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Special Issue: 12th International Conference on Education and Justice

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Professing Education
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From the Editors

This special issue of ***Professing Education*** is dedicated to the work and spirit of movements for social justice as it includes work from the 12th International Conference on Education and Justice. We thank the guest editors, Colleen Rost-Banik and Kimo A. Cashman, and the consulting editors, Kevin Kumashiro, for this exciting issue and for this partnership.

Mary Kay Delaney, Gretchen Givens Generett, and Paula Groves Price

October 2023

Professing Education is an e-journal of the Society of Professors of Education. The Society was founded in 1902 when the National Society of College Teachers of Education was first formed in cooperation with the National Education Association. Among its early presidents were Charles DeGarmo and John Dewey. The Society is an interdisciplinary, professional and academic association open to all persons, both theoreticians and practitioners, engaged in teacher preparation or related activities. Its purpose is to serve the diverse needs and interests of the education professoriate. The Society's primary goal is to provide a forum for consideration of major issues, tasks, problems, and challenges confronting professional educators. We invite you to join us. Visit www.societyofprofessorsofeducation.com for more information.

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Foreword

Kevin Kumashiro
Conference Organizer,
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The rightwing and far-right attacks on public education continue to escalate. Censoring curriculum and any attempts to raise critical awareness about diversity and justice through state legislation and district policy (which have now been proposed or enacted in some form in nearly all states in the United States) accompany the censuring of teachers through demonization, threats, personnel actions (like, firings), and the chilling effect that emanates in both K-12 and higher education. Many teachers, teacher educators, leaders, advocates, and students are struggling to figure out how to teach towards justice when teaching itself is under attack, and the sense of despair and isolation can be overwhelming. One way that educators and scholars are responding is by finding more ways to do our work together with the goal of speaking back to and changing the contexts in which we work, including the educational policies, reform initiatives, institutions, and narratives that hinder anti-oppressive education.

Last year, in the midst of this escalating attack on teachers and teaching, 500 educators and educational scholars from around the world gathered online for the 12th International Conference on Education and Justice, held on October 6-8, 2022. Centered on the theme of "collective scholarship for public pedagogy," the conference aimed to highlight the role of educational scholars in anti-oppressive movement building, particularly when we produce scholarship collectively and leverage it for public pedagogy. Models for the conference included recent projects by Education Deans for Justice and Equity (EDJE), the California Alliance of Researchers for Equity in Education (CARE-ED), the Hawai'i Scholars for Education and Social Justice (HSESJ), the Pennsylvania Education Scholars Collective, recent statements by 130+ organizations opposing censorship and by 17,000+ educators opposing anti-trans attacks, and countless more, from large informal networks to even just pairs of colleagues—all strategically sharing their research through background briefs or media articles, testimonies or interviews, grassroots organizing, and so on with the aim of changing policy, practice, curriculum, and public consciousness. The conference particularly highlighted presentations of works-in-progress (scholarship, curriculum, programs, and initiatives) and encouraged dialogue during the sessions in order to learn from others and apply or extend or build on or simply find inspiration from their work, all with the hopes of sharing research and resources and to build networks and other collectives for advancing equity and justice in education.

From this conference emerged the four articles in this Special Issue that focuses on not merely the transformative potential of collective action, but also the challenges of doing so and the vulnerability required for such work:

- Reframing what being a student can entail: Although educational institutions often teach students to conform, they also can and do teach or at least create space for students to question, imagine, and re-create. The article by the AsianCrit Collective (Velasco, Han, Kha, Lee, Noel, Ungco, Chui) invites us into conversations about their entry, their intervention, and their takeaways from convening as graduate students in ways that animate intersectional critical theories as Asian American graduate students working to thrive internally while transforming

externally. Oh how I wish I could have been in such a collective when I was a graduate student!

- Reframing the why and how of mentoring: Too often, students are being mentored in ways that replicate the assimilationist demands that have long permeated educational institutions. In contrast, what might it mean for mentoring to trouble itself? The article by several collaborators of the Mentoring for Social Justice and Community-Building Project (Aromi, Bambara, Bivens, Elamin, and Katz) share a range of inquiry-based initiatives to mentor students in higher education that draw on various anti-oppressive theoretical frameworks that compel us to re-imagine mentoring in ways that differently engage any number of aspects, from relationships within to resources for mentoring.

- Reframing the what and with of researching: Like mentoring, the processes of doing research in the academy often serve to reinforce any number of injustices that lie at the foundation of various disciplines, and this is so even when we are trying to center our research on such values as diversity, democracy, and justice. The article by a collective of Muslim scholars (Zaal, Hoque, Hussein, Ayari, Ahmad, Billups, and Bedir) modeled the vulnerability and critical reflection needed to think through the messiness of participatory research (in this case, with and about Muslim teachers) and implications for refusing the assimilationist demands of traditional approaches, regardless of methodological parameters.

- Reframing educational and community activism: Just as we can draw on a range of theoretical frameworks to reimagine the student experience, mentoring, and research, so too can we reimagine what it means to change educational policy, particularly from different relational positions vis-à-vis educational institutions. The article by a collective of educational and community activists (Beach, Heinecke, Dickerson, Moxham, Thornton, and Bryant) teases apart a range of strategies needed to dismantle white supremacy in educational policy by fleshing out a framework that identifies different places from which to intervene inside or alongside or counter to educational institutions, and the potential for change that each position offers.

As the conference organizer, I know that I and many of the conference participants are grateful for the vision and leadership of guest co-editors Colleen Rost-Banik and Kimo A. Cashman in producing this Special Issue, which is a brilliant intervention in educational research and intersectional justice. We owe much gratitude to the contributors and prospective contributors; the collaborators who made their projects possible; the conference participants who deepened their analyses; the co-editors and reviewers of this Special Issue, whose vision and labor brought together these articles into a fruitful whole; the editors of *Professing Education* and the leaders of the Society of Professors of Education for their partnership; and to you, the readers, who are invited to engage with the ideas in these articles as we collectively build a stronger movement for equity and justice in education.

Kevin Kumashiro
October 2023

Introduction to Special Issue Featuring the 12th International Conference on Education and Justice

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With great honor and gratitude, we have co-edited the 2023 Special Issue of *Professing Education*.This special issue arose from the wealth of scholarship presented at the 12th International Conference on Education and Justice. Practicing the conference theme of *Collective Scholarship for Public Pedagogy*, each presentation, and thus each article for this Special Issue, was required to be collective in nature. Addressing the first half of the conference theme of collective scholarship, people had to work jointly in their presentations for the conference, and in their writing of the manuscripts. The inspiration behind this stipulation springs from social movements; constructing a more just world demands collective rather than individual work.

