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Introduction: Reading and Writing the t/Terror Narratives of Black and Brown Girls and Women: Storying Lived Experiences to Inform and Advance Early Childhood through Higher Education

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Introduction

Reading and Writing the t/Terror Narratives of Black and Brown Girls and Women: Storying Lived Experiences to Inform and Advance Early Childhood through Higher Education

Jeannine Staples and Uma Jayakumar

It is our pleasure to introduce this special issue of the *Bank Street Occasional Paper Series*. #SayHerName is a social justice initiative—now popular Twitter hashtag and visibility movement—founded by Kimberle Crenshaw and the African American Policy Forum. Through #SayHerName, Crenshaw states:

“Although Black women are routinely killed, raped, and beaten by the police, their experiences are rarely foregrounded in popular understanding of police brutality. Yet, inclusion of Black women’s experiences in social movements, media narratives, and policy demands around policing and police brutality is critical to effectively combating racialized state violence for Black communities and other communities of color.

This movement aims to expose the experiences of Black and Brown girls and women who are subject to police violence in society and various violences in schools. In response to the #SayHerName call, this issue forefronts the lived experiences of Black and Brown girls and women from early childhood through higher education.

Throughout schooling and within multiple social contexts, Black and Brown girls and women experience micro and macro social traumas—also known as t/Terrors-- that have a lasting and significant impact, even when we are able to resist, survive, and persevere academically and socially (Staples, 2012, 2015, 2016). Too often, the capacities we generate to overcome adversities are used to absolve academic and other social institutions of responsibility for the perpetuation of interpersonal and intergenerational suffering. Indeed, despite the important role that Black and Brown girls and women play in initiating

academic and social reforms, we are rendered less visible and less relevant in the fight for justice and equity.



It is against this background that this special issue finds its dual purpose: to acknowledge the power of Black and Brown girls and women and to write us into the world. This means recognizing the particular spectrum of violence that Black and Brown girls and women experience over time, contributing to the eradication of that violence, and moving decidedly to the realization of what we call “life in abundance,” the ability to attain happiness and sustain well-being (Staples, 2016). It requires a critical race praxis—by, with, and for girls and women of color—towards transforming the conditions, practices, and policies that attempt to render us invisible (Jayakumar & Adamian, 2015). At this socio-political moment, such a project requires naming oppressive conditions, as the very nature of the violence we experience is yet to be fully acknowledged by multiple teaching/learning constituents. It also calls for centering the voices of Black and Brown women who are scholars, educators, and activists to shape the (re)construction of social and emotional justice. In line with a critical race praxis for educational research (Jayakumar & Adamian, 2015), this work is not only crucial for envisioning more equitable and just policies and schooling conditions, it is tied to personal healing and transformation.

The Importance of Social and Emotional Justice

Social justice initiatives privilege acknowledgment and protection of the experiences, rights, roles, and responsibilities of all members of humanity in their exterior/public life; emotional justice initiatives do so for their interior/personal life (Staples, 2012, 2016). These interdependent movements converge to speak to systemic, institutionalized breeches in individuals’ experiences, rights, roles, and responsibilities due to dehumanizing ideologies, practices, and policies that violently affect or even erase exterior and interior life. Empathetic and altruistic social and emotional justice includes the ability to attain *life in abundance* in academic and social spaces, throughout one’s lifetime (Staples, 2012, 2015, 2016).

Unfortunately, Black and Brown girls and women in the United States are under-resourced and under-researched, and many are too socially, emotionally, politically, and academically neglected and abused to attain a sense of well-being (Crenshaw, 2014; Rollock, 2007; Staples, 2016). The inequalities we endure regularly lead to inconclusive educational attainment, high rates of state-sanctioned and interpersonal violence, disciplinary brutalities, emotional and psychological duress, gross disparities in healthcare, and, eventually, severe constraints upon the acquisition of wealth (Savali, 2014; Solorzano, Ceja, &

Yosso, 2000; Williams & Nichols, 2012). Policies meant to reverse segregation and promote “equity,” by increasing the number of under-represented girls and women of color in Pre-K–20 contexts, are often ineffectual because they neither acknowledge nor respond to the complexities of microaggressive and macroaggressive “t/Terrors.” They do not inform or meaningfully educate constituents about the complexities of lived experiences that emerge in relation to integration and inclusion.

This micro/macro distinction is important. Whereas microaggressive experiences result in incremental social alienation, mental exhaustion, and emotional turmoil, macroaggressive experiences result, by extension, in physical violences, retentions, social ostracizing, legal entanglements, and political alienation. Microaggressive relational and social *terrors* have been demonstrated to culminate, over time, as meta-level crises—that is, *Terrors* (Staples, 2016). These t/Terrors compound over time in the lives of Black and Brown girls and women, constructing us paradoxically as extraordinarily powerful and painfully, dangerously vulnerable to more violences (Staples, 2016). Furthermore, in early childhood through higher education, we face distinct barriers to success, due to the intersections of race *and* gender biases, discriminations, and prejudices on the individual, group, and systemic levels. Yet these experiences are often analyzed in broader narratives that separate such identities (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989).



