recruiting new girls to ensuring the girls adhere to the established order.

conditions and allow her to thrive against seemingly insurmountable odds. Black female literacy educators serve as motherly supports to Richardson as she transitions from a life on the streets to her pursuit of becoming a world-renowned literacy and language scholar in the post-secondary context. These maternal relationships sustain her by providing academic, cultural, and emotional support. Embedded in Richardson's first-person narrative is a broader conception of the role of literacy educators that goes beyond traditional notions of teaching and learning and centers the literacy traditions of Black girls.

Study Focus

The focus of this critical content analysis (CCA) is to examine two Black female⁴ literacy educators in *PHD to Ph.D.* Dr. Geneva Smitherman (Dr. G) and Denise academically othermother through a politicized ethic of care in support of their Black female student Elaine in the post-secondary literacy context (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, "A Womanist Experience" 73; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, "Womanist Lessons" 437; Case 27; Collins 174; Foster 109; Greene 2; Short 4-5). Academic othermothering entails Black female literacy educators serving as mothers by cultivating, nurturing, and sustaining relationships with their Black students (Bernard et al. 105-106; Dixson 219; Hirt et al. 211; Lane 274; McArthur and Lane 67). Academic othermothering also entails Black female literacy educators using pedagogy as an emancipatory tool to support Black girls' academic, cultural, and socioemotional well-being (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, "A Womanist Experience" 73, 437; Dixson 219; Guiffrida 702-703; Hill-Brisbane 3-4; Lane 276; Ladson-Billings 7; McArthur and Lane 67). Politicized ethic of care is a Black

⁴ The term "female" has been used throughout this essay in an effort to be in alignment with the use of the term in scholarly research in both Black feminist studies and African American literacies (Richardson, *African American Female Literacies* 213)

feminist teaching ideology in which Black female teachers tap into Black girls' "cultural frameworks, lived experiences, socioemotional needs, and diverse learning styles" (Lane 276).

This study illustrates the facets of the Black female educator and Black female student relationship. This entails Black female educators' embodiment of the academic othermother identity by disrupting traditional conceptions of writing and writing instruction within White-dominated education systems, cultivating a strong work ethic in a rigorous advanced studies program, and illustrating various approaches to academic othermothering. This study depicts how Black female educators enacting the academic othermother identity cultivate a Black girl's resilience in the face of opposition within school spaces, which provides current and future educators with depictions of teacher-student relationships in street literature memoir texts that can be used to reimagine literacy teaching and learning. The following research question guided this study: *In what ways do Black female teachers enact their Black academic othermother identity to support their Black female students in the post-secondary literacy context?*

Black Female Teacher-Student Relationships

Black female teacher-student relationships offer insight into academic othermothering. Watson explores how three contemporary Black female educators in New York City public schools enacted a spiritual and politicized care rooted in their understandings of the sociopolitical contexts where their students lived and learned (362). Grounded in an endarkened feminist epistemology and a politicized womanist care, Black female educators "enact a politicized ethic of care by driving high expectations; building relationships through vulnerability, encouragement, communication, and recognition; and redefining success and envisioning paths for the future" (Watson 362). Watson further argues Black female teachers

enact tenets of politicized care to create strong connections and investments in their own and their students' educational and professional pursuits (362).

McArthur and Lane examine their Black feminist pedagogical practices in two qualitative research studies designed to educate Black girls (71-75). Situated in the urban classroom context, the study was designed to support the social and intellectual empowerment of young Black women (McArthur and Lane 71-75). Both scholars examine how Black female educators engage in acts of pedagogical love and how Black feminist pedagogy serve as alternative, safe spaces for Black girls. McArthur and Lane “exhibit care through othermothering practices; establish spaces for healing to promote holistic well-being; administer ‘check-ins’ as a form of collective accountability and socio-emotional support” (71-75).

Several scholars examine Black female professors' perspectives on academically othermothering their Black students in the post-secondary context (Griffin 169; Mawhinney 213). Drawing on the othermothering framework and employing an autoethnographic and personal narrative methodology at a historically Black university (HBCU), Mawhinney found embodying the othermother identity entails Black students “referencing her through personalized familial language and seeking her out to talk about personal issues unrelated to school matters” (219-223). Mawhinney found her role as teacher was blurred while providing both academic and personal support to her Black students (227-228). Conversely, Griffin examines Black professors' othermothering practices with Black students across two predominantly White institutions (PWI) (169). Drawing upon a social exchange theory, Griffin found Black professors have “a strong commitment to student success and a closeness and a level of informality with students grounded in shared racial and cultural experiences” (175-178).

