Qualitative Inquiry
2021, Vol. 27(10) 1182–1190

DOI: 10.1177/10778004211021809
journals.sagepub.com/home/qix
SAGE

Still Following Our North Star: The Necessity of Black Women's Spiritual (Re) Membering in Qualitative (Re)search

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Abstract

Qualitative researchers often engage inquiry with attention to the mind, a bit to the body, and scant attention to the spirit, ignoring the complex role that our inner lives play in conducting research. Black/endarkened feminist scholars center (re)search as an academic, political, and spiritual endeavor that necessitates the ethical practice of (re)membering, Thus, acknowledging spirit is at the center of inquiry, a tool of survival, and self-definition against enduring anti-Black oppressions and structures. This article explores how Black women (re)searchers who (re)member the spirit in qualitative (re)search can articulate new questions of qualitative (re)search centered on race, personhood, and spirit.

Keywords

African American studies, ethnicity and race, Afrocentric feminist epistemologies, feminist methodologies, methodologies, re-thinking critical theory, methods of inquiry

Living Memories: Our Spirits Still Feel Our North Star

We start this article with a story. Think of it as a piece of data that needs to be coded. Puzzled through. Interpreted. Felt. Think of the ways you might approach these data, how you would make sense of them, and what you might need to accurately interpret and understand what actually happened here. And maybe most importantly? Think about the way that your very personhood as a (re)searcher matters in that pursuit:

> *Sometimes a bus ride is not a bus ride, but a portal that can transport you to places you had never imagined. Such was an afternoon in December, as our group traveled from the Ashanti Region capital of Kumasi on the long journey to Cape Coast. I (Cynthia) am the instructor, the guide, the curator of this experience for my students and colleagues, as well as lead investigator on our (re)search project. So asking that the trip be engaged in silence is both a pedagogical and methodological move that I made, a move toward knowing in this space called Ghana. As (re)searchers in a qualitative inquiry about the influences of our Ghana Study Abroad program, both Amber and I also participated in this journey in silence, in sacred memory of our enslaved African ancestors who traveled this exact same path through the bush some 400+ years ago, barefoot, near naked and shackled. We traveled in silence in sacred memory of those who had possibly traveled hundreds of miles from wherever they had been brutally captured to the place where we now joined the long march of Black people heading to places we did not know. We moved in silence in sacred memory of the fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, aunties, uncles and children who perished along the way. We traveled in sacred memory of and bearing witness to those who survived these horrible degradations and are alive to sit in an air-conditioned bus on that day. And we are Black women (re)searchers.*
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> *In our silent travel, some of us reflected with our eyes closed, listening through our headphones to whatever musical inspiration we had chosen to accompany our journey. Some of us slept, much needed rest behind the jetlag of our arrival two days prior and the equally seductive lullaby of the engine of the bus. Others intently read one of the highly recommended books from the course, Homegoing, a novel by Yaa Gyasi (2016). This stunning text echoed in fiction many of the exact places in Ghana that we were experiencing in our program. Captivated by our own inner worlds and wrestling with our unsettled spirits, some of us simply watched the scenery go by and tried to imagine what that journey would have been like for our ancestors. Such witnessing was heavy, a mix of deep respect and incredible humility for their strength, courage and sheer will to live.*
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> *Unbeknownst to me as a (re)searcher, this bus ride would be quite different than any I'd ever taken on study abroad trips*

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*before. As usual, I heeded the advice that I had shared with participants just moments before: "Allow yourself to feel and experience **everything**. Be open to whatever Ghana is trying to tell you." As is often the case on this memorial bus ride, I put on my headphones and closed my eyes. I was listening to Jonathan Butler, a South African musician sing about God's grace, about the need to "lift His name on high." I realized in that moment that our travel on the path of our ancestors was itself worthy of being "lifted on high." Like many of the Black women teachers across the years, we were being blessed to bear witness freely on the very long and treacherous journey taken by our ancestors as captive human beings. In fact, this journey was the beginning of our peoples' journey, the journey of our becoming **African** Americans.*