Given these and other troubling findings, it is imperative to understand and clearly convey the impact such abuses, instabilities, erasures, and intersections have on the abilities of Black and Brown girls and women to develop affirming and actualizing intellectual, social, and emotional states in and beyond Pre-K–20 contexts. Such understanding often emerges from narrative, critical, and ethnographic research. This qualitative research functions to envision new theoretical frames that complement, challenge, and inform the quantitative, outcomes-based studies upon which policymakers generally rely. At the same time it promotes more meaningful curriculum and pedagogical practices that can lead to social *and* emotional justice, for all.

Contributions to Our Understanding of Social and Emotional (In)justices

This special issue is comprised of informed, grounded, thick, descriptive, critical, and creative narratives by Black and Brown women scholars, educators, and activists. Each author has cultivated years of lived experiences and praxis at these marginalized race and gender intersections in addition to supporting the academic and social evolution of girls and women who are similarly situated in schools and society.

There is wealth in our insights. Through scholar/educator/activist articulations—and a talented artist’s creative representations—of the lived experiences of Black and Brown girls and women in and out of school, the contributors address key gaps in the literature while informing public discourses.



We called upon the authors to provide brief, critical essays using intersectional frameworks to convey marginalized lived experiences. We asked for essays that show the need for new interpretive, conceptual, and methodological frameworks in grasping these complexities. Our goals included the production of work that contributes to explaining how discrete social categories such as race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality compound to inform experiences with inequalities and injustices—barriers to happiness, well-being, and abundant life—in everyday academic and social contexts.

By using intersectional frames, this special issue intends to reveal the invisible nature and impact of daily micro- and macroaggressive t/Terrors experienced by Black and Brown girls and women (Ruchti, 2016; Staples, 2016). By naming and problematizing what is made invisible or trivial, we seek to improve the lives and learning trajectories of students who embody multiple dimensions of identity (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011). We hope to challenge how educators, administrators, activists, and policymakers think about equity and justice-related initiatives and interventions (such as mentorship programs and safe zones) through a focus on shared conceptions of wellness, humanization, and radical, contextual equity. We privilege identity dimensions on the margins of schools and society to move toward these ends (Guyton & McGaskey, 2012; McCabe, 2009; Ruchti, 2016).

The essays in this issue reflect deep awareness of the types and tenors of relational and social t/Terrors endemic in the academic and social experiences of Black and Brown girls and women. They forefront the need for transformative solutions that support us in not merely surviving, but in individually and collectively thriving. The essays focus on identifying the often dismissed violences of schooling. At the same time, they highlight courage and resilience, as well as institutional programming and practices that support the happiness and well-being of Black and Brown girls and women. Together, these works affirming Black and Brown youth as “student teachers” support the development of critically conscious and radically inclusive pedagogies, curricula, and policy. We are confident that they will help create more critically conscious classroom and school cultures and rich conversations about what is—and is not—happening with Black and Brown girls and women.

Questions that Inspired the Issue

We asked contributors to consider a range of questions as they prepared their essays. We ask that you engage with these questions as you read the issue and reflect on your work as scholars/educators/activists and/or administrators/policymakers/artists.

1. How are Black and Brown girls and women labeled (as unintelligent, poor, fat, loud, wild, or “fast”—or as smart, pretty, quiet, sweet, palatable, or exceptional)? What are the socioemotional and sociopolitical effects of such labels, and the lived experiences they reproduce?
2. How are schooling and the people inside of schools violent toward the Black and Brown bodies of girls and women? What stories need to be told about these types of violences in order to foster exposure, interruption, elimination, and reconstruction?
3. How might we reimagine supporting Black and Brown girls in their management of various relational and social t/Terrors (i.e., micro- and macroaggressions)? The emphasis here is particularly on how Black and Brown girls and women can be foregrounded beyond the social dimensions of fictions and speculation. We can do this by humanizing, texturizing, and materializing empathic views among people who serve them.
4. How do we challenge the dehumanization of Black and Brown girls? How can we name, identify, and revise the schooling systems that dehumanize Black and Brown girls and women?
5. How can we effect change in the academic, social, political, media, legal, and cultural systems that adversely affect the life trajectories of Black and Brown girls and women? How do we challenge and destabilize white supremacist patriarchal norms and values so that the onus is not on Black and Brown girls to adapt to multiple systems of oppression? How can we enlist white people and people who can claim white privilege into this project?