These scholars highlight Black teacher-student relationships and the politicized ethic of care designed to support Black youth. The current study identifies Black women's ethic of care as a form of academic othermothering, which is important for Black girls who are transitioning from traumatic experiences and trajectories to more promising ones. The current study extends current scholarship by examining Black female teachers embodying the academic othermother identity in support of their Black female student in the post-secondary literacy context depicted in a street literature memoir text.

Black Girls' Literacies

In *Black Girlhood Celebrations*, hip-hop feminist Ruth Nicole Brown defines Black girlhood as “the representations, memories, and lived experiences of being and becoming in a body marked as youthful, Black, and female” (x). Brown argues identity markers such as “Black,” “adolescent,” and “girl” locate persons in a larger social structure as members of marginalized groups (3). Centering their ways of knowing through their engagement in the social world, Black girls continue to be resilient in the face of opposition against their agency and identities long before entering the literacy classroom. Several scholars explore the possibilities and potential of Black girls and the influence of literacy on opportunities to engage in self-expression in ways that honor their lives (Price-Dennis et al. 13; Richardson, *African American Literacies* 77).

Richardson highlights how Black girls' literacies are embedded in African American female ways of knowing and performing that she refers to as “African American female literacies,” which consist of practices such as storytelling, signifying, dancing, singing, and quilting, among others (77). Muhammad and Haddix argue Black girls' ways of knowing and

being are multiple, tied to identities, historical, collaborative, intellectual, and political/critical (325). These tenets serve as starting points in developing pedagogical strategies that honor Black girls in the literacy classroom. “Black girls’ racialized and gendered experiences necessitate spaces, places, and understanding of the literacies that foreground and honor their lives” (Price-Dennis et al. 13).

Black Girls’ Writing

Muhammad’s qualitative case study examine how Black girls illustrated representations of themselves through their out-of-school writings (“In Search for Full Vision” 224). Drawing on critical sociocultural theory, Muhammad found Black girls use “writing to represent self, resist dominant representations, and write toward social change” (“In Search for Full Vision” 224). Writing also serves as a space for Black girls to express their multiple selves. This study found Black girls’ language practices were socially constructed and serve to counter and reclaim power through writing (Muhammad, “In Search for Full Vision” 224). In a subsequent qualitative case study, Muhammad examines and co-develops a writing institute designed to support Black girls in constructing their identities (“Creating Space for Black Girls” 204). The writing institute’s curricula were grounded in four themes: identity, resiliency, solidarity, and advocacy (Muhammad, “Creating Spaces for Black Girls” 204). Drawing on a historical literacy framing, Muhammad juxtaposes the participant’s writing experiences in both the out-of-class and in-class context (“Creating Spaces for Black Girls” 206). Muhammad found within the classroom, writing did not affirm the participant’s identities and the participant often masked herself as a writer to conform with established norms (Muhammad, “Creating Spaces for Black Girls” 209).

Kynard examines how Black college students who employed rhetorical and intellectual traditions of Black discourse on college-level, department-wide final essay examinations were assessed (15). Employing a multiple case study methodology, Kynard examines the writings of Black students enrolled in a freshman English course, as well as institutional norms on writing assessments (15). Kynard found assessments were aligned with Institution Freshman English (IFE) and focuses on students “articulating a standard point of view in writing responses and presenting a grammatically correct formula” (15). Given this, Kynard found students that employ Black rhetorical practices and intellectual traditions that disrupted anti-Black ideologies were penalized (15). The current study highlights the importance of literacy educators developing inclusive writing pedagogies and assessments that disrupt the silencing of Black girls’ literacy and language practices.

Academic Othermothering

Academic othermothering undergirds this critical content analysis (Collins 178-179). James defines othermothering as the acceptance of responsibility for a child not one’s own, in an arrangement that may or may not be formal (44). The concept of othermothering has roots in the African cultural tradition, specifically the West African practice of communal lifestyles and interdependence of communities (Bernard et al. 104-105; Edwards 87). Wane argues African traditional worldviews suggest that children belong to the larger community, not just to the biological parents (112). Grounded in a Black feminist approach to social justice, this shared responsibility of extended family assuming child-care responsibilities illustrates the way cultural traditions in the Black community have been designed to nurture and sustain Black people as a collective way to cope with and resist oppression (Collins 174; Gilkes 4; James 44).