Eyes closed, I let my mind wander, trying to imagine that walk of the ancestors. How frightened they must have been, not knowing why they had been so brutally kidnapped from their families and where they were being so imhumanely made to walk. And it was as if time stood still in those moments for me, as if past, present and future were one connected moment. Yes, I could feel the bus moving my body along the miles, even with my eyes closed. But I was "seeing" in my mind's eye. There, I saw a funeral procession of hundreds of Ghanaians in bright red and black cloth adorned with adinkra symbols, beautiful Black women with silky black scarves worn only during times of mourning. Some of the older men wore traditional black cloth, some of the younger brothers donned bright red soccer jerseys. I was moving with them, even as I didn't know consciously how that movement was happening. I could feel my tears, warm and wet, running unabated down my cheeks, as Jonathan Butler's words sang in my ears: "You are worthy of my praise." "Yes, you are," I replied knowingly, out loud. Then, in gratitude, I said quietly: "Kind ancestors, you are worthy of my praise." And even as I felt these moments of mourning, I could also see that many women are still working. There's a woman in black with taga nuts on her head. She comes by, constantly calling for us to buy. Two men ride by on an aboboya filled to the rim with freshly cut firewood. The one with the machete in his hand smiles at me, as this story plays inside my head and touches my heart, too. I see coconut trees and big plantain plants, their beautiful fronds and big leaves waving in the breeze like gigantic fans. Then, I spot in the distance one of my favorite trees here in Ghana. It's called the tree of life. Like the baobab, it is a tree that is treasured in Ghana for it's wide sweeping branches that provide abundant shade and a necessary place to gather for moments of cool respite from the scorching sun. Inside my vision, I turn my head, eyes now facing the other side of the road. There is a young Ghanaian sister, using both hands to turn freshly harvested cocoa beans on a woven mat so that they might dry evenly in the hot sun. Eyes still closed, I see myself looking out farther on the horizon past the sister. Something is moving. Squinting, I catch my breath: The movement in the bush is a long line of Black people, shackled at the necks, hands and ankles, trudging along, heads bowed, spirits too. My eyes shot open and I am more than a little shaken.

What did you feel as you read these data? What kinds of questions did they raise for you? In that moment, I immediately grabbed my journal and wrote it all down: It was a moment that I wanted to (re)member, that somehow seemed important. But the questions embedded in these data for the Black woman scholar are many, resting in how we make sense of experiences like this and their meanings both in and as our (re)search but also in our bodies, minds, and spirits. *What* is being (re)membered here? Why is it being (re)membered? And what lessons have these memories come to tell us in this moment? What are the possible lessons far beyond our roles as teachers or scholars, about our personhood, and the spirit that animates us? These are the questions we explore in this article.

It's Not Just Any Star: Living Evidence of Black Women's Spirituality in Qualitative (Re)search

It was in Ghana that I began to recover
the answers.
I had been searching for
words, concepts, theories, people
anything
to make sense of my study.
But how could I make sense
of myself?
Black *and* woman
Christian *and* Afrocentric.
Where might this study of others begin
if not from within?
I stopped at the intersections
African American history, Black liberation theology and education.
What are the connections?
How would this work be perceived?
How would I be perceived?
Would they understand
my work,
my life's question?
How *could* they understand
when I still couldn't make sense of
churches above the slave dungeons,
dismemberment for education,
dying to read
the Bible.

What were they in search of?
What did they hope to find?
Convergences of my Blackness and Christianity,
spiritual knowledge, formal education and ancestral wisdom.
What are the connections?
As the wind from the Atlantic brushes against my face
I am awakened, anew.
Like a fresh anointing, a quickening of the spirit.
The same waters that transported my ancestors to new lands
brought me back to honor them.
And with my offering, I received
reconnection.
Cooling waters from grandma's well.
The well of strength, perseverance, ingenuity, courage, and faith
that wells up inside of me.
I am baptized in the spirit.
No contradictions or incongruities.
The wellness and freedom
of both, and.

