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The Substance of Things Hoped For, The Evidence of Things Not Seen

Examining an Endarkened Feminist Epistemology in Educational Research and Leadership

The call for recognition of cultural diversity, a rethinking of ways of knowing, a deconstruction of old epistemologies, and the concomitant demand that there be a transformation in our classrooms, in how we teach and what we teach, has been a necessary revolution—one that seeks to restore life to a corrupt and dying academy.

—bell hooks, *Teaching to transgress*

According to Stanfield (1993), “epistemological concerns in cultural research in the social sciences cannot be divorced from concerns regarding the functions of culturally hegemonic domination in knowledge production and dissemination and in the selections and rewarding of intellectual careers” (p. 26). Additionally, the underlying understanding of the nature of reality and the forms of discourse one employs (or is encouraged or permitted to employ) to construct realities in research on leadership significantly impacts not only what can be said and how it is said, but where it is said. Nowhere is this truer than in the interpretation and representation of educational inquiry, especially as we engage more artistic modes of research (Eisner, 1979; Greene, 1978; Walker, 1996; Yenne-Donmoyer & Donmoyer, 1994). As we see a gradual “opening up” of the uses of Black vernacular and more indigenous references in pop culture representations in theater, music, and the like (although still primarily controlled and attended by predominantly white audiences), it seems reasonable to

assume that the educational leadership research community might also be ready to examine more culturally indigenous ways of knowing research and enacting leadership in the academy. In this way, such voices are provided legitimation, not of their existence, but as analytic, conceptual, and representational tools that explicate deep meanings of the very bases of educational research and leadership: its ontologies, epistemologies, pedagogies, and its ethical concerns.

I will argue here that when we begin to move beyond race/ethnic and gender as biological constructions to more culturally engaged explanations of being human, and when we seek to examine the origins of such knowledge constructions as to the very nature of how reality is known (its patterns of epistemology) (1), we will find that what constitutes knowledge depends profoundly on the consensus and ethos of the community in which it is grounded. Given the shifting demographics and recent interest in “multicultural” communities and people of color, it is not only an ethical imperative for researcher/leaders, but also a compelling possibility to engage a differing metaphor of research, one that profoundly disrupts the idea of neutral relationships and structures in inquiry and points instead to the complex nature of research when it maintains allegiance and substantive connections to the very communities under study. Thus, alternative epistemological truths are *required* if educational researchers and leaders are to be truly responsible, asking for new ways of looking into the reality of others that opens our own lives to view—and that makes us accountable to the people, interests, and needs of whom we study.

As an African American feminist scholar, I will examine in this chapter what I call an endarkened feminist epistemology. In defining an endarkened feminist epistemology, I have deliberately sought language that attempts to unmask traditionally held political and cultural constructions/constrictions, language that more accurately organizes, resists, and transforms oppressive descriptions of sociocultural phenomena and relationships. In this vein, Asante (1988), Morrison (1993), Ngugi Wa Thiongo (1986) and others have suggested that language has historically served—and continues to serve—as a powerful tool in the mental, spiritual, and intellectual colonization of African Americans and other marginalized peoples. They further suggest that language itself is epistemic, that it provides a way for persons

to understand their reality. Thus, in order to transform that reality, the very language we use to define and describe phenomena must possess instrumentality: It must be able to *do* something toward transforming particular ways of knowing and producing knowledge (2).

Therefore, in contrast to the common use of the term “enlightened” as a way of expressing the having of new and important feminist insights (arising historically from the well-established canon of white feminist thought), I use the term “endarkened” feminist epistemology to articulate how reality is known when based in the historical roots of Black feminist thought, embodying a distinguishable difference in cultural standpoint, located in the intersection/overlap of the culturally constructed socializations of race, gender, and other identities, and the historical and contemporary contexts of oppressions and resistance for African American women. Such attention to the epistemological levels of research and leadership also implies a shift in the research metaphors and an uncovering of the ideologies that we have taken for granted, those that have traditionally left unproblematized our goals, purposes, and practice in educational research. In order to articulate an endarkened feminist epistemology, it is important that I first address the shifting ground of educational research and the prevailing metaphors that have [mis]guided us in our research endeavors.