The second half of the conference theme, public pedagogy, signals the practices and processes of sharing knowledge and skills that move beyond formal schooling and into the shaping of cultural forms and narratives. Thus, instructively, the process of collectively engaging in scholarship is both a reflexive and a purposeful pedagogy. In the course of working together, as people and their ideas rub against one another— getting stuck, generating friction, or building from one another—people are required to be reflexive and attentive in how they relate with one another. Making this reflexivity public provides a pedagogical model for other groups to try, helps to foster cross-collective synergy, and inspires movement building. Collective scholarship is also purposeful in its public pedagogy. That is, the work is designed to intervene in the present moment by informing readers and helping to shift public narrative about a particular topic.

As co-editors, we saw our kuleana (responsibility) as facilitating a process that invites collectives to share how they are navigating and meeting what is required in this moment. With the help of anonymous reviewers, we gave feedback, offering a mirror for the different collectives featured. We pointed out the respective manuscript's strengths while also encouraging the authors to address hard questions about their process and their overall "product."

This process allowed us to have generative conversations, both in regards to learning about the amazing work that other groups are doing and in thinking about how the groups can inform the work in which our respective collectives are engaged. Kimo is part of an interdisciplinary collective of scholars and educators who are focused on/committed to bringing an end to the United States' illegal occupation of Hawaiʻi and to re-establishing the lawful-Hawaiian Kingdom government. Colleen is part of Hawaiʻi Scholars for Education and Social Justice, a group of education scholars who cull research to help inform conversations about issues significant to Hawaiʻi's public education.

We see the work of this Special Issue of *Professing Education* as highlighting insights that we believe are critical interventions in both collective scholarship and public pedagogy at this moment.

Highlights for what is required in this moment

Practicing is key.

In *The Mentoring for Social Justice and Community-Building Project: Notes on the Theory and Practice of Co-Mentoring in Higher Education*, Aromi, Bambara, Bivens, Elamin and Katz call our attention to the beauty of practicing alternative social and economic worlds. *Practicing* shifts the focus away from neoliberal evaluation measures concentrated on outcomes and efficiency and towards the ways we relate with one another as we attempt social justice. Their article pushes against traditional and hierarchical forms of mentoring by centering the idea that we are all teachers and learners with both expertise to share and new things to learn. Collectively emphasizing and practicing the mutual and horizontal relations it takes to have life-giving experiences, especially in institutions known for the opposite, are crucial for constructing different realities (Maynard & Simpson, 2022).

Refusal and dreaming are crucial.

In *Theorizing Collective Praxis Rooted in Epistemic Disobedience and Responsibility*, Zaal, Ahmad, Ayari, Hussein, Bedir, Hoque, and Billups stress the importance of both unlearning and refusing the oppressive norms and processes that they have been socialized into. Refusal can be an instructive way to heal from the systems of oppression inflicted by hegemonic western modes of thinking. Their collective work not only rejects the dehumanizing depictions of Muslims in the U.S. but also the demands of assimilation for basic survival. Instead, by employing Critical Participatory Action Research, they draw wisdom from multiple sources, including anti-colonial theories and the Muslim principles of ummah and wudhu, to engage, on their own terms, with the oppression they have experienced in order to support one another in epistemic disobedience, responsibility, and radical dreaming (Mignolo, 2009; Seawright, 2014).

Similarly, the AsianCrit Collective (Velasco, Jing Han, Kha, Lee, Noel, Ungco, and Mendoza Chui) theorizes refusal and dreaming in *The AsianCrit Collective: Creating, Sustaining, and Moving Toward Liberatory Futures*. Through a conversational style, their manuscript illustrates not only the deep care they have taken in fostering kapwa across multiple settings but also unsettles staid academic scripts of scholarship (Enriquez, 1992). As they design, teach, write, play(!), dream, and refuse together, they assemble liberatory ways of being.

Applying pressure works.

In *K-20 Anti-Racist Educational Activism in Post-2017 Charlottesville*, Beach, Heinecke, Dickerson, Moxham, Thornton, and Bryant stress the importance of applying pressure from inside, outside, and across institutions to create anti-racist change in educational settings. Not previously connected to one another in explicit ways, the authors demonstrate how leadership, activism, and collective scholarship can emerge from people and places that are not predetermined. Rather, events like those that unfolded during the 2017 *Summer of Hate* can—and must—serve as a catalyst for anti-racist movement building. Being open to one another's anti-racist work allows for amplifying and building off of comrades' insights and achievements, thus forming a collective in the process of doing essential work.

The work is hard and filled with tension.

We noticed in the articles a tension between mobilizing different realities and clinging to current structures. This was evident as the collectives wrestled over article format, theoretical frameworks (e.g., individual and collective; traditional and critical; Eurocentric and anti-colonial; Christian and Muslim), and citational practices. Centering struggle is one of the key ways the articles intervene in the present moment. That is, collective scholarship for public pedagogy does not necessarily yield efforts or relations that are conflict-free. Rather,

engaging with struggle is part of the promise it holds.

Moreover, the logistics of thinking and writing together are challenging. Society doesn't offer many good models for it. The process of collectivity can be slow and wonky. But it also can generate meaning and relationship. It can be both frustrating and fun, pleasurable and painful. Yet, collective work is what we MUST practice and trust if we are serious about constructing a world that is liberating for all. We must join in solidarity with one another, drop the pretension of egos, individuality, and influencer status that we have been socialized into (at our collective expense), and dream and rehearse with one another into freer relations.

To that end, collective scholarship is not about limiting ourselves to ensuring that academic tenure and promotion practices take collective work seriously. Instead, it's about making a reality wherein knowledge and experience can be shared in ways that do not depend on hegemonic systems or predetermined ways of being simply to sustain life. Surely there are alternative realities we can collectively fashion that do not rely on the oppressive dynamics of the current structures (including education) that govern our lives. We invite scholars—and all people—to glean insights from the past and present and join one another to address epistemological, ontological, and material harms while centering care, practice, and struggle aimed toward justice.

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The Mentoring for Social Justice and Community-Building Project: Notes on the Theory and Practice of Co-Mentoring in Higher Education

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The COVID-19 pandemic and the global social and racial justice struggles of the past three years have been full of lessons. Not only did they disrupt the normative social order, but they also expanded openings through which we could reimagine our institutions, our habits, and our ways of relating to each other. The individualist logic that pervades everything from the economic structure in the U.S. to our labors in the academy is not the only possible social organizing principle, and communities have long been practicing more collaborative modes of being together.