As the daughter of two Christian ministers, I (Amber) used to spend the entire day on Sunday at church. Throughout the week, it was choir rehearsals, children's ministry, administrative meetings, and community outreach. Yet, our deep investigation and study of the Word of God happened in our home. We understood God as one who values justice, is on the side of the oppressed, and desires that all be liberated from all forms of political, social, economic, and spiritual subjugation. My parents fully embodied scriptures of agape love, salvation, redemption, humanity, and hope. Faith was not simply something we did: It was who we were. In the absence of affirmation from schools, home was where my racial *and* spiritual identities were affirmed. As my understandings of faith and race deepened, however, I experienced and expressed a sort of cognitive dissonance. I attempted to make sense of the perceived contradictions of being both an enslaved people, which was taught in school, and "a royal, chosen people" (I Peter 2:9), which was taught at home. What did it mean for me to be Black *and* Christian? How did it impact how I showed up in the world? I needed to learn more. My childhood quest initiated (re)search that would inescapably shape my future qualitative inquiry.

I have continued my (re)search, attempting to make sense of the gravity of African American history and the depth of our faith as Black people. And it was in Ghana that I began to recover answers to questions that unapologetically held me hostage and refused to let me go. Standing in the women's cell of the Cape Coast slave dungeon, I was reminded of my ancestral roots. Black American women were not tabula rasas or mere victims of violent capture, rape, and brutal chattel slavery: *We* came from a place, rooted in rich cultural values and oral traditions. They were Black women who knew what freedom felt like in the very core of their being. Black women who out of radical love agitated, refused, and resisted. They were Black women who saw me before I saw myself, dreamed me up, and were determined to survive; Black women who had a blessed assurance about God and His promises to them; and Black women who developed powerful spiritual tools for combating the societal ills that shaped their lives. *I* came from a place. *That* place. For so long, I had been searching for spiritual anchorage, a place that shattered the contradictions of race and religion and affirmed the nuances of mind, body, and spirit. My sojourn to Ghana helped me (re)member the spiritual force that animates Black women's (re)search and qualitative inquiry.

Living Evidence in Black Women's Research

(Re)search for Black women begins with a deep, persistent search for one's self, one's humanity. It is a spiritual desire to (re)member who we are and *whose* we are, a courageous search again in the mind, body, and spirit (Dillard, 2006, 2021). When Black women (re)member in qualitative inquiry, our (re)search helps us see ourselves as African people and envision our work more clearly. It likewise alerts us when our humanity is being assaulted. It is our process of examining the spirit of our work and the internal yearnings and questions that drive our inquiry, as we saw in the story of the bus ride from Kumasi. Here, guided by our previous (re)search on race, religion, and education, we provide living evidence of Black women's (re)search as a critical component of (re)membering in qualitative research. While this evidence is drawn from a study that Amber conducted on her experiences studying with Black students in a predominately White private Christian school, we articulate four elements of living evidence in Black women's (re) search when (re)membering is an explicit part of the inquiry.

Black Women Who (Re)search (Re)member, Even If Others Do Not

I (Amber) began my research study by meeting with the principal of the school. We talked about my background, research interests, and details about the project. He asked a few questions, agreed to allow his school to participate, and expressed enthusiasm. The principal also provided me a brief history of the school and how it got started stating that a group of local community members, business owners, and

parents banded together to build it over 50 years ago. He talked about the government removing prayer from public school and parents being unsatisfied with the overall direction that public schools were moving in. Yet, he neglected to mention that the benign concern of (White) parents was actually a way to move away from newly integrated public education. I found it ironic the way the principal gushed about the school's diverse student demographics but omitted the school's racist past. Before even embarking on my (re)search, I learned that the school was actually a segregation academy, or a school constructed during the era of school desegregation legislation. It wasn't just about the separation of church and state: It was about maintaining separation between races. It was about White supremacy and the perception of "inferior" Black students imposing on sacred White spaces. His omission and trepidation quickened my spirit:

What was he hiding?

What was I really embarking on?

What would I discover

These internal questions, inklings, eerie feelings, and tuggings on my spirit were essential to the development of my (re)search study and could not be ignored because there was a reason why my spirit was alerted, even troubled. For Black women (re)searchers, we develop discernment in our (re)search process, making us alert and reflective, particularly regarding the assertion of our humanity and our (re)membering of those most marginalized in (re)search processes. We uncover silences, interrogate pauses, and question omissions as an essential part of our (re)membering. My knowledge of history and intentional (re)membering was not accidental or incidental: It was a particular knowing and being that I brought to the research process.