*Changing Metaphors, Changing Ideologies:
The Shifting Cultural Ground of Research*

All research is social construction and a cultural endeavor. A major contribution of feminist, ethnic, and cultural studies to the educational research community has been the reframing of the research endeavor as an *ideological* undertaking, one deeply embedded within the traditions, perspectives, viewpoints, cultural understandings, and discourse style of the researcher (Dillard, 1995; James & Farmer, 1993; Lather, 1986; Packwood & Sikes, 1996; Scheurich & Young, 1997, Stanfield, 1993). Packwood & Sikes (1996) argue convincingly that these ideologies are reflected in the metaphors that we use to conceptualize both the processes and the epistemological bases of research. Ironically, however, they suggest that even in the current plethora of narrative accounts of research (see Casey, 1995 for a comprehensive

review of narrative research in education), the most pervasive metaphor characterizing the final product (the research paper or published article) is still that of research as recipe. They suggest further that

this is not only an implicit metaphor, it is also an implicit myth. The metaphor is that the process of research is to follow a recipe, and the myth is that this is the truth. These are illusions that researchers perpetuate. We perpetuate them by the way we present our final research texts and by the way we carefully delete the voice of the researcher, our own voice, from the text. (p. 336)

We can see from the metaphor of research as recipe, that the relationship between the researcher (as “knower”) and the researched (as “known” or to be known) is one of detachment: The researcher is set apart from the subject (the recipe) in order that knowledge (the final outcome) is “objective.” While much has been written on the virtues and pitfalls of positivistic quantitative social science, one could argue that much qualitative work also rests on similar conceptions of “truth.” I would further add that regardless of research paradigm, if educational research is to truly change or transform, it will only be because we are in the midst of a “far-reaching intellectual and spiritual revisioning [and articulation] of *reality and how we know it*” (Palmer, 1983, p. xvii, emphasis mine). In other words, a transformation at the epistemological level.

From my standpoint as an African American woman, moving away from such a metaphor is critical, not simply as a move against objectivity or one “right way” to engage in educational research. At its episteme, it is for me a move away from the fundamentally wrongheaded assumptions that undergird such a metaphor in my work and the work of others, and toward a recognition of my own African-centered cultural identity and community. This *necessitates* a different relationship between me, as the researcher and the researched, between my knowing and the production of knowledge. This is also where Black feminist knowledge (3) provides an angle of vision from which to construct an alternative version of this relationship and a new metaphor in educational research, one that moves us away from detachment with participants and contexts and their use as “ingredients” in our research recipes and toward an epistemological position more appropriate for work within such communities.

Thus, a more useful research metaphor arising from an endarkened feminist epistemology is *research as a responsibility*, answerable and obligated to the very persons and communities being engaged in the inquiry. As the purpose of this paper is to articulate an endarkened feminist epistemology, the metaphor of research as a responsibility is a central assumption—and an invitation to the reader to become aware of multiple ways of knowing and doing research available to those serious enough to interrogate the epistemological, political, and ethical level of their work. It is also the intent to enter and hopefully push forward Scheurich and Young's (1997) challenge toward a "lively discussion" about the "racial" in our research in two important ways. First, by placing the narratives of African American women at the center of this discussion of an endarkened feminist epistemology and articulating this epistemological position through these voices. Second, through illuminating the important meanings of the metaphor of research as responsibility in the enactment of an endarkened feminist epistemology.

Enacting Representation: Narrative Research as Cultural Ideology

Engaging an endarkened feminist epistemology has strong implications for the ways in which written texts are displayed and discussed. I have chosen in this chapter to explore the possibilities of narrative representations called life notes (Bell-Scott, 1994). Seen as a part of the body of research literature commonly known as narrative research, life notes refer broadly to constructed personal narratives such as letters, stories, journal entries, reflections, poetry, music, and other artful forms. However, as a form of narrative, life notes may be seen as embodying the meaning and reflections that consciously attend to a whole life as it is embedded in sociocultural contexts and communities of affinity. How such meaning is represented takes on importance here, with life notes holding the common trait of being relatively "unedited, uncensored, woman talk" (Bell-Scott, 1994, p. 13). An important assumption guiding this representational move is that African American women's "theory" has not been broadly utilized in mainstream educational research, even as it has been continually and constantly constructed and utilized within African American communities and contexts to give sense and meaning to one's life (Brown, 1988; Gordon, 1990; hooks, 1989; Some, 1994). Finally, I suggest that