Through our own lives and experiences during and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have collected stories that remind us how much we need each other and that we can, in fact, craft and practice our relationships with each other and with the world differently. In April 2020, Arundhati Roy described the COVID-19 pandemic as a "portal" to future change opened up by the abrupt shock. This portal invited glimpses into other, as-yet-unrealized possibilities for structuring our social and economic worlds in more sustainable, equitable, and life-affirming ways (Roy, 2020).

The Mentoring for Social Justice and Community-Building Project (MSJCP) that we describe here emerged out of this hopeful premise. We believe mentoring students in higher education often replicates an individualist paradigm, with top-down, hierarchical mentoring models that recall Freire's (1970/2003) "banking model" of education, positioning the mentor as the seasoned knowledge-holder and mentee as the recipient of said knowledge. As a collective of staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral researchers at Rutgers University who have experienced both affirming and disempowering mentorship in academia, we are motivated by what we see as an opportunity to reimagine mentoring and challenge the one-way, hierarchical mentoring arrangements in higher education that ignore power and positionality. We—along with three other staff and graduate students who could not join in the writing of this article: Marina Feldman, Corina Hernandez, and Ariela Parisi—designed and implemented the Mentoring for Social Justice and Community-Building Project as a pilot program in the 2022-23 academic year, a capacity-building space to envision mentoring as a social justice practice and experiment with enacting more horizontal, democratic mentoring relationships that value shared knowledge production and collaboration. This project emerged in partnership between the School of Graduate Studies and Douglass Residential College at Rutgers University, the flagship public university of New Jersey. Our goal has been to foster mutually beneficial

[1] We've opted to list authors alphabetically, by last name, instead of by identifying ourselves as "first, second, third," etc. authors. As part of our commitment to deconstructing neoliberal hierarchies of worth in the academy, and to reflect the joint labor that went into the thinking and writing of this article, we decided it was fitting to share "first authorship" of this paper.

relationships between current graduate students and undergraduates committed to aligning their scholarship, advocacy, and collaborations with social justice principles. Through training graduate students in justice-oriented approaches to mentorship and pairing a cohort of graduate student mentors with undergraduate mentees, the pilot project aimed to generate sustainable co-mentoring relationships shaped by common interests, experiences, or aspirations. We hope that the relationships, norms, and artifacts we have created together might serve as a model for others in higher education wishing to ground mentoring practice in relational, justice-oriented philosophies and facilitate graduate-undergraduate mentoring relationships that are themselves sites for social justice praxis.

We have come together as co-authors in an effort to clarify the philosophies and political commitments shaping the origins and the implementation of the MSJCP, as well as to reflect on our practice and learning throughout the pilot year. In what follows, we position our efforts within the existing literature on social justice, feminist, and critical mentoring in higher education; describe the philosophy and background of our project; and share personal vignettes reflecting on our experiences with the project and connecting theory to practice. We highlight the importance of creating space for non-hierarchical relationship-building while grappling with the constraints placed on any such project, even a critical one, conducted within a traditional institutional setting. While many groups created substantial artifacts from their time together, many participants and program conveners agreed that the strength of critical mentoring lies in its orientation toward cultivating relationships rather than imparting any particular piece of information. It is with joy and curiosity that we seek to explore the very real, lived possibilities for, and challenges of, conceptualizing and practicing mentoring differently.

Theoretical Frameworks for Feminist, Critical, and Social Justice Mentoring

As Heppner (2017) notes, mentoring can encompass many different activities and goals, such as helping first-generation students navigate graduate school or facilitating the development of a particular skill set. Because of the diversity of elements and outcomes attributed to mentoring, some have argued that mentoring lacks conceptual clarity (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007). In this section, we describe how mentoring has been defined by a diverse, transdisciplinary academic literature, focusing on how critical and feminist mentoring practices are understood. As we later explore through our experiential vignettes, we bring these definitions, possibilities, and mentoring challenges to our work at Rutgers. We came to this project with an understanding that mentoring as a concept holds within it an unequal power relation, so it can, in practice, reinscribe hierarchies of power. We nonetheless have chosen to retain and grapple critically with mentoring as a means to push the boundaries of what counts as mentorship without jettisoning a concept that offers possibility for connection within higher education.

While mentoring is a longstanding practice in academia and beyond, recent scholarship has attempted to disentangle its more traditional form from social justice or feminist-oriented approaches (Weiston-Serdan, 2017). Traditional mentoring in higher education can involve many different individuals and serve multiple purposes such as career development and degree progression (Lunsford et al., 2017). Mentoring is typically scaffolded by a hierarchical relationship wherein the mentor (often a faculty member) passes down knowledge to the mentee (typically a student or an early-career faculty member) (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). Mentoring can occur through a formal program or informally (Costello, 2015), as in the case of a student seeking out a faculty member or even a peer for sustained conversation.

Despite the variety of forms mentoring might take in higher education, the focus is often on advancing the mentee through an existing institutional or power structure, rather than fostering a critical understanding of power and the mentor and mentee's relationship to it. As Lunsford et al. (2017) describe, this is reflected in the evaluation of mentoring programs which, for undergraduates, focus on measures such as grade point average and enrollment retention. Even when studies focus on the development of interpersonal skills such as "leadership capacity" (Campbell et al., 2012) as the outcome of mentoring relationships, those skills are expected to be deployed within and serve extant institutional structures. What's more, the labor of mentoring in the academy tends to fall more heavily to non-male faculty members (Misra et al., 2011; Misra et al., 2012), while the knowledge of people of color is valued differently than that of white peers (Mullings and Mukherjee, 2018). The racialized and gendered inequities shaping society are reflected in academia and thus mentoring. For that reason, we find it especially crucial for higher education to adopt an antiracist and power-conscious posture toward mentoring so we can move mentoring practice from a focus on institutional assimilation to anti-oppressive transformation.

Social justice and feminist approaches to mentoring begin with the contention that mentoring can help cultivate critical consciousness and need not be rooted in hierarchical distinctions between mentor and mentee. Much of the literature on social justice mentoring is influenced by Brazilian scholar and activist Paolo Freire and therefore centers on fostering critical consciousness as a core element of social justice. Inman (2008) and Neville (2015) contend that the affirmation of identity, as well as the development of critical consciousness, can lead to social transformation. Kivel (2004) understands this work as a specifically intergenerational project which builds a community working toward change. In their work with Latinx students, Figueroa and Rodriguez (2015) describe a social justice mentoring approach as one that facilitates understandings of power structures within academia as well as nurtures a sense of validity of self, experience, and non-hegemonic epistemologies. While this type of mentoring does include helping students navigate academia, its focus is more squarely on fostering critical consciousness and empowerment. Likewise, Grenier, Robinson, and Harkins (2021) argue that the mentoring relationship can be used to cultivate critical consciousness among mentors and mentees alike. If approached in this vein, mentoring moves from a deficit framework, in which the mentee is assumed to lack knowledge or experience, to one which encourages affirming, deepening, and perhaps challenging existing knowledges for both the mentor and mentee.