Black Women Who (Re)search Also (Re)cognize Divine Purpose

Early in the recruitment phase, I received an email from a parent inquiring whether his elementary and high school–aged children could also participate in the (re)search study. Because the study focused exclusively on the experiences of Black middle school students, unfortunately, the other children did not qualify. Still, I thought it was noteworthy that he desired for all of his children to participate in the study, especially given what some might regard as controversial.

History, academic research, social media, and popular news outlets regularly document the damaging, oppressive, and violent experiences of Black students in public schools and predominately White public school spaces (Annamma & Stovall, 2020; Morris, 2016; Sojoyner, 2013). So, I wanted to see whether a private Christian school would offer any new insights, new pathways for understanding the confluence of race and religion in education.

So I contacted dozens of parents whose children met selection criteria. Only four responded and submitted the necessary paperwork. I felt deeply Black parents' hesitancy and understood their caution, which made this particular Black parent's enthusiasm even more intriguing. It also made me wonder why he—and the other consenting parents—allowed their children to participate:

What were Black parents in search of?

What was it about these Black students, their families and their stories that drew them to the study?

What did Black parents expect and hope their children would get out of participating in the study, especially with a Black woman (re)searcher?

I came into the (re)search study with a particular ethos and understanding of purpose. Of those students eligible to participate, I felt there was a divine purpose for those who chose to engage in my study. There was something I had that they needed, and vice versa. There was something we needed to co-create. There were questions that needed answers, experiences that needed to be affirmed. There were testimonies waiting to be shared, histories and cultures that desired to be (re)membered, and dreams of freedom that were asking to be explored. Despite the small number of participants, I knew there was a *reason* why they were there. The Black woman who conducts (re)search embodies a particular way of knowing and being that she brings to the (re)search process. Down deep in her heart and spirit, she *knows* even when she doesn't yet "know" in her head. It is an embodiment of divine purpose, a certain way of being with/in (re)search that honors that spirit of each participant.

Black Women Who (Re)search Make Room for the Spirit

On the first day of data collection, I was eager to meet the participants and get started. The principal led me to a small administrative office and asked whether that space would work for the focus group sessions. The room was tiny and bursting from the floor to the ceiling with papers, books, trophies, and other school memorabilia. Although there were only two of us in the room, I felt the walls closing in on me. We had no room to move, no room to breathe. In addition, the room was just steps away from the principal's office:

Why would he offer us this space?

Was there nowhere else to go?

What was it about this study that needed monitoring and surveillance?

I understood that it wasn't about the aesthetics of the room, but the kind of spirit we brought into it. However, we needed an alternative space outside of the panopticon of whiteness. We needed a physical place to speak our piece *and* a sacred space to seek our peace. We needed a place of refuge a sanctuary.

In my own (re)search, I had learned the history of hush harbors. Hush harbors were clandestine, secluded areas near plantations where enslaved Africans assembled to worship God, to commune with the spirit of ancestors, and to garner strength. What brought groups of enslaved Africans together was a shared experience of enslavement, as well as an unshakeable belief in God and the restorative power of being with/in community. In the midst of violence, degradation and oppression, enslaved Africans prayed for freedom and often found hope, solace, and even joy. Despite the risk of severe consequences, hush harbors were transformative spaces where battered souls and broken hearts could be healed, and humanity reaffirmed.

With this spirit, my participants and I created our own hush harbor. We gathered once a week in a small remote classroom to make ourselves and our stories known within a school space that rendered Blackness invisible. We (re) membered who we were as African people and whose we are as children of God. We opened ourselves up to one another, sharing individual testimonies of trials and tribulations, survival and revival, and bore witness to others' truth telling. Our sessions became a space to make critical links between the past, present, and future, as well as the natural and supernatural. Our hush harbor served as an anchor to ground ourselves in love and liberation. Black women who (re)search create these relationships and spaces of (re)membering to foreground the work of the spirit in each phase of the (re)search process. We create liberatory material and spiritual spaces to organize, reclaim, freedom dream and resist and make room for the spirit to move because we realize deeply the truth of our work: That it is not solely about us individually, but about freedom for all of us.