African women's voices embodied in life notes can be seen as specialized bodies of knowledge which, while legitimate and powerful, have been excluded from the reified bodies of knowledge and epistemological roots undergirding most social science research literature and practice. This has led to the expression, self-definition, and validation of Black female understandings and knowledge production in alternative sites, that is, in music (such as in the African American blues traditions), poetry, literature, and daily conversations, to name just a few (Hill Collins, 1990). I made the choice to represent data in this way to at least begin to gesture toward the confluence of the aesthetic, female, cultural sensibilities that are often stifled in traditional modes of representation and discourses, mostly because they require (but rarely receive) translation from one cultural context to the other, which denaturalizes, reduces, and diminishes their richness and meaning. Further, the attempt within these narratives is to illustrate the relationships of power, the contexts of opportunity (or lack thereof), and to highlight the epistemological roots and their consequent local meanings in my life and in the lives of Black women researchers more generally.

In this chapter, I enact what one of Lightfoot's (1994) participants, Katie Cannon, refers to as the "epistemological privilege of the oppressed" (p. 59): I speak truth to research and leadership as it is known by three prominent African American women leader/researchers. The hope through utilizing life notes as a form is that readers of these texts will experience them as "overheard conversations, in addition to actual literary texts" (Bethel, 1982, p. 180), conversations that embody a particular and explicit standpoint. In this way, these narratives may be viewed as at least part of the "evidence of things not seen," demystifying African American feminist ways of knowing, in moments of reflection, relation, and resistance: Black women's spaces where one can know who we are when we are most us.

Data were collected primarily through the use of interview, but also through the analysis of texts and written documents produced by three African American women. The first narrative is that of a graduate student in her second year of socialization and course work toward a doctoral degree in higher education administration. The second is that of a secondary school principal in an urban school district. The final narrative is autobiographical, written by me, as a college-level administrator at a predominately white university. Multiple rhetorical styles are used to represent these women's voices in

narratives. Although this representational move is mine alone, it was done in an attempt to both mirror and honor the style and substance of the data as it was shared with me. However, the reader should keep in mind a major purpose of this chapter: to explore, at the level of representation an endarkened feminist epistemology. In other words, in what is literally and metaphorically the chapter's center, I enact the ways that narrative research texts about research, teaching, and leadership are also cultural ideology, through three narrative life notes, positioned not as Other but as center, given "a society full of institutionalized and violent hatred for both [our dark] skins and [our] female bodies" (Bethel, 1982, p. 178). It is precisely at this point of representation, when the pressures to conform to the "norms" of "proper" scientific research are most difficult to resist that I seek to recognize the cultural genesis and meanings of the lives of African American women researchers and to disrupt and unsettle the taken-for-granted notions surrounding the very goals and purposes of educational research.

Life Notes Narratives: Three Voices

Narrative One: The Opening (4)

Where the road goes from paved to gravel is the place where my life is
Right in that spot, that line, that crack—
There is the wormhole of who I be.

I be me in that space
Dark and quiet—

And Whole—
Wholly me and made of all that is me
Journeying to the edges
Spilling over to pavement or gravel—

Sustaining this entity through movement and talk
Folding into itself facing attack
Turning out onto the street facing struggle
Being me
Being Whole
Being me again

Ever re-creating
 clarifying
 pushing the edges
 So that this Third Space
 between paved and gravel becomes . . .

and Becomes more than a crack (break yo' mama's back)
 a line (problem of the twentieth century)
 a spot (see it run)

but Becomes . . .

and is becoming whole (philosopher)
 integrated (transgressive)
 critical (-ly important)
 VOICED (heard)

*Narrative Two: Leading with her life: A day in the life of a Black
 woman high school principal*

I grew up here in Easely, right over in the South district. At that time there weren't too many of "us" [African Americans] so I knew everyone in the city who was Black. Schools? I went to Catholic schools all my life—even college! That's funny to me because even though I went to Catholic schools, and I wore a uniform, and was taught by the nuns and things, I actually got a really good education. It was about the only way to get an integrated education in Easely, especially in the 1950s. And that was important to my parents.

My Dad was an eighth-grade graduate and one of the first African American barbers on the Easely-to-Chicago train route. My Mom had two years of college. She was a teacher, too. My oldest sister went to college in the convent, and the other one still is a practicing nun. My brother, who's only ten months younger than me is the only one of us kids who didn't go to college. Education was really a priority for my family. Getting an education was important. My Dad used to say that we had to do better [than our white counterparts] because we're never good enough and we'll never be good enough. An education would help us to deal with that.