Othermothering has expanded to include Black women's impact in educational institutions and the role teachers play in cultivating, nurturing, and sustaining relationships with Black students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, "A Womanist Experience" 73, Beauboeuf-Lafontant, "A Womanist Experience" 437; Bernard et al. 104-105; Dixson 220; Hirt et al. 211; Lane 71-75; McArthur and Lane 74-75). Centering the teacher-student relationship in teaching and learning, academic othermothering ensures student success, including enabling Black students to use education as a tool of social transformation to challenge the status quo and enrich their own lives (Collins 174; Foster 109). This work entails Black female teachers' pedagogical work as an extension of their social justice agenda to address social conditions of Black children and to uplift them (Dixson 220; Dixson and Dingus 810-811; Guiffrida 702; Hill-Brisbane 3; Lane 274; Ladson-Billings 7; McArthur and Lane 74-75). Black female teachers assume an academic othermother identity through an "outsider-within" perspective, in which they often contend with the multiplicity of identities being both Black and an educator (Hill-Brisbane 5). Serving as tremendous supports to Black girls results in Black female teachers assuming additional services beyond their regular workload.

Methodology & Research Design

The study was based on a street literature memoir text: *PHD to Ph.D.: How Education Saved My Life*. This text was selected based on the following criteria: (1) Black female authoring a memoir that illustrates their academic, socioemotional, and/or cultural journey; (2) Black female teacher-student relationship depicted as a main storyline; (3) Black female literacy educators enacting the academic othermother identity. Dr. Richardson's young adult street literature memoir was selected for this study because it centers a first-person narrative of the

commodification of Black girls on the streets and the devaluation of Black girls' brilliance in the literacy classroom. Dr. Richardson perseveres during these experiences and currently centers in her scholarly research the very aspects of her identity that were exploited and devalued—Black girlhood and Black female literacies (Dillard 678).

Dr. Geneva Smitherman (also known as Dr. G) is an English professor and Director of the African American Literacy and Language Program at Michigan State University. She serves as both Elaine's Master's and Ph.D. advisor. Denise is a writing instructor and tutor in the Writing Center at Michigan State University. Denise works closely with Elaine after Elaine's professor referred her to the writing center for academic support.

Critical Content Analysis

The focal data for my analysis is based on Dr. Elaine Richardson's young adult street literature memoir *PHD to Ph.D.: How Education Saved My Life*. Critical content analysis serves to "understand, uncover, and transform conditions of inequity embedded in society" (Rogers 4). CCA provides the opportunity to analyze the political stance Black female educators take around issues of inequity and power in society regarding Black girls (Nyachae 793). The research purpose and question selected in this study were grounded in the current educational climate of Black girls. The first step of analysis consists of an immersion as a reader. The initial reading focuses on responding to the whole text, instead of analyzing the text in parts. The second reading focuses on acquiring information to analyze the text, as well as a response to the text and includes writing reflections based on literary and cultural elements in the text that stood out. The written reflections capture conditions and circumstances that resulted in Black female educators enacting the academic othermother identity in support of Elaine.

First, I highlight excerpts from the text that represent instances of Black feminism and academic othermothering. Academic Othermother Identity entails the ways in which Black literacy educators serve as academic othermothers to ensure the success and wellness of their Black female students. I coded sections of texts that represent the following: advocacy, encouragement, and discipline. *Advocacy* focuses on Black female educators pushing back against institutional structures designed to constrain Elaine. *Encouragement* consists of instances in which Black female educators supported Elaine in embodying her future self. *Discipline* includes Black educators asserting authority in high pressure situations. I then revisited the theoretical framework to refine codes, which included identifying overlaps in codes and merging codes. Theoretical memos were written for each code and illustrate what the data was showing.

Introduction to Findings

This study found Dr. G and Denise academically othermother by (1) honoring Black girls' writing voices; (2) publicly advocating to colleagues for inclusive writing spaces for Black girls; (3) encouraging Black girls through "tough love" practices to envision and embody their future selves; and (4) tapping into generational practices to support Black girls.