Feminist approaches to mentoring similarly address power dynamics within the mentoring relationship and in the broader social context. Since the expansion of feminist epistemological approaches within the academy in the late 20th century, scholars across disciplines have remained interested in articulating what defines feminist mentoring and what potential it might hold. Rather than being a tool for women alone, feminist mentoring encompasses both a strategy for helping marginalized individuals navigate hierarchical institutions as well as for critiquing and dismantling hegemonic structures. Though, as Mullings and Mukherjee (2018) caution, racialized and otherwise marginalized individuals experience institutions, such as higher education, in varying ways and may not share the same political consciousness necessary to enter into a transformative mentoring relationship. Given the explicit or implicit violence of most formal institutions with which we interact under capitalism, mentoring provides an avenue to facilitate survival for those targeted by oppressive structures (Costello, 2015; Moss et al., 1999). At the same time, the ways in which feminist mentoring is practiced

can counteract an institutional focus on individuality and meritocracy by implementing co-mentoring, peer mentoring, and other forms of collaborative mentoring (Moss et al., 1999). Godbee and Novotny (2013) understand attention to power structures within mentoring to be a specifically feminist approach, one which they nuance with the concept of co-mentoring which emphasizes mutuality and collaboration. A co-mentoring approach acknowledges that mentoring may occur across differing social positions as well as between peers. Many participants in our program adopted the appellation "co-mentor" to reflect the more horizontal plane of relation cultivated during mentoring meetings and to highlight the knowledge held by each individual, not just the designated graduate student mentor.

Despite the openings which a social justice or feminist approach to mentoring might create, it is important to note the institutional context in which our project and many other mentoring relationships take place. These institutional contexts, such as universities and even social movements, are at least in part designed to replicate oppression and the status quo. Mentoring in this space can involve contradictory desires to contribute to social change and to shore up extant structures (Moss et al., 1999). In some cases, mentoring programs can be focused on women or other marginalized social groups but nevertheless replicate hegemonic power structures (Harris, 2022). As the Fem-Mentee Collective et al. (2017) write, "Care may have the potential to create and inform channels of solidarity, but we ought to also be critical of whether this is a strategy of accommodation rather than transformation" (p. 593). Laliberté and Bain (2018) note that this tension in feminist mentoring practices can lead to feelings of having failed as a mentor. Yet, failure can also inspire a further look at the ways in which systems become entrenched and an evaluation of what our role, and that of mentoring, in transforming them can be. Writing this piece collaboratively has provided an opportunity to reflect collectively on what we might see as generative failure.

Our project contributes to this literature an example of an organized effort to enact social justice through mentorship, with a specific focus on power and relationality. We adopt a feminist approach that is dedicated to cultivating reciprocal relationships as well as to thinking through how social change might occur. Our commitment to feminist mentoring practices is evidenced in both the focus of our mentor-mentee groups as well as how those groups are conducted with an emphasis on co-mentoring, mutuality, and learning across difference.

Project Design and Process

At Douglass Residential College, a unit within Rutgers focused on serving women and gender-minoritized undergraduate students, mentorship often happens between a faculty/staff member and an undergraduate student focused on professional progression or degree completion. Whether formal or informal, mentoring is a key part of the Douglass mission, and Douglass is deeply committed to aligning programming with social justice and feminist values. At the School of Graduate Studies (SGS), graduate students have opportunities to participate in training and professional development pertaining to mentoring and community engagement. These often have a research focus, without either an explicit social justice analysis or an experiential component. Accordingly, our units aimed to extend our mentoring programs in new peer and near-peer directions by connecting undergraduate students with graduate students in horizontal mentoring relationships.

The MSJCP began with an intramural seed grant, which program conveners saw as a way to resource alternative practices of relating in academia and work within and against traditional conceptualizations of mentoring. We sought to develop a co-mentoring program topically and pedagogically rooted in social justice principles. In other words, we imagined a program where

the mentoring relationships would not only be organized around social justice topics but also crafted as spaces to experiment with ways of being that align with justice-oriented frameworks. As such, we proposed and received funding for a program to train graduate students in feminist, justice-oriented approaches to mentoring and paired them with undergraduates based on shared interests, identities, and personal and professional aspirations. Graduate students from across disciplinary areas at Rutgers were invited to apply to serve as mentors in this guided, year-long program. Each graduate student mentor received a small stipend for their participation in the project. The lack of compensation for undergraduate mentees reflects a tension that threads throughout our experience in this project: namely, a desire to practice mentoring differently despite not always knowing how to realize it. The relational and collaborative contours evolved over the course of the project, growing sharper over the many months of conversation and ideation among conveners and participants. Committed to learning from moments of generative failure, we see this paper as an invitation to wrestle with contradictory instances like this where, despite good intentions, our program design and practice did not fully reflect a relational, non-hierarchical ethos.

As part of the application process, prospective graduate student mentors proposed justice- or community-oriented projects around which to organize their mentoring relationship with undergraduate students. Program conveners aimed to share power and nurture creativity by crafting the program architecture alongside the participating graduate students. Inviting graduate students to envision and organize their own mentoring project meant that the graduate students were partners in program creation. Projects addressed methodological and practical questions on topics including spatial justice, women of color undergrads preparing for graduate school, and ethical university-community collaborations. Two projects focused on supporting first-generation and women of color in navigating the hidden curriculum of the graduate school application process. Another project introduced students to the vibrant history and contemporary advocacy of the surrounding New Brunswick, NJ Latinx community, highlighting the stories and knowledges of resistance that circulate just outside the Rutgers campus. A fourth project grappled with principles and frameworks for ethical, community-based research. And the fifth project served as an affinity group for Latinx students to support one another in their professional, scholarly, and advocacy goals. Our pilot program emphasized not only identity-affirming and community-focused mentoring, but also co-mentoring and near-peer relationships as sites for social action in their own right.

Program conveners selected five graduate student mentors based on their project proposals, personal experiences, and investments in community engagement and social justice. The selection process was driven by a desire to feature projects with a strong justice-oriented thrust so that students could not only grapple with social issues and collective action, but also contemplate how to align the pedagogies and ways of relating through mentoring with the very justice-oriented ethos structuring the project topics. Undergraduate students were then invited to apply to the program and select the graduate student mentor whose project most interested them. The program supported 16 undergraduate student co-mentors.