My Daddy used to make us sit there and watch the news, for hours. At first we wanted to go run the streets with our friends, but

then it got really interesting. It got real. We discussed those things at the dinner table. We knew there was racism here in Easley, too, but it didn't take the same form. It was much more subtle. That's why my parents put such emphasis on getting a good education, to better prepare us to combat the racism we might face . . .

You may not know it, but I'm a teaching principal. It's really unusual but I did it because I'm not gonna take just anyone into my school. Yeah, it means a lot more work for me. But I did it because those available for the position in the surplus pool were less than desirable. And there weren't any [Black] folk in the pool either. The only way to get around that is not to open it up. So I started out just teaching one semester. Now I've been teaching for three years. It's just one of those things that you have to do with this job. And you know something? It shuts the faculty up. They can't say I don't know anything about the plight of teachers. . . .

I came to the district a long time ago. At that time Rosefield was all white. When they sent me here the school was more than 50 percent minority. That's part of the reason I'm here. My *promotion* [emphasis added] was that I was brought here to Rosefield to clean up this *mess* [emphasis added]. And it was a mess. But now [two years later] we're doing a lot better. But we're changing. The ninth-grade class is about 60 percent white again and I think this is a trend. Eventually, I'll be reassigned somewhere else. The community, the teachers, they will want a white principal again. That's just the way it is. You just have to go with it . . .

I don't need to have my own children because I've got 1,000 of them five days a week, six hours a day. There was this one student—she didn't do very well her first few years. She'd been in foster home after foster home. Finally, I got her into the Upward Bound program. Then she was selected as a Natural Helper. After a while, she began to really get into her classes. But then she would be disappointed when she got her report card. Her cumulative GPA was so low and as a senior, she thought she couldn't catch up. But I kept pushin' her. Her last two quarters she got a 4.0. For graduation, I got her a gift certificate to a local department store. She actually went on to university, over there where you are, I think! You need to look her up! . . .

You know, as the principal, I go through all of the report cards and write notes on them before they are given to the kids—all 800 of them. All students with 4.0 get stamps saying "excellent"—and I

write a little note, too. All kids with a 3.0 get a different stamp. And all the Black kids with a 3.0 get another special stamp. And then any kid who shows improvement gets a stamp, too! It takes me a long time, but it's important to recognize their achievements . . .

[She answers the telephone.] Yes. Rachelle Smith? This is Gloria Natham, the principal at Rosefield, Issac's school. Well, Ms. Thomas. I need to tell you that we were under the understanding that Issac picked up his transcripts [from his previous school]. We have been working with the counselor. He's been playing around and now since he didn't register, we can only get him a second- and third-period class. He was up here on registration day, but he didn't bother to go through registration. So this is what we're gonna do. He's gonna go immediately into the Learning Assistance Center (a special student study hall/tutorial). He came in here playing and we need to let him know that we take his education seriously. He will also have a contract. That means he signs in every day with each of his teachers and a progress report is sent to you every other week. Now, Issac does not need any help or encouragement with ways to help him make excuses. If he has a dental appointment or something, then you need to write him a note. But we do not excuse students for sleeping in or being late. And we do not have to accept all of his notes either. See, it's just like a job. They only let you be absent or late one or two times and then you're out. So, I'll get the counselors together so we can make him a schedule . . . He'll have the progress report and attendance card every week. He [now] knows that you know he has it so there's none of that. See, what we're trying to do here is get him through school. Bye-bye . . .

Some people grumble because I really don't have an open-door policy. I don't want folks to visit me like they'd visit their hairdresser or their psychiatrist. I don't have time for that. I have better things to do with my time. They should know how to teach . . . I have been into each teacher's class during the first two weeks of classes. I just want to see what they're doing. When I came to Rosefield, the kids weren't in class. They were walking the halls. And almost every kid walking the halls were Black and Hispanic kids. They'd still be there happy as clams if we didn't get after them and the teachers whose class they were supposed to be in. Now the halls are clean and there are more of our Black and Asian and Hispanic kids in those higher-

level classes. Part of the reason is that you're standing right in their faces [some of the traditional white teachers]. That kind of presence helps them to realize that you're not letting them off the hook. They've got to teach all of the kids . . .