Black Women Who (Re)search Help Others Begin Their Own (Re)search

Over the course of several weeks, students shared intimate stories of their experiences of being Black in a private, predominately White Christian school. They deconstructed the absence of Black history in school curriculum, interrogated the marginalization of Black people in textbooks and discussed incidences of racism in their daily school life. We imagined what schools would look like for Black students to bring their whole selves to school: mind, body, and spirit. Students also explored the meanings of being Black and Christian and how it showed up in their life outside of school. They articulated concerns with racist White family and friends, expressed dissonance in biracial Christian identities and offered spiritual solutions, like prayer and meditation to combat anti-Blackness. Yet, as the study came to a close, students began to inquire about what was next. They still had lingering questions that needed answers, interactions that needed clarity, and secrets that needed to be brought to the light. Students asked to continue our sessions and brainstormed names of friends who they believed might benefit. Like their parents, students too were in search of something more.

In the absence of affirmation from school, the hush harbor we created provided edification, fortification, and transformation. Parents realized the sheer nonexistence of activities, clubs, and groups that affirmed their children's spiritual *and* racial identities in school. Student participants also realized that they were missing something from school, something they knew deep in their spirit they needed. I soon realized that doing the work of (re)searching my humanity actually encouraged and initiated others' (re)search process. This is the work of Black women (re)searchers. As we (re) member the legacy of our people, find God in dark places, recognize divine purpose, and make room for the spirit, we simultaneously endow others with the power to do the same. This work illustrates the communal nature of Black women's (re)search. Our individual search for humanity is always inextricably linked to the liberation of our brothers and sisters. They are our mirrors: We are because they are. As such, *our* (re)search is about the ongoing process of (re) membering and understanding the spirit that animates our qualitative inquiry.

(Re)membering Black Women's Spirituality Is Our North Star

Many (re)searchers have made the fundamental claim that Black Americans are part of the African diaspora and can trace heritage homeland to the African continent (Angelou, 1986; Busia, 1989; Collins, 2000; Dillard, 2006, 2021). Relatedly, Dillard (2018) also claims that (re)engagements and (re)clamations between Black folks living in diaspora and those living on the African continent are not inherently about a battle, but can instead be seen as relationships and conversations that must also be about repair and healing, based in our shared ancestral commitments and covenants (Dillard, 2021). Our refusal in this article, especially as it relates to qualitative (re)search, is that we explicitly choose *not to forget* the forced exit in enslavement of millions of brothers and sisters that created a stunning loss of

our cultural memory on both sides of the water, a loss that violently lead to forced assimilations and survivals. However, in our (re)search and ongoing relationships with Black history that stretches all the way back to Africa, we are suggesting that it is not only possible but critical to the Black woman scholar to, as Beyoncé sings, "find our way back." Not to some mythical moment as we *were then* but as we are now: Black people on both sides of the water and between, seeking wholeness, justice, and freedom that are always already based on our differing but related encounters with White domination and greed, capitalism, and patriarchy. Fundamentally, when we look deep and long enough across these waters, Black people *share the same ancestors*. As Robinson (2004) suggests and as we implicitly suggest throughout this article, Black American (re)searchers are often asking something deeper of our personhood as we engage in acts of (re)search, similar questions he shares in reference to his own mother's quest for clarity:

> My mother had felt it all along what I had felt for so many years, a longing, a missing *something*, a need to go *back*, to investigate a spiritual anchorage, to meet, before it became too late, her *family*, to read the meaning of her long life in the lineal mists of her people's passage on another continent through the millennial corridors of time, to be introduced, finally, manumittally, to that last hidden corner of herself. It is who *was* I? Not who *am* I? That is the question, the former realm eternal, the latter explaining nothing. (p. 142, author's emphasis)

