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Girl Let Me Tell You: Using Black Feminist Theory, Professional Counterspaces, and Endarkened Narrative Inquiry to Explore Narratives of Black Women Professional Staff in Higher Education

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Abstract

This presentation highlights the frameworks (theoretical and conceptual) and methodology used to explore the ongoing dissertation research on the narratives of Black women professional staff in higher education and professional counterspaces as sites of resistance.

Keywords: Black Feminist Theory, Endarkened Narrative Inquiry, Professional Counterspaces

Professional counterspaces are culturally responsive spaces and networks created by Black women for Black women that foster an environment conducive to professional growth and development, community, and support on all levels (West, 2019b). Counterspaces are spaces where Black women can network and provide a space for support and empowerment (West, 2019b). West (2019a) defines a professional counterspace as "a professional development opportunity intentionally designed by and for similarly situated underrepresented individuals to convene with one another in a culturally affirming environment, where the reality of their experiences are held central" (p.159; West, 2019b, p. 544). My study seeks to understand how Black women professional staff in higher education utilize professional counterspaces as sites of resistance. Professional counterspaces are spaces that are cultivated and designed for Black women to have empowerment and support, networking, and professional development (West, 2019a, 2019b), and serve as a safe space to be vulnerable in sharing their own stories.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study include:

- 1) What are the narratives of Black women professional staff about their experiences in higher education?
- 2) How do Black women professional staff in higher education utilize professional counterspaces as sites of everyday resistance?

Methodology: Endarkened Narrative Inquiry

Endarkened narrative inquiry as a methodology is a relatively new development in the field of qualitative research. Endarkened narrative inquiry integrates aspects of several theoretical frameworks, including womanism, Black feminist thought, endarkened feminist epistemology, and narrative inquiry, to create a methodology that foregrounds the entirety of Black women's experiences (McClish-Boyd, & Bhattacharya, 2021). Endarkened narrative inquiry is intentional about centering the voice of Black women (Mackey, 2021; McClish-Boyd, & Bhattacharya, 2021). Utilizing an endarkened narrative inquiry methodological approach would allow for a more nuanced way to situate and account for Black women's experiences and ways of being and knowing (Mackey, 2021).

People, how they make meaning and construct their identities are at the center of narrative inquiry and its development as a “reflexive, relational, and interpretative” (Bochner & Riggs, 2014, p.195) methodology. It is an investigation of how a person's experiences are situated within various contexts (Clandinin, 2006). I am interested in the narratives of the experiences of a specific group of Black women. When you choose to study people, you study people who are "existing in narrative and socially constituted by stories" (Bochner & Riggs, 2014, p.195). Black women have a unique position and therefore have a unique way of interpreting their lived experiences, as well as a culturally specific onto-epistemology (Collins, 2002) while acknowledging their Blackness and how that influences their experiences (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021), endarkened narrative inquiry was a logical choice. Narrative inquirers understand that everyone leads storied lives and acknowledge our interconnectedness as researchers to the meanings we make of participants' stories (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022). Employing narrative inquiry as a methodology informed by Black feminist theory and intersectionality requires a unique approach.

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