I just put my foot down. If it's not good for kids, it's not good for Rosefield. I just say this is what we did and why we did it. It's as simple as that. But I have very good relationships with the [teacher's union]. I talk with them a lot! One of the guys named William Dudley, ya know, he's Black. And he just tells me the law. He came out here to Rosefield last year and came to some interesting perceptions himself [about what Natham sees as "old guard" faculty]. But what that means is that it puts us, on one hand, as friends. We're usually not in adversarial roles. But sometimes we are. But no matter whether it's positive or negative, you always wonder if the grievance or issue would be the same if you were a white principal. It's hard."

Narrative Three: A memorandum of understanding

TO: Those who want to know at least part of the reason why Black women leaders might have an "attitude" in the academy

FROM: Author #2

RE: Some Real Colleague Blues (5)

DATE: April 1995
I am looking for real colleagues
I am looking for real, honest colleagues.

Not folk who assume from jump street that I've arrived in the Dean's office or the academy solely because of affirmative action, but folk who don't think that my leadership and teaching, particularly at a "prestigious" university, requires an extraordinary explanation for my being there.

I am looking for real honest colleagues who assume that my ways of being (my culture), my ways of knowing (my theory), and my ways of leading (culturally engaged) are not any less rigorous or righteous or real than their own but instead a place from which I center and

make sense of my work as an African American woman. These real colleagues do not see a conflict between theory and cultural/experiential explanations as principles that guide thought and action, but recognize that it is that sort of didactical framing that inherently continues to advance a traditionally racist and sexist agenda, particularly in leadership and educational research.

In other words, I am looking for colleagues who do not believe that the bell curve really exists.

I am looking for real honest colleagues. Colleagues who are comfortable enough with their own constructions of their own humanity to respect mine. Who aren't scared of talking about the ways that racism, or classism, or sexism, or homophobia shape our decisions about policies and programs within education. Folk who know that those are the very conversations that will breathe life into an academy that thrives on reproducing privilege and inequality at every turn.

I am looking for good honest colleagues who will not ask the question: "What is it like to be a Black woman administrator? Oh yeah, I've got about five minutes," but instead will, over a glass of wine, cup of coffee, or a meal (and as a *regular* ongoing part of their lives), engage in the *reciprocal* dialogues and struggles necessary to actually hear my response—the blood, sweat, and tears, as well as the joy, the sensuality, the hopefulness, the spirit-filled nature of my being in and choosing administration as part of my academic life.

I am looking for colleagues who will understand why many Black women do not separate our "academic" work from the rest of our life's work, from advocacy work on behalf and in the very communities of color and women who nurture us, who take us in, who patch us up after what feels like a lifetime of struggle to survive the often brutal realities of the professoriate. We are intimately connected to our communities and must give homage to those whose work it has been to sit with us, talk with us, feed us, bandage us up, hug us, and remind us of the legacy of strong women and men of color who have come before us. It is only then, after we have been "pushed back to strength" as sister Gloria Wade Gayles would say, that our communities of care send us away from these home places, better and stronger advocates for the struggle of opportunity and human rights, especially in educational contexts.

I am looking for colleagues who can see that there are deep connections between being Black academics and leaders, mothers and

lovers, and researchers and scholars that informs our work. These colleagues must recognize too that inherent in being one of the too few sisters who have successfully navigated a way through the maze of higher education leadership, I have a higher moral responsibility that transcends being widely published in the top journals, beyond being “politically correct.” In other words, women leaders of color and consciousness, while fully cognizant of and attentive to the requirements of tenure, promotion, and a scholarly life must also pay attention in our research, teaching, and leadership to Alice Walker’s call for “each one to pull one [or more].”

In this vein, I am particularly looking for some leadership colleagues who “don’t believe you’re ready for a promotion to full-time associate dean,” but two months later, after learning that I am a finalist for a deanship at a prestigious private university, suddenly discover my enormous talent and value to the institution. “An associate deanship is yours if you’d like it . . .”

Yeah, I am looking for some real honest colleagues.

I am yearning for some honest colleagues who know there is no such thing as an acceptable joke about race or gender or sexual orientation/affiliation and other honest colleagues who will “go off” without my being there;

I am seeking some I-am-equally-responsible-for-engaging-and-dialoging-in-the-most-honest-ways-I-can kinds of colleagues;

I am looking for, searching for (and in some cases, I am fortunate enough to have found) honest colleagues who are not intimidated or confused by the power and magic of women of color, who choose to be leaders. Especially articulate, bright, well-published, successful, gorgeous, connected, righteous Black women intellectual leaders who do not want to be rendered invisible in order to be accepted or acceptable in higher education. Do you know any colleagues like that?