Our Invitation to You and a Preview of the Essays

And now, we ask that you join us in engaging with these questions as you read the essays and reflect on your own experiences in and out of schools, in relation to pedagogy, your practice, artistry, and administering. As you do, keep in mind that, despite our salience and power, the lived experiences and transformative political influences of girls and women who are Black and Brown are rendered less relevant and credible within schools and society. To render them highly visible, we must acknowledge and center our power by writing ourselves, via articulations of our lived experiences with t/Terrors in and out of school, into the world. We hope that they will clarify the requisite steps and interventions for reducing inequalities and mediating injustices affecting Black and Brown girls and women, early childhood through college.

Let's Say a Word About the Girls

This essay focuses on stereotype projection and enactment in the context of the white gaze. Wendi S. Williams points specifically to frames of smartness and goodness, and discusses how the stereotypes that are commonly projected onto Black girls affect their educational experiences.

Not Only a Pipeline: Schools as Carceral Sites

Connie Wun argues that schools are part of a U.S. logic of punitive carcerality, positioning Black and Brown bodies under constant observation and scrutiny. Drawing from a qualitative study of Black and Latinx girls and their experiences with school discipline, she describes the normalization of policing and carcerality, and highlights how the girls assert their agency and forms of resistance to maintain autonomy and possession of their bodies.

Perhaps a Black Girl Rolls Her Eyes to Shift Calcified Pain Throughout Her Body

Fahima Ife describes “#BlackGirlMagic Across Time & Space,” an undergraduate literature course she designed in response to her teacher education students’ reflections on and reactions to the Black girls in their field sites. Through novels, poetry, music, film, scholarly pieces, and art, her students examined how Black girls cultivated sites for expressive freedom and created what the author calls a spiritual training ground.

Under Surveillance: Interrogating Linguistic Policing in Black Girlhood

Pamela M. Jones explores how language-based micro- and macroaggressions conspired to shape her identity and opportunities. Using intersectionality as her theoretical frame, she arrives at new understandings about resisting multiple oppressions and considers possible interventions at the school level.

‘Who You Callin’ Smartmouth?’: Misunderstood Traumatization of Black and Brown Girls

Using critical race theory’s counter-storytelling, Danielle Walker, Cheryl Matias, and Robin Brandehoff

begin with the story of a Black girl's response to her teacher's white emotions. They argue that teachers, especially those who are white, must stop emotionally projecting onto Black and Brown girls and instead begin what they call an honest listening.

Put Some Respect On Our Name: Why Every Black and Brown Girl Needs to Learn About Radical Feminist Leadership

Bettina L. Love and Kristen Duncan argue that to honor the humanity of Black and Brown girls we need to begin with narratives that not only #SayHerName, but explicitly expose girls to radical feminist leadership approaches. The essay includes practical suggestions for the classroom to ensure that young girls of color understand the philosophy that guided Black and Brown female leaders who were freedom fighters for liberation.

Restorative Schooling: The Healing Power of Counternarrative

In this essay, Veronica Benavides describes her own educational journey and the low expectations she encountered along the way. She proposes the concept of restorative schooling as an alternative way of being, seeing, and knowing in the world.

Where Our Girls At? The Misrecognition of Black and Brown Girls in Schools

Amanda E. Lewis and Deana G. Lewis contend that misrecognition leads to both invisibility and hypervisibility of Black and Brown girls in schools and educational research. The authors argue that schools must become places where students' full humanity is acknowledged, their struggles are recognized, and they gain the necessary skills to realize their aspirations.

Resist School Pushout With and For Black Girls

Here, Joanne N. Smith describes Girls for Gender Equity, which centers the experiences of young women of color within advocacy campaigns, participatory action research, and programming. She shares how this intergenerational organization helps youth to reach their potential as social justice advocates and leaders demanding an end to educational injustices and working towards gender and racial equity in schools.

Untying the Knot

Pointing to the experience of Shaquanda Cotton, who served jail time for a minor physical altercation, Charise Jones argues that we must be proactive in highlighting the struggles and gifts of Black girls and in seeing the world through their eyes. She offers concrete strategies and urges us collectively to work harder to achieve this goal.

Black Girls Are More Than Magic

In her essay, Gloria Ladson-Billings describes “famous” accomplished Black women as both magical and not. In so doing, she points to the strength, intelligence, bravery, and resilience of Black girls to underscore their essential work in fighting for social justice.

Walking the Tightrope of Visibility

In this essay, Leigh Patel asks how we can bring about visibility that not only interrupts the erasure of Black, Brown, and Indigenous women, but also alters how we are in relation to what and whom we have named. She argues that this work is especially important in schools where students are ranked and sorted, and where the idea of representation can overshadow a more valuable focus on our ways of being with each other.

We hope you enjoy this collection as well as the artistic representations commissioned especially for it. Please feel free to connect with us online to share your engagements with the works:

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