In the previous story of our bus ride from Kumasi, quite clearly and literally there were not enslaved Africans on that horizon. However, we shared this story to illustrate a larger point. When we (re)member as part of the process of inquiry, we will have experiences with time, space, and spirit that are different from anything else we may have previously experienced, a new way of imagining and seeing life that does not move us farther from these experiences but instead moves us more deeply into their possibilities. And it *all* matters. That was definitely the case for us, as Black women scholars in Ghana. Kwame Onwuachi (2019) in his memoir *Notes From a Young Black Chef* describes being in the company of his Grandfather and other village elders on his very first trip to his heritage homeland of Nigeria. He describes his process of (re)membering this way:

> This was different than anything I had experienced in America. The air, hot and windless, was also heavy with the past. The Igbo had been holding councils like these for thousands of years, gathering for meals like this for thousands of years, living in households like this for thousands of years. The past connected to the present without a rupture, without a seam, with no distinct lines between then and now. (Onwuachi, 2019, p. 73)

We have all had experiences that we cannot explain, déjà vus that make us tilt our heads a bit, sometimes in wonder or reflection, other times in disbelief. This is work of our spirits. Most of us have also had moments of great clarity, helped by our visions or dreams of people who have mattered to us, long passed on to the other side and who visit us again and again. This too is the work of our spirits. While we can literally have these experiences where ever we are on the planet, *it's our attention to those moments of (re) membering and the lessons they bring that are important to our qualitative inquiry*. We read of this evidence of (re) membering for a Black women (re)searcher in Amber's narration of its influence in her (re)search study with Black students in a religious school. In the words of our early esteemed Black feminist scholars, (re)membering also (re) minds us that defining ourselves for ourselves and on behalf of our work is very important to understanding and being more fully human as Black women who live at the intersections of our multiple social and cultural identities (Collins, 2000, 2019; Crenshaw, 1991).

(Re)membering in qualitative inquiry requires us to look anew both inside and outside of ourselves, narrating and articulating an expanded vision of Black peoples and our cultural and heritage knowledges beyond the people, places, and things we have "seen" in our current life experiences. It is to engage what Oyewumi (2004) describes as our world sense. In other words, (re)membering in qualitative inquiry involves an awakening to our senses that includes an awakening to our spirit and spiritual knowledge. It involves and invites us to move beyond what we think we have "known" through our physical senses (i.e., through only what we have touched, felt, thought, and experienced): It involves attention to the deeper, often more just knowings (or living evidence as we describe it here) that Black people and others have used to survive and thrive for millennia. Our experiences in (re)membering what counts as knowledge—and who the holders of knowledge really *are*—includes an overt attention to spiritual knowledge as faith, guided by Hebrews 11:1: *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen*. This (re)visioning of what counts as data then includes careful attention to what is inside our hearts, to how our hearts are feeling. It quite centrally involves learning how to *trust* what we feel, intuit, and "just know" in our spirits as Black women scholars. (Re)membering helps us begin to imagine how acts of inquiry can be *otherwise*. As Greene (1995) eloquently states, as we encounter things that we perceive as new, imagination is critical. This can certainly be said of things of the spirit:

> We are called upon to use our imaginations to enter into that world, to discover how it looks and feels from the vantage point of the person whose world it is. That does not me we approved it or even necessarily appreciate it. It does mean that we extend our experience sufficiently to grasp it as a human possibility. (p. 4)

As Black women (re)member in qualitative inquiry, we are the people at the intersections who the world needs to learn from, even as we continue to piece together the long story of our knowledges and personhood from the African continent through the diaspora, always guided by our North Star. But if qualitative (re)searchers listen carefully and really want to learn from the power and humanity of Black women (re)searchers, we offer three powerful lessons for the field of qualitative (re)search, arising from the living evidence of spirit in our (re)search.