*The Substance of Things Hoped For:
Theorizing Through an Endarkened Feminist Epistemology*

You know where the minefields are . . . there is wisdom . . . You are in touch with the ancestors . . . and it is from the gut, not rationally figured out. Black women have to use this all the time, of course, the creativity is still there, but we are not fools . . . we call it the ‘epistemological privileges of the oppressed.’ How do

you tap that wisdom—name it, mine it, pass it on to the next generation?

—S. L. Lightfoot, *I've known rivers*

These life notes provide a glimpse of the complexity of issues, identities, and politics that influence and shape particular conceptions and worldviews, and ultimately our lives as educational leaders and researchers. The intention here is not to present Black woman as victimized, unable or unwilling to recognize even our own complicity at times, especially at times when we resist “talking back” within the racist, sexist, and homophobic institutions where we work. It is further not the intention to present ourselves and our lives as “always acting from the position of powerlessness that white supremacy defines as our place” (hooks, 1995, p. 269). The legacies raised up in life note narratives—of precious mentors, mothers, comrades, and colleagues—suggest a strong historical ethos of commitment to transformative work through our research, teaching, and leadership, in honor to named communities of affinity and support. The final intention here is not to present race/ethnicity or gender as being essentialist, unchangeable or immovable. Instead, these positionalities must be seen as shifting and dynamic sets of social relationships that embody a particular endarkened feminist epistemological bases. Through utilizing multiple and complex representations, our ability to understand, construct, and negotiate between and among these multiple relations and realities can continue to unfold (Omi and Winant, 1986, McCarthy & Crichtlow, 1993).

While these narratives offer versions of feminists and feminisms often unheard, they also articulate a conscious struggle in our attempt to do as Golden suggested: To “fess up” to the ambiguity often tied up in the chasm between biological/material and ideological/epistemological definitions of feminism, its constitutive theories and elements, and the complexity and range of representation and responses. However, an inclusive and transformative possibility of any/all feminist thought must fundamentally take into account the special and particular ways of seeing that Black and other marginalized female scholars bring to the knowledge production process, not as biological constructions but as historical, political, and cultural constructions, under constant and vigilant negotiation, and conceptualized to dis-

rupt at least, and possibly “to dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde, 1984, p. 112).

While there is no easy way to analyze these narratives, embodied within them are specialized knowledges that theorize a dismantling standpoint of and for African American women and that encompasses a coherent and dynamic epistemology: A place from which to theorize the leadership and research realities of Black women through situating such knowledge and action in the cultural spaces out of which they arose. Thus, in articulating an endarkened feminist epistemology and a new metaphor for research (as responsibility), I first examined patterns and themes that were found in common between the three narratives and placed those in the context of the literature on Black feminist/womanist thought, and also my own experiences and research findings as an African American woman leader and scholar. Then I raised several questions that helped me to do two things: (1) to conceptualize, theoretically ground, put forth alternative methodology and representational moves around which I could arrange these African American women leader’s voices, articulating an endarkened feminist epistemology, and; (2) to offer broadened understandings for those in the research community who engage inquiry around culture and the often slippery constructs of race, ethnicity, and gender—and who find their current epistemological positionings and more widely know research traditions unpalatable. The questions were these: Does the multiplicity of our modes of knowing representationally suggest a similar multiplicity in our understanding of the very nature of the realities of leadership? Said another way, are there patterns of epistemology that can help us to decipher the patterns of leadership lives, those situated political struggles and personal passions that lie at the nexus of scholarship and activism? For African American women leader/researchers living within our highly racist, sexist, and class-conscious society, how do we use experiences of racism, sexism, and other oppressions to inform our research as well as our leadership? Might the discourses we employ—and their patterns of epistemology—differ from what is traditionally known or spoken as “academic”? If so, how are they different? Most important, what do particular standpoints make possible in educational inquiry and how might that assist the entire research community in conceptualizing our work beyond often simplistic, biological and didactic notions of identity, politics, and the like to more useful cultural ones? Said another way, how do the insights engaged

in being and living as an African American woman leader/researchers open up new possibilities for the research and leadership community to see phenomena in new ways?