Resources for Mentors

Committed to relationality and care as a core component of social justice, program conveners aimed to model the ways of relating that conveners wished for mentors to nurture with their mentees. Program conveners facilitated an orientation for graduate student mentors where we developed a shared conceptual ground for justice-oriented mentoring, discussed inclusive

facilitation and logistical administration strategies, and workshopped one another's mentoring projects. To guide our collective inquiry, program conveners produced several draft resources — including a sample mentoring agreement to facilitate co-mentoring and a checklist for inclusive and relational mentoring — which conveners and graduate student mentors reviewed and revised together. Program conveners emphasized collaboration and democratic decision-making throughout, inviting mentors to think about how they could shape the course of their year-long collaboration *with* the mentees. What do both the mentors and mentees want out of the relationship? What can we learn from each other? How can mentors and mentees share relationship-building, goal-setting, and action-planning responsibilities? These were just some of the considerations included in the draft mentoring agreement, in addition to prompts related to accessibility, communication, and collective care. In this way, mentors were encouraged to horizontalize their practice and contemplate how equitable and trusting collaborations can emerge through non-hierarchical and relational approaches to facilitation and decision-making. We aimed to transform the mentoring process into a site for enacting anti-oppressive, power-conscious principles in and through how we structured and showed up in our relationships with each other. The flexibility of the program meant that graduate student mentors had the space to stretch, experiment with, and transgress the tools and resources formally provided to them, resulting in a creative and enriching co-learning experience.

The mentors and program conveners also maintained monthly check-ins to get to know one another and grapple with reflections and questions regarding the program and social justice mentoring in general. These check-ins served as informal spaces for co-mentoring, as graduate student mentors shared experiential feedback with each other, which in turn shaped how individual projects were carried out. This connection was particularly important for our graduate mentors, as many worked remotely and experienced isolation in the dissertation phase of their degree programs. Our collective writing of this paper is another iteration of these check-ins, a way for us to support one another and reflect on the complexities of aligning our ways of relating in and through mentoring with social justice frameworks.

Resources for Mentees

With their graduate student mentor, undergraduate student mentees met as a group each month to engage in dialogue-based and action-oriented collaboration on their cohort's specific mentoring project. Just as program conveners invited graduate students to propose their mentoring topics, graduate student mentors also invited undergraduate mentees to shape the specifics and direction of the project. Some groups used their monthly gathering time to discuss strategies for navigating the graduate school application process as women of color, others met with community leaders engaged in social justice advocacy, and some deepened their competencies in event planning and coalition-building in the process of organizing a Latin American Film Festival.

Resources for Capacity-Building

Throughout the pilot year, we designed opportunities to engage the larger university community. We hosted campus events about social justice mentoring and organized a culminating showcase for mentors and mentees to reflect on their year-long collaboration and share what they discussed, produced, and learned together.

Further, program conveners launched a website, featuring artwork specially designed by a local artist, to serve as a hub for project resources (Mentoring for Social Justice and Community-Building, 2022). Mentors and mentees shared artifacts from their work together, such as photos from the monthly dialogues that mentors hosted with mentees, as

well as a video and map from a community walk, where one co-mentoring team explored New Brunswick together, discussed the social change landscape, and met with labor justice and immigrant rights organizers working to transform economic and labor relations in the state. Another co-mentoring team built cross-campus relationships to organize a Latin American Film Festival on campus and publicized it through the program website. The website also housed blog posts by program conveners, mentors, and mentees grappling with our own process and results in the context of outcomes-driven higher education. By exploring creative outlets to document and celebrate our work, as well as producing resources to guide us (e.g., the mentoring agreement template), our aim was to elucidate the many moving parts of justice-oriented relationship building while also drawing on adrienne maree brown's (2017) reminder that "we will need to make justice one of the most pleasurable experiences we can have" (p. 27).

In all, we conceptualized each mentoring cohort as a circle of community where graduate and undergraduate students could come together around a shared topic of interest, collaboratively define the contours of their relationship, and inquire into how to shape justice-oriented change in their own communities and day-to-day lives as students, emerging researchers and professionals, and community members interested in nurturing university-community engagement. The loosely structured nature of the program — and the space afforded to graduate student mentors to define the focus of their mentoring work — was deeply intentional. In the design of this project, conveners acknowledged that each question and corner of our world can be engaged from a power-conscious perspective, including how we conceptualize and show up in mentoring relationships. We were motivated to craft this project as a space to cultivate this perspective, to practice applying it to our own relationships, and to build a community poised to reflect and act on topics of shared interest.

Reflecting on Our Mentoring Practice in the Mentoring for Social Justice and Community-Building Project: Author Vignettes

In the spirit of feminist, social justice mentoring, we strove to create an expansive network of co-mentoring relationships. Through our approach to facilitation, relationship-building, and decision-making, we aimed to connect our motivating theories to our practice, weaving justice-oriented philosophies of relationality and power-consciousness into our mentorship. Each of us has incorporated these ideas into our practice in unique ways, some of us shaping mentoring circles around navigating hostile and emotionally violent systems and institutions (i.e., women of color preparing for graduate school), and others engaging in the visionary task of imagining and transforming these systems and institutions (i.e., redefining research and more ethical community-university collaboration). Consistent with the feminist mentoring scholarship, we acknowledge the tensions in these dual goals and see both interventions (navigation and transformation) as necessary and impactful feminist projects.

In our efforts to build knowledge collaboratively and shape the project over its lifetime, we have incorporated reflective practice in all stages of the program, from monthly mentor check-ins to collaborative resource creation. Having completed our pilot year, and consistent with the reflective practice we see as core to social justice mentoring, we have been working to distill key takeaways as we design future years' versions of this project. We entered into this project aware of and open to the tensions, contradictions, and imperfections we'd be likely to experience in our efforts to enact relational mentoring in an institutional context. Institutional constraints and our shared positionality as folks still in the process of unlearning hierarchical mentoring norms meant

that program implementation did not always fully approximate the vision we intended. So, we find it crucial to reflect together on the complexities, challenges, and possibilities of enacting feminist and social justice principles through mentoring. We hope that by sharing these reflections, we can raise questions for conveners and mentors in similar projects at other institutions. We recognize that throughout this year, we have been working to pursue an ethic of mentorship that is at odds with the traditional schema most legible within university contexts, and in sharing our experiences here, we hope to inspire solidarities with like-minded projects elsewhere.