Finding 1: "You Have a Strong Voice and a Nice Way of Presenting Your Ideas. They Can't Deal with Your Style, But Don't Let Them Kill Your Voice": Academic Othermothering by Honoring Black Girls' Writing Voices

After receiving a D on her freshman English paper, Elaine meets with her White male professor. The professor opens the discussion inquiring about which school system she had attended. Although offended by his line of questioning, Elaine informs him that she graduated from Cleveland Public Schools (Richardson, *PHD to Ph.D.* 201-202). The professor's demeanor

revealed that he thinks Elaine's writing style does not align with traditional conceptions of writing. Black students' writing styles that draw on cultural nuances and rhetorical traditions are deemed substandard (hooks 35; Kynard 15). Steeped in racism and classism, the professor's exchange highlights his perception of Elaine as academically incompetent and a non-writer (hooks 37). The professor refers Elaine to the campus writing center to work with a writing tutor.

In their initial meeting, Denise highlights that Elaine had very minor grammatical errors, specifically her use of periods and commas, but was overall a very strong writer. Denise's academic othermothering entails affirming Elaine's voice as a writer. In one particular instance, Denise listens as Elaine recounts her trajectory as a writer as she discusses taking Developmental Reading and Developmental Writing courses and passing both courses. Elaine stresses how, "They treat me like I'm illiterate!" Denise responds, "You have good ideas and a nice way of expressing them. Don't let them kill your voice" (Richardson, *PHD to Ph.D.* 199; 204). Denise's othermothering places emphasis on Elaine's uniqueness (Collins 282). Denise honors Elaine's voice as a writer by building on her competence and agency as a writer. Denise disrupts a narrative of illiteracy and incompetence often placed on Black girls when their voice and style as writers do not conform to traditional models of writing and writing assessments (Kynard 15).

Denise informs Elaine "your style is not a college format. You are not illiterate. Ain't nothing wrong with your mind" (Richardson, *PHD to Ph.D.* 204). Despite traditional writing norms, Denise reminds Elaine that her style is valid. Denise communicates with Elaine in the very style and voice that the professor deemed inappropriate as she mentions, "Ain't nothing wrong with your mind." Denise employs AAVE, the rhetorical style embedded in Elaine's writing. This illustrates a vested, communal interest in the rhetorical and cultural traditions she shares with Elaine.

Finding 2: "I'm Going Over There to Tell Him Something. Who Does He Think He is?":

Academic Othermothering by Publicly Advocating to Colleagues for Inclusive Writing Spaces for Black Girls

Elaine's writing identity was in constant opposition to the professor's traditional conception of writing. This contentious relationship leads to Elaine's sentiments, "School English is a bitch! It looks you in the face and tells you, you don't even know what you know" (203). Elaine's perspective reveals how school sanctioned English is designed to discredit and erase Black girls' lived experiences, cultural traditions, and identities as writers. This illustrates how her word choice and college writing format deemed her invisible in White academic spaces (Kynard 15). According to Baker-Bell, conformity to solely White Mainstream English is the dominant language format required and deemed academically proficient by gatekeepers (50). Denise's academic othermothering also entails encouraging Elaine to be deliberate in centering her voice and personal experiences in her writing. Given that college format is the standard, Elaine feels she does not have the right words to describe her neighborhood. Denise encourages Elaine to incorporate cultural nuances and rhetorical traditions in her writing to describe the world around her, despite the professor being void of the experiences and writing identities of Black people.

Denise's academic othermothering also entails assuring Elaine that everything will be fine after they discuss the draft of the second paper (Richardson, *PHD to Ph.D.* 203). After grading a revised version of the paper, the professor asks Elaine how much of the second paper she wrote (203). This line of questioning reveals, despite the revisions made to the paper, the professor continues to view her as incompetent. Offended again by the professor's perception of her, Elaine informs the professor that Denise had provided feedback; however, he is convinced

that it was authored by someone else (203). Denise academically othermothers by informing Elaine, “you can’t let him talk to you like that. He thinks you can’t think. Ain’t nothing wrong with your mind. You’re smart. He doesn’t appreciate your ideas” (204). Denise’s othermothering entails empathizing with Denise as she questioned herself as a writer (Collins 282). Denise encourages Elaine to advocate for herself; however, her academic othermothering consists of intervening within an unequal power dynamic to cultivate equitable writing spaces for Elaine. Denise states, “I’m gonna go over there and tell him something. Who does he think he is?” (Richardson, *PHD to Ph.D.* 204). Denise’s academic othermothering consists of gauging the appropriateness of emotions in her discourse with Elaine (Collins 282). It results in exchanging words with the professor to shift the unequal power and social dynamics at play between the professor and Elaine. Holding the professor accountable is another maternal step designed to protect Elaine’s voice and identity as a writer (Collins 284).