Given this analysis, what then are the assumptions of an endarkened feminist epistemology? Maybe more important, within a cultural view of narratives, what might such assumptions tell us about the partial, situated, nature of any claims to knowledge, given the dynamic shifts and even contradictory nature of research experiences and explorations of cultural identity?

Before discussing these assumptions, several caveats are in order. Fine (1992) suggests the pervasion of gender into predominately studies of gender differences may be safe within the context of education and particularly feminist research, but makes us deploy and legitimate essentialist understandings of gender and “reproduce dualities/beliefs about gender, sexuality, and race and ethnicity” (p. 8). Patricia Hill Collins (1990) suggests further that Black feminist ideology “does not mean that all African American women generate such thought or that other groups do not play a critical role in its production” (p. 22): Being biologically female (or male) does not automatically a feminist thinker make. Self-conscious, determined examination and struggle is often required in order to reject distorted and oppressive perceptions of women in general and African American women particularly, and to value human thought and action from self-defined standpoints. As Stanlee James (1993) further suggests, this consciousness work is itself a form of theorizing (6):

Although Black women are often characterized as victims, theorizing is a form of agency that provides them with opportunities to learn, think, imagine, judge, listen, speak, write, and act—and which transforms not only the individual (from victim to activist, for example) but the community, and the society as well. (p. 2)

Such “theorizing” is confounded by the vigilant need for African American scholars and leaders not simply to study and read written texts, “but [to read] the situation we [are] in . . . to understand the necessity for studying the terrains of hierarchy and power and hypocrisy and authenticity” (Omolade, 1994, p. xii).

The contours, politics, and research implications for engaging an endarkened feminist epistemological bases and related ways of re-

search need to be explicated, particularly for those seeking to engage research in more alternative ways. However, I want to be clear about the viewpoint forwarded here, recognizing the reductionistic, flattening problematics inherent in “outlining” the assumptions of an epistemological stance. First, I do not subscribe to substituting a dominating white male version of science with a Black female version, reinscribing the same positivistic view of science. The social critique that endarkened feminist assumptions engage is focused on the violence perpetrated in the universal generalization from the particular White male knowledge of the nature of reality to describe everyone’s realities, including those Black and female. This brings me to the second point: There is a need to resituate our research endeavors in their cultural and historical contexts, to reclaim their personal and social roots or origins. Thus, the fundamental questions in research should not be whether one epistemological bases is logical (all cultural groups develop logical thought, albeit differently from one another). Rather, as Palmer (1983) suggests, the question should be

Whose voice is behind the thought? What is the personal and communal reality from which that thought arises? How can I enter and respond to the relation of that [those] thinker[s] to the world? (p. 64)

As a Black feminist researcher, I utilize both African/African American and feminist literature in theorizing these assumptions, reflecting the representation (conceptual and epistemological) of elements of both traditions in articulating an endarkened feminist epistemology. While I draw heavily on Collins’s (1990) core theories of Black feminist thought and Harding’s (1987) elements of feminist psychology respectively, I have also drawn on Palmer’s (1983) work on spirituality in education. While rarely mentioned in discussions of educational research and teaching (see Dillard, Tyson, and Abdur-Rashid (2000), for an examination of spiritual concerns in teacher education), spirituality is intimately woven into the ethos of an endarkened feminist epistemology. The convergence of these three bodies of literature, along with my examination of the narratives presented here, provide primary contexts for imagining and theorizing these assumptions.

Finally, as Stanfield (1993) suggested at the outset of this chapter: “Epistemological concerns in cultural research in the social sciences

cannot be divorced from concerns regarding the functions of culturally hegemonic domination in knowledge production and dissemination and in the selections and rewarding of intellectual careers” (p. 26). Thus, articulating these assumptions of an endarkened feminist epistemology is important for a number of reasons: First, in raising awareness of the power relations played out in our academic careers as researchers; second, and more pragmatically, to provide guidance (and courage) to members of tenure committees, publication review board who may better recognize the “validity” of the work of African American women within and outside of the academy, based on these alternative set of assumptions; third and finally, to challenge the all too prevalent idea that there is a unitary way to know, do, and be in educational research endeavors.

Assumption #1: Self-definition forms one’s participation and responsibility to one’s community

From an endarkened epistemological ground, all views expressed and actions taken related to educational inquiry arise from a personally and culturally defined set of beliefs that render the researcher *responsible* to the members and the well-being of the community from which their very definition arises. For example, in the narrative of the principal, she talks passionately about being responsible to African American and other students of color particularly—and *students*, more generally. However, as she describes the motivation for that sense of responsibility, she takes us back to her childhood and her own schooling experiences as a source of self-definition.