Theorizing the Complexities of Institutionalization: Briana's Vignette

I came to social justice work through community organizing in Georgia, where I learned so much about the challenges and possibilities of creating sustainable, anti-oppressive change through policy advocacy and relationship-building. Now, after having completed a Ph.D. in Educational Theory and Practice, I'm a postdoctoral researcher in the graduate school at Rutgers working on equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives. I was inspired to conceptualize and co-create the MSJCP after having spent my years as a doctoral student contemplating how a relational ethic and way of being can shape the effectiveness and sustainability of justice-oriented organizing and education (Bivens, 2023). In an effort, in part, to make sense of my own experiences in grassroots organizing, where I'd grown disillusioned, resentful, and worn out, I sought a way forward through prefigurative politics, the idea that we can practice *now* the type of world we wish to create.

I'm convinced of the need for such a prefigurative politics in our mentoring practice. But doing things differently in institutional spaces with entrenched norms and operative concepts that are often antagonistic to relational, anti-neoliberal, and justice-oriented ways of being comes with challenges and complexities. In this program, we've at times struggled with the contradictions and possibilities of institutionalizing a program based on values that are, in many ways, anti-institutional. For example, much of the feminist mentoring scholarship discusses organic, emergent relationships. So I've wondered what might be lost in our decision to formalize mentoring relationships as part of an institutionally managed and supported program with a clear start and end date. I've also grappled with the discursive contours of this project and the labels we assign (i.e., program conveners, mentors, mentees) to describe how we relate to this work. I'm curious about how to use language that aligns with the onto-epistemological thrust of the project without being opaque, inaccessible, or alienating. Are we *mentors* and *mentees*, or does that replicate the very mentoring hierarchy we desire to challenge? Or, more compellingly, are we all *co-mentors*, supporting each other on a flattened plane of relationality where we all contribute to and benefit from shared knowledge production?

This theory work was not a private exercise that program conveners engaged in behind-the-scenes; instead, we used both our monthly check-ins with mentors and our blog posts to collaboratively consider conceptual questions like these in an effort to create greater alignment between our practice and our guiding philosophies. In short, mentoring for social justice and community-building involves getting clear on the theories of being and knowing that shape our practice so we can be even more intentional in how we craft and show up in mentoring relationships.

Personal Praxis: Leading from the Inside: Madinah's Vignette

In my work, I hope and anticipate that I am bringing my best self to each and every interaction. As a recent Ed.D. graduate, my research and practice explore how power operates between universities and communities.

As the Director of Mentoring at Douglass Residential College, practicing feminist mentoring requires being present and listening non-defensively to students' concerns and needs. This program was a direct result of students requesting more guidance on graduate school and more connections to graduate students. In co-designing and implementing the MSJCP, it was important for me to ensure that all aspects of the program were responsive to the needs of the diverse community of Douglass students.

For example, during the mentor selection process, we focused on near-peer matches that were clearly connected to our students' interests and that forced program conveners to think about systemic concerns in the university. We were intentional about selecting one project proposal that focused on connecting students to the local community through community walks and other engagement strategies. Knowledge, and thus power, is not static but travels through everyone in myriad ways. Our impetus for a graduate-undergraduate mentoring partnership allowed program conveners to center social justice with both the undergraduate students and graduate student mentors. This project attempts to reflect and enact all portions of the social, the justice, and the mentoring into one initiative that aims to build bridges across the university.

Making Space for Co-Mentoring: Liana's Vignette

I am a doctoral student in Geography whose research centers broadly on how social difference structures contemporary labor landscapes in the United States. In my fourth year, I chose to participate in the social justice mentoring project out of a desire to work more closely with undergraduate students at Rutgers University, as well as to think through how change takes place in our world. With this guiding thought, I proposed a mentor group structured around how social science and other forms of research can be used for organizing and transformational purposes. Rather than assuming that research can serve this function, I baked into the design of our sessions interrogations of the power dynamics of both research and community organizing. For example, in the first semester of group meetings, we dedicated our time to discussing the concepts of research and community which allowed us to think through the communities we come from and what the implications of studying those communities from an insider or outsider perspective might be. As we thought about community, we also shared how our backgrounds impacted access to mentoring relationships.

In the second semester of group meetings, we focused more narrowly on research ethics, comparing different systems for study guidelines such as the IRB and the "Protocol for Review of Environmental and Scientific Research Proposals" from the Akwesasne Task Force on the Environment. In contrast to the typical dry IRB training session, we approached these ethical systems as historically grounded and perhaps limited in their capacity to ensure ethical research. Stitching these larger theoretical conversations together were reflections on our own past and future research projects, our work in community, and our experiences in higher education.

As we describe in our analysis here, our pilot project strove to enact non-hierarchical mentoring practices as an avenue to share knowledge across institutional and age divides. Over the course of my group's first meeting, it became clear that each member of the group had extensive experience as a mentor in some form or another, whether as a writing tutor or activist within their community. While it was still my responsibility to organize meeting agendas and facilitate the conversation, we quickly agreed that we would serve as co-mentors and bring our collective expertise into the room. This has been one of the most satisfying parts of the co-mentoring process for me: seeing students connect with and guide each other, something that infrequently emerges from more traditional classroom settings. By the end of the year, one

student felt supported enough to consider pursuing writing a senior thesis, something she had not previously thought achievable.

Because my group's topic was largely methodological, I often wondered if what we were working on together should be understood as mentoring. I struggled with and against a desire to have students come away with a particular product or skill set as is expected in other academic spaces. My plan for our group to create our own research protocol based on others that we had studied and our own experiences proved to be impractical given the numerous time constraints on group participants. I grappled throughout the year with feelings of failure and not having provided "enough." Yet, at the same time, to move away from traditional mentoring relationships perhaps also entails shifting our focus from particular outputs to relationship-building, to creating spaces where individuals can learn openly from each other and take that new knowledge into whatever spaces they inhabit in their lives. Speaking with two group participants at our concluding ceremony, I realized how much they had gotten out of our free-flowing conversations and that they would approach future research projects prepared to ask questions about ethics and praxis. For me as a graduate student, participating in the project helped me understand that I do have valuable experiences to share with others, as well as that there is a need for more non-hierarchical and judgment-free spaces for undergraduate students working on senior theses and other research. At Rutgers, support for these endeavors most frequently comes from individuals with structural power over students (faculty or graduate student teaching assistants) which can limit the scope of discussion. Horizontal and feminist co-mentoring groups, however, can open the door to compassionately honest conversations and mutual learning.

Excelling in Academia and Beyond: Lailatou's Vignette

I am a third year Ph.D. student in Microbial Biology at Rutgers University. As the first in my family to hold both undergraduate and graduate degrees and someone who did not have any mentors during my academic journey, my work with students entailed guiding them through resources in preparation for graduate education and career paths. This includes how to effectively study, navigating campus and community resources, identifying mentoring networks, seeking opportunities such as undergraduate summer research programs and internships, and looking for grants and scholarships. Additionally, students and I prepared for graduate school applications through building a resume/CV, writing a personal statement and a diversity statement, identifying professors to write outstanding letters of recommendation, and using fee waiver forms to apply to graduate school in case of financial hardship.