Despite the professor acknowledging that there was considerable improvement on the paper, he gives Elaine a B- and a C on her two papers (Richardson, *PHD to Ph.D.* 203). Although Elaine addresses the professor’s feedback while also incorporating cultural nuances and rhetorical traditions, his assessment of her writing indicates his continued perception of Elaine as incompetent (hooks 17). Elaine’s experience reveals how Black people are taught to respect the oppressor’s view of the world and own their oppression within it (Richardson, *PHD to Ph.D.* 204). To Elaine’s point, the system keeps Black girls poor and powerless, which further widens the opportunity gap.

Finding 3: “Check this Out. You Need to Spend the Summer up Here and You Need to Put a Freeze on Weekend Trips to Cleveland”: Academic Othermothering by Encouraging Black Girls Through “Tough Love” Practices to Envision and Embody Their Future Selves.

In an advisement meeting, Elaine meets with Dr. G, her literacy professor and advisor, regarding her academic schedule. Elaine describes Dr. G as her othermother in the academic world (Richardson, *PHD to Ph.D.* 232). Although Elaine continues to get her life on track, juggling student life and motherhood, she still yearns to be back in her hometown of Cleveland. Elaine often drives back to Cleveland on most weekends to see her young daughter and family and perform gigs at local clubs. Elaine finds a way to work her academic life around her social life; however, Dr. G learns of Elaine's "version of the doctoral program" and re-imagines her program (233).

Dr. G's academic othermothering consists of developing a rigorous academic program for Elaine that she will be fully immersed in. Dr. G arranges a summer opportunity for Elaine to develop her research skills (Richardson, *PHD to Ph.D.* 233). Resistant to the idea, Elaine informs Dr. G that she doesn't have plans to be on campus during the summer months because she plans to head home to Cleveland on weekends to see her baby and perform with her music friends. Dr. G informs Elaine that her family support back home ensures that her daughter would be fine in Cleveland. Dr. G's motherly wisdom consists of holding Elaine personally accountable by encouraging her to commit to her studies on a full-time basis (Collins 284).

As an academic othermother, Dr. G realizes Elaine's full potential and the commitment necessary for a Black girl to be successful in the academic program. Embedded in Dr. G's academic othermothering are "tough love" practices reminding Elaine that the process is all or nothing and cannot be done on a part-time basis. Dr. G informs her "It is not enough to do well in your courses. You have to know the field like the back of your hand. You cain't sing up on dis PHD. You have to read, write, and research up on dis bad boy. Nah, sing up on dat. Your goal is to be one of the top scholars in the world on African American language and literacy"

(Richardson, *PHD to Ph.D.* 233). Like Denise, this illustrates a vested, communal interest in the rhetorical and cultural traditions she shares with Elaine. Dr. G stresses the importance of a strong work ethic to be academically successful and a top scholar in her field. Dr. G's guidance supports Elaine in envisioning and embodying her future self as a literacy scholar.

Finding 4: "She Talked to Me Like a Black Woman in Ways That Got Under My Skin and She Told Me Where to Get On and Off!": Academically Othermothering Shaped by Generational Differences

Both Denise and Dr. G engage in "women's work" on behalf of Elaine; however, they each employ different styles of academic othermothering based on their generational positioning. As an elder, Dr. G's academic othermothering is steeped in an authoritative approach that both benefits and frustrates Elaine. Dr. G's no-nonsense approach is rooted in practices akin to a Queen mother, a wise matriarch leading Elaine in charting a path to ensure her success. This style of academic othermothering does not provide Elaine the opportunity to negotiate terms or conditions with Dr. G. Elaine vents, "She talked to me like a Black woman in ways that got under my skin and she told me where to get on and off!" (Richardson, *PHD to Ph.D.* 234). Elaine's sentiments reveal how Black women embodying the authoritarian approach to academic othermothering are often direct and sharp. This approach is rooted in maternal wisdom and the need for Black girls to be responsive in high pressure situations.