According to Hill Collins (1990), while race and gender are both socially constructed categories fraught with problematics, one could argue that constructions of gender rest on clearer biological criteria than those under girding race (Appiah, 1992; Bell, 1992; Omi & Winant, 1993; West, 1993). However, while united by biological sex, women as a category do not construct the same meaning of woman, given distinct her stories, geographic locations, origins, cultures, and social institutions. While most feminist scholars would recognize and subscribe to at least some common experiences based in culturally engendered experiences of being female, the experiences are qualitatively different for those who stand outside the circle of “acceptable”

women, most particularly African American women (King, 1988). This is not meant to suggest that an additive analysis is ever useful in educational research, that is, that the greater the multiplicity of oppressions, the purer the vision of group members on marginalization or subjugation. Instead, what is suggested is that the struggle for a self-defined feminist consciousness for African American women in our roles as scholars seems to require embracing both a culturally centered worldview (in this case African-centered) and a feminist sensibility, both necessary in embracing and enacting an endarkened feminist epistemological stance. Through such praxis, an alternative ideology and cultural meaning for research is articulated, one that reflects elements of both traditions, a both/and standpoint (Hill Collins, 1990) deeply rooted in the everyday experiences of African American women. In the narratives, even with the variability that was articulated in the unique individual versions of who we are as Black women researchers, coherence is realized in our collective refusal to be reduced to someone else's terms: To give voice to silenced spaces as an act of resistance.

Defining oneself in relation to one's cultural and social community also defines one's participation within that community, both one's connection and affiliation as well as one's responsibility. Thus, if one claims that one is *of* the group (that is, chooses to conduct research and makes assessments of claims to knowledge of the group, however distant or intimate those claims), there must be a simultaneous assessment of a person's character, values, motives, and ethics in relation to that group (7). In other words, regardless of the identity position claimed (e.g., Black, white, male, female, etc.), from an endarkened feminist epistemological standpoint, the researcher would necessarily and carefully examine their own motives, methods, interactions, and final research "reports"—and seek understanding and meaning making from various members of the social and/or cultural community under study. In essence, each of the three voices here unabashedly claimed an identity standpoint and cultural positionality as Black women (e.g., "I be me in that space/Dark and quiet—And Whole"). However, it is through the voice of the principal in narrative two that we can clearly see self-identity and responsibility to the students and staff at Rosefield, enacted in her refusal to allow "undesirable" teachers into her building and taking the vacant teaching position herself, increasing the number of African American teachers in the building.

This allowed her to create a self-definition—and a socially constructed definition as well among teachers—as an African American woman teaching principal. Such a definition formed both how she participated in the community of teachers, the manner that she would respond to that community, and maybe most important, the manner in which the community responded to her.

From an endarkened epistemological ground, all views expressed and actions taken related to educational inquiry arise from a personally and culturally defined set of beliefs that render the researcher *responsible* to the members and the well-being of the community from which their very definition arises: To know something is to have a living relationships with it, influencing and being influenced by it, responding to and being responsible for it.

Assumption #2: Research is both an intellectual and a spiritual pursuit, a pursuit of purpose

An endarkened feminist epistemology draws on a spiritual tradition, where the concern is not solely with the production of knowledge (an intellectual pursuit) but also with uncovering and constructing truth as the fabric of everyday life (a spiritual pursuit). Thus the “theories” of knowing that have guided research as a value-free social science are directly challenged when an endarkened feminist epistemology is articulated, as suggested here by Hill Collins (1990):

Alternative knowledge claims are rarely threatening to conventional knowledge. Such claims are routinely ignored, discredited, or simply absorbed and marginalized in existing paradigms . . . [However] much more threatening is the challenge that alternative epistemologies offer to the basic process used by the powerful to legitimate their knowledge claims. If the ideology used to validate knowledge comes into question, then all prior knowledge claims validated under the dominant model become suspect . . . The existence of an [endarkened] feminist ideology calls into question the content of what currently passes as truth and simultaneously challenges the process of arriving at that truth. (p. 219)

As suggested in the final narrative: “I am looking for colleagues who do not believe the bell curve really exists.” African American women have historically and contemporarily addressed our multiple