My major takeaway from my mentoring experience was that my mentees and I had each other's backs. We discussed our short- and long-term goals for thriving in academia and in the workplace, but most impactfully, we opened up about mental health. For example, one student was having a hard time with a professor who was not treating her fairly in terms of grades and participation. I suggested the student approach the professor, if they felt comfortable, to express their feelings and determine a just path forward. I also suggested that the student connect with Rutgers counseling services. I have used these services multiple times, so I shared my own personal experience with the student as a way to practice vulnerability and build trust while facilitating their access to an important mental health resource. Another student knew that she wanted to take two gap years after graduating to work in a health-related field to gain more hands-on experiences before applying for a graduate school, but she didn't know where to start. I affirmed her choice and personalized our mentoring time together to

respond directly to her personal goals. I helped her apply for opportunities in her field, draft her personal statement, and finalize her resume.

I chose to focus on these areas to support the first-generation women of color I was working with as they explore careers in academia, industry, and beyond. Navigating these structures and processes often relies on capital and extensive networks, which can deter them from staying in academia, especially as women of color continue to face gendered and racialized discrimination in academia and the workplace. So my project was focused on nurturing women's growth and success within and outside of the academy, their personal decision-making, and their mental health as an important part of personal and professional thriving. This makes our mentoring personal within a social justice framework.

Uncovering Hidden Curricula: Julie's Vignette

As a first-generation college and graduate student and a woman of color, I have confronted the hidden curriculum within academia for many years. During my fifth year as a doctoral candidate in Library and Information Science, I led a mentorship group focused on demystifying the graduate school planning process for women of color. This was an opportunity for me to reflect on my own journey and use it to help the young women I met with, offering them insight into the questions they may not yet know they will need to ask.

Whether considering funding, admissions, or the potential paths a program can lead to, the graduate school landscape offers many opportunities for those with insider knowledge to gain an edge over peers. The goal, in my mentorship group, was to talk through some of these pain points and give undergraduates an opportunity to plan ahead, seek answers, and avoid some pitfalls. As someone who has often wished for guidance on this journey, I aimed to use the lessons I've learned through struggle to inform these young women and help them to gain confidence in seeking the resources and information they will need.

In our meetings, we had loosely structured conversations around a theme. My group of three undergraduates looked at graduate programs, funding options, and more together, sharing screens and talking through the process of looking for information. We compiled a resource document with sources to find information about specific programs, and media to help support students' acclimation. The goal for our group was not for each student to know exactly what to do at each turn, but rather to feel empowered in her search, know the sort of questions she should ask, and feel confident asking for help and guidance from her faculty mentors and other experts in her specific field. In our sessions, I focused on using the serendipitous conversations that arose while we searched for information together to identify the things I hadn't known myself when I was in their position. Drawing upon the idea of co-mentoring, I positioned myself as a partner in the undergraduates' process of thinking about and planning for their futures. I may not have been someone who had all the answers, but in reflecting on and sharing my own experience, I helped to identify the questions and begin a collaborative process of looking for the answers.

Conclusion

Student-focused mentoring in higher education too often replicates a top-down, hierarchical approach defined by a knowledge binary between "mentor" as the expert knower and "mentee" as the information recipient. This individualist, one-way mentoring methodology has been challenged by feminist, critical, and social justice approaches which emphasize collaboration, power-consciousness, and social action. In integrating theories of social justice and feminist mentoring, our goal has been to understand more fully how the mentoring relationship itself can be a site for social justice praxis and how co-mentoring can be mobilized toward true institutional or social change. While

the pilot year of the project is complete, our units remain in ongoing conversations about how to adapt and sustain this project moving forward. By taking a feminist and social justice-oriented approach to mentoring through all phases of the project creation, mentor and mentee recruitment, implementation, and assessment, we embarked on the complicated and invigorating process of seeking to make change from within a hierarchical institutional structure. For this project specifically, this meant taking a collaborative and relational approach to mentoring in lieu of the traditional top-down approach, focusing on the personal in addition to the professional, and exploring, rather than obscuring, the sociocultural contexts around mentor-mentee identities and experiences. By positioning this effort as a practice in world-building and reflecting on the challenges and possibilities of connecting our motivating theories to our mentoring practice, we aim to contribute to a reshaping of the mentoring landscape in higher education in the service of anti-oppression, ethical university-community collaboration, and relational ways of being and knowing.

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The AsianCrit Collective: Creating, Sustaining, and Moving Toward Liberatory Futures

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Kriya: I woke up this morning with wavering hope. It's January 2023, and there have been three mass shootings in California in a little over a week; the COVID-19 pandemic rages on despite government officials' silence; extreme climate events as part of an ongoing global climate crisis just caused destructive flooding across most of the western U.S. (National Centers for Environmental Information, 2023); and record-breaking inflation in 40 years (Wiseman, 2022) is making me second guess every purchase, including food items, despite my employment at an institution of higher education. It feels difficult *to be* in the world.

I mention *being* as a male-presenting, gender nonconforming, queer/bakla/beks, non-disabled, Filipinx migrant settler on the lands of the Tsalagi peoples (now the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, and United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians) and the Tsoyaha peoples (Yuchi and Muscogee Creek). My desires to build liberatory futures for my people and others on Turtle Island and my Philippine homelands led me to meet like-minded individuals on Duwamish and Coast Salish lands. It was there that I and a group of six others chose to be colleagues, critical peers, and radically loving friends.

Rae: These days, I often feel exhausted just from moving through the world, navigating each latest crisis. I am tired of hearing the word "unprecedented" when our communities have experienced and resisted relentless violence for centuries. I am tired of receiving official statements of consolation from institutions that consistently fail to make the transformations needed to sustain rather than harm global majority peoples. The AsianCrit Collective—this brilliant group of co-conspirators and human beings—is one of the only spaces where I feel held and seen. A space where we can exist together authentically and honor and tend to each other's grief, anger, and weariness. And, a space where we can do work that nourishes us, work that is joyful and heartfelt and necessary.

I move through these critical conversations as a nonbinary, queer, neurodivergent, second-generation Chinese immigrant and settler on Duwamish and Coast Salish lands. I am committed to moving toward environmental and climate justice and thriving social-ecological futures through centering marginalized cultural knowledges and practices, care and relationality,

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storytelling, emotionality, and multigenerational learning and power. Playing and learning with the AsianCrit Collective has radically reshaped how I dream of and work to realize these visions of collective liberation.