On the contrary, Denise's academic othermothering is akin to a more collaborative approach. Since Denise and Elaine are close in age, Denise's academic othermothering is akin to that of a big sister. In this relationship, there are opportunities for Elaine to advocate for herself and set the terms and conditions for their relationship. Denise's academic othermothering approach is sharp in some instances, but also regulated and pointed in other instances. Given this,

Elaine seems to have agency in various interactions with Denise. Being close in age, Denise's academic othermothering is grounded in an understanding of the multiple approaches to interacting with Elaine. Dr. G and Denise's academic othermothering approaches reveal how generational differences significantly shape their interactions with Elaine. They also reveal how Elaine's level of agency is tied to both the circumstances surrounding their interactions as well as the interactions themselves.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how two Black female literacy educators, Denise and Dr. G, embody the academic othermother identity in support of Elaine in the post-secondary context. Denise affirms Elaine by honoring and celebrating her writing voice that was steeped in Elaine's lived experiences, cultural nuances, and linguistic traditions. Denise also publicly advocates to peer colleagues for inclusive writing spaces that honor Elaine as a writer. Dr. G enacts "tough love" practices to encourage Elaine to envision and manifest her future self as a top literacy scholar. In their efforts to support Elaine, both Denise and Dr. G's academic othermother identity are rooted in their generational positioning. Denise embodies a collaborative approach to academic othermothering while Dr. G, embodies an authoritative approach to academic othermothering. Denise and Dr. G's embodiment of the academic othermother identity is a political and revolutionary act, which is rooted in the understanding that White-dominated academic institutions do not have the needs of Black girls in mind. This agenda of the academic othermother entails Denise and Dr. G centering Elaine's lived experiences, cultural traditions, and linguistic traditions in a society where her social positioning situates her at the margins.

Implications for Literacy Teaching and Learning

In *Teaching to Transgress*, Black feminist author and social activist bell hooks states, “I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions—a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom” (20). This poignant quote illustrates an emancipatory form of education that centers the politicized ethic of care that Denise and Dr. G enact in support of Denise in the post-secondary context. Literacy educators should consider the following questions in incorporating a politicized ethic of care in their literacy classroom:

- *What are Black girls’ lived experiences, school histories, literacy and language traditions, and cultural nuances?*
- *How do I honor and amplify Black girls’ writing identities and voices? What ethic of care practices can I incorporate in my writing instruction to support Black girls?*
- *How can I develop projects that align with more inclusive writing assessments?*
- *As an advisor, how can I support Black girls to manifest their future selves?*
- *What style of academic othermothering is most suitable based on Black girls’ individual circumstances and needs both outside of the classroom and inside of the classroom?*

Literacy educators should understand Black girls’ lived experiences, cultural nuances, and linguistic traditions, so that they inform writing and writing instruction in the post-secondary context. Literacy educators weaving academics and elements of Black girls’ identities into instruction ensures inclusion and accessibility to Black girls. For example, narrative and creative writing provide Black girls the opportunity to tap into the power of

storytelling to unearth and document their journey through cultural nuances and rhetorical traditions, allowing them to develop their own style as writers.

Literacy educators can also center Black girls' multiple literacies by incorporating inclusive writing assessments, including portfolio-based projects, into the classroom. Further, literacy educators can include Black girls in developing assessment tools, like rubrics for writing projects. This ensures that Black girls have a voice on which criteria should be used to assess writing projects. In advisement sessions, literacy educators can discuss Black girls' talents and interests with them and work collaboratively to develop a plan to manifest their short- and long-term goals. The current study offers a conceptual framing based on how Denise and Dr. G's generational positioning influence their academic othermothering practices. Given this, further research needs to be conducted that examines the typology of academic othermothering and specific factors and conditions that shape educators' embodiment of the academic othermother identity. Literacy educators can embody a style of politicized ethic of care most suitable to Black girls based on their individual experiences and needs. Literacy educators can cultivate literacy classrooms that center Black girls' potential and possibilities by honoring all of who they are and all of who they are striving to be.

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