First, Black Women Offer You the Invitation to (Re)member

This is the invitation that you too must offer yourself and your students of qualitative inquiry. But before you even form (re)search questions or begin to collect any data, as their guide, your inner life must be well. As the person responsible for your students' well-being and wholeness in mind, body, and spirit, you too must be whole. Not perfect, but having spent considerable time in reflection; careful study and examination of your own spirit; your knowledge of the racial, cultural, and spiritual genius of the students you teach; and the values embedded in the long traditions of *their* people. Again, race, gender, sexualities, and other social identities are not the "problem": Not seeing their influence on the work of the qualitative (re)searcher *is*. Like the Hippocratic oath that asks medical doctors to "first do not harm," how many of us consider the harm we may unknowingly be doing to Black students and other students of color as they study particular canons of (re)search traditions, methods, tools of analysis, and (re)presentational styles. So before we begin to teach (whether in formal classes or as academic advisors), we must start by asking ourselves a few questions:

1. Who am I? More importantly, Who *was* I? Who did I used to be historically/ethnically/racially/nationally? What are the racial, cultural, social, class, and other identities that I embody? Can I say them out loud in the company of those who do not embody the same identities?
2. When I think of my friends and colleagues, are there Black women or Black people in this group? Why or why not? Have I ever talked about our racial differences and really listened to what they were telling me?
3. If I am a White person, is there a knot in my gut as I talk about Blackness and Black people? How did that knot get there? How do I describe that knot to others and how does the act of doing so enable a *productive* dialogue with others, particularly across differences?
4. What is my life experience with Black women or Black people, not just in the United States but across the globe? What additional experiences might I need to have to understand Black life more fully and how do I responsibly and respectfully have those necessary experiences?
5. How have I prepared to approach the lives and realities of different Black women differently, given specific regional, class, language, and other differences?

(Re)member this is not an exhaustive list but is simply offered as an *invitation* to begin to tap into your own spirit as a human as a necessary *first step* to (re)cognizing Black women and other people of color in anti-racist ways. It is also an invitation that we offer to teachers of all racial, ethnic, and social identities. It is an invitation to do the courageous and important work of looking inward at what we may think we know before we "teach" others.

Second, Black Women Offer You the Gift and Power of Creating Sanctuary

While the stories here are a result of two Black women's (re)membering of the spirit of Black and African culture and traditions in our (re)search, generations of our grandmothers and aunties have left so many texts that provide glimpses into various sanctuaries that Black women have created and experienced in our long walk to freedom. Authors like Abena Busia, and Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall, Maya Angelou, nayyirah waheed, and Lucille Clifton have literally been sanctuaries for us, providing models of how to breathe and resist oppression and to build on behalf of our freedom as Black women. They have been our hush harbors in the harshness of a world that too often renders us invisible. Historically, in addition to being a refuge or quiet place for our minds, bodies, and spirits as enslaved Black people, as Amber described earlier in this article, hush harbors were also spaces where we (re)membered who we were and whose we were. They were spaces where we could temporarily escape the confines of segregation and degradation and find joy and purpose in (re)membered rituals of praise in song, dance, and prayer. They were our places to be affirmed in community with other Black people and to commune with the spirits of our ancestors. It was a space where our bruised and wounded souls could be healed and a world that embraced Black humanity could be created again. As it was then, Black women *know* Black humanity deeply. We know that our Black lives matter. What we need today are modern day hush harbors, spaces of (re)membering that enact community and collective kinship, places to organize, freedom dream, and resist. We need the spaces that Amber provided for her student participants in her (re) search study and that was provided for Amber and others to critically study in Ghana.

But for those who might want to create sanctuaries for Black students and communities, you need to know that the struggle you are joining did not start today. You need to know that the struggle for Black lives to matter began in the European invasion of the continent of Africa and the subsequent plundering of resources that continues today. And you will need to make a serious and ongoing commitment to critically study and unpack the *length* and the *breadth* of that hurt, harm, and danger. For Black people, that examination will be wrestling with, understanding, and being honest about the hurt, harm, and danger that race, slavery, and continued inequities that you and your racialized group have endured and survived. In the case of White people, it will be wrestling with, understanding, and atoning for generations of hurt, harm, and danger that your ancestors caused or perpetrated against us and others. As a teacher or (re)searcher, you *will* need your own sanctuary to do this work of unpacking, leaning on no one to teach you what you do not know as a shortcut to the gift of learning, and (re)membering for your own spiritual and intellectual growth and development. In sanctuary, all of the (re)membering processes are yours to grow through. That is the gift of sanctuary: It's a place where you can surrender, search again, vision again, think again, present yourself again and ultimately, claim and live legacy again. Who you need in your sanctuary or sacred community will vary, but it may need to be made up of racially or culturally homogeneous members at first: We all have a lot of healing work to do within and around those who share similar racial and social identities and legacies. The key in sanctuary is to wrestle with the hurt, harm, and danger and the joy, resilience and strength of your ancestors and create new covenants with them to move forward. Here are a few questions as you begin your work in sanctuary that might be helpful in examining your work as a (re)searcher, especially of the stories and accomplishments of Black people and communities:

1. How do I hold the differences of the stories I am reading or experiences I am having with Blackness sacredly (with reverence), without judgment or denial?
2. Can I rest in that place in these experiences where it is not always about me? Not about what I know or feel, but empathetic enough to imagine a differing reality?
3. Are humility, sacrifice, and selflessness at the center of my desire to "know" Black stories, Black culture, and Black people or am I collecting exotic stories to tell?
4. How does what I *thought* I knew about diverse Black people match what I am now hearing from engagements with diverse Black people? How and what does that make me *feel*?
5. Where are the places and people who could provide disconfirming stories to the ones I am experiencing? Have I sought out their stories, too?
6. How do I struggle within the tensions of the African continent and her diaspora and multiple meaning of that dispersal within the larger story of collective Black culture?
7. In what ways do the stories I'm hearing or reading map on to my own experience and knowings? In what ways are they different? What does that help me to know?
8. What else do I need to know to imagine sharing my understandings (or lack of understanding) with my students? More importantly, what can they teach me?

Third, Black Women Offer up the Need to Live in the Spirit of Black Legacy

What we ultimately found in our (re)search study of the Ghana Study Abroad in Education Program (GSAE) was that different groups had different outcomes in their processes of (re)membering. For Black people in GSAE, our work could be characterized as *(re)covery*. It was about repairing the spiritual, cultural, and material damages to ourselves and our communities, beginning with our spirits and in engagement with African heritage and culture. Our work as Black teachers was to stand in the brilliance and strength of the legacy of Black people unabashedly, with no apologies and no permission needed. In contrast, for many of my White students, their (re)membering processes could be characterized as an *uncovering* of the history and culture of Black people that they did not know. It included the hard work of acknowledging legacies of inhumanity wrought by their ancestors. From the (re)search, their work was about developing a new covenant with their ancestors and thus with humanity, one that both (re)cognized the harm perpetrated against Black life and deliberate acts they could engage to heal and work to repair that harm. And this work toward justice was about actually engaging in active anti-racist work versus the simple acknowledgment of injustice or feeling guilty about what happened to Black folks and others who have been harmed in the marginalizations wrought by racism, capitalism, and White supremacy. This echoes the spirit of co-conspirators that Bettina Love (2019) so brilliantly offered us. And a fundamental test for all who (re)search will be our answer to this question: *Will Black people themselves (re)cognize our efforts in the spirit of (re)membering Black legacy as we (and generations before us) have experienced it?* Here are a few more questions to consider as you begin your work in (re)claiming and living Black legacy:

1. What do experiences of Blackness *mean* to Black people and how do diverse Black people make meaning of their experiences?
2. Can I *hear* and *imagine* the depth of the meaning of individual and collective Black peoples' experiences and empathize without trying to "save" them?

Instead, can I examine the ways that I become more human in relation to and with Black life?
3. What do Black stories mean to me and what emotions and memories do they evoke?
4. What are the structures in place that have been and continue to be oppressive to Black people? How do I work diligently to tear them down and do my part to create sanctuary for those most harmed as we build more equitable structures?
5. When someone sees or reads my (re)search, how will they know that I approached this project with reverence for Black lives, cultures, and stories?

These are some of the gifts that Black women scholars have given us. But a gift is only a gift if you accept it. Legendary poet Lucille Clifton (2012) is calling us all to (re)member ourselves in the spirit of our work as (re)searchers in her poem, *why some people be mad at me sometimes*:

> They ask me to remember
>
> but they want me to remember
>
> their memories
>
> and I keep on remembering
>
> mine. (p. 262)

Thus, (re)membering is not optional for those of us who (re)search when race, equity, and justice are at the center of the work. (Re)membering can in fact be everybody's North Star as qualitative (re)searchers.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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