Doua: As a queer, nonbinary HMoob refugee and scholar, one of the best gifts I've received from our AsianCrit Collective is the importance of nourishing ourselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually when disrupting white-cisgender-heteronormative-patriarchal violence. It's a reminder that our humanity comes first, even when others seek to destroy us.

Kayla: I grew up on Ohlone lands in a predominantly East and Southeast Asian community as a cis-het, neurodivergent, Chinese and Filipina woman, and a second generation immigrant and settler with economic privileges. My teachers, peers, and government officials often looked like me, and yet I was often embarrassed of my Asian identity and cultures. It was like we all made an unspoken pact—a commitment to whiteness. Through the tsismis, the conversations that were only spoken in mother tongues when in public, and observing how people who looked like me moved through the world, I learned of a violence that was racialized and gendered, normalized and made easy to dismiss, as well as the actions of resistance and defiance, navigational capital (Yosso, 2005), and lessons on love. But this was deep knowledge, knowledge that I could feel but couldn't put into words or make sense of. Holding this type of knowledge in your bones and living in a society that constantly tells you you're wrong in the way you look, the way you think, and the way you exist leads to an immense amount of self-doubt. It wasn't until I took a required course in ethnic studies (thank you to the Third World Liberation Front and the 1969 student strike and fight for Ethnic Studies) in a Bay Area university that I began to reveal that deep knowledge, puzzle-piecing my way through understanding interlocking systems of oppression. This learning space felt like inhaling after holding my breath for decades, gradually relieving a lack of air I've been forced to ignore for so long. Now, getting to dream and create with the group has been like letting out an exhale, allowing that deep knowledge to surface and guide me in my commitments to the members of the Collective and our communities.

Camille: Our conversation reminds me so much of this poem, A Resting Place, by Derek Dizon. Dizon, who is also a mental health clinician and grief therapist, writes, "Where do the displaced return to? Each other." I am the child of Kapampangan and Tagalog immigrants who settled on Lenape lands. I am currently a cis-het woman, non-disabled at this time, and in relationships with English (dominant), Tagalog, and Bahasa Indonesia languages. I grew up fascinated by the movement and migration of my Filipinx family, which I would later learn to call diaspora and displacement. And now, I am grappling with how these structures are actually continuous enactments of imperialism and settler colonization. The AsianCrit Collective continues to offer me a homeplace (hooks, 1990) and a return to each other.

Saraswati: Despite working and living in the place where I grew up, a second-generation immigrant and settler in Duwamish and Coast Salish lands, I can feel so disconnected. Growing up as a queer, Indian, Malaysian and white, non-disabled, cis-gender woman and educator, I struggled in finding my people. I've always had my family, but in the Pacific Northwest it can be hard to find folks who both understand your Asianness, your queerness, your complexity, the complexity of your family and communities, and who are also working towards justice and wholeness.

Our families and communities are struggling. South and Southeast Asia are predicted to become so unbearably hot in the next couple decades that people will not be able

to survive outside. Our people have continued to experience climate change and are expected to be some of the places most hard hit. Just last December, I sobbed as my family was stuck on their roofs for over five days due to intense flooding in Malaysia—five days of not knowing if they were alive or lucky enough to be one of the families that only lost all of their belongings. Finding the AsianCrit Collective has meant finding folks who not only understand what my people, our people, are going through, but people that have an intersectional view on working towards liberation. They recognize what it means to lovingly hold our families while also pushing them in understanding our queerness, our gender, our wholeness. We hold and love but also interrogate our and our families' complicity in anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, and other systems of power. We grow. We create. We learn through our relations with one another.

Together, we are the AsianCrit Collective, a group of Asian and Asian American graduate students (currently and formerly) who met and established relations at a university in the Pacific Northwest. We first came together because we wanted to see ourselves and our values of abolition, decolonization, and systemic justice in our graduate school curriculum. We have since collaborated on community projects, educational workshops, curriculum development, research, and teaching in service to our peoples. We seek to further our relationships within and beyond our communities in strengthening our solidarities with Black, Indigenous, Latine, Pacific Islander, Asian, disabled, working class, 2LGBTQIA+, and other systematically marginalized peoples on Turtle Island and in our ancestral homelands. We enact and dream of collective liberation.

This paper is our attempt of writing the stories born of our relationships with one another, of how we want to live and how we are in this ever-challenging world, and the lessons that we think could be gleaned from such stories by educators, students, activists, storytellers, artists, and others who want to join us.

Our Methods, Framing, and Central Question

Forming Our Manuscript

We wrote this paper as a constellation of experiences, stories, theories, and dreams. We drew from Wilson's (2008) notion of relational accountability in foregrounding our relationships in our research and writing. Wilson teaches us that knowledge production in the service of one another and our communities has to be participatory, collaborative, and relationship-based. We attended to each other's well-being whenever we connected through virtual synchronous (Zoom, Google Docs) and asynchronous (text, email, Google Docs) spaces, always allocating time to check in with each other, share life updates, and provide support, resources, and employment leads. The commitments to collaborate on this manuscript were initially discussed over email and text messages with consideration to not only our capacities and aspirations but also to how such a project might strengthen (or compromise) our relationships.

Guided by Liboiron et al. (2017), we intentionally navigated the complexities of authorship order, an academic practice in which we have yet to find satisfaction. In one of our subsequent Zoom meetings and throughout our research and writing, we asked ourselves if and why we wanted to continue with our efforts: Did we feel sustained in our collaboration? How might we or would we plan to stay connected after this project was finished? We allowed each other to engage in the research and writing as we decided for ourselves, continuously communicating and negotiating our commitments to the work.

We recognized that it would be sustaining for all of us to translate our practices of relationality (i.e., our storytelling, meal sharing, knowledge production, hanging out, celebrations, holding

space, theorizing, and collective dreaming) into a paper format that most closely approximated our ways of being when we are with one another virtually or in person. We thus chose a format guided by a forum (Alim et al., 2017), collaborative pedagogy (Ungco et al., 2022), and unsettling (Snelgrove et al., 2014) in our scholarship in this article and in our disruption of institutionalized research relationships (Whetung & Wakefield, 2019).

We engaged in San Pedro and Kinloch's (2017) dialogic spiral in our approach to storytelling as theoretical and methodological anchor. Within the dialogic spiral, "we impact and are impacted by various places and people, and we emphasize this impact because it contributes to how we story and re-story our interactions" (p. 381S). The centrality of relationships in this process serves to humanize us as co-researchers in the act of co-constructing knowledge through storytelling, listening, and knowledge exchange and production.

Our dialogic spiral included multiple conversations on what our collective scholarship could offer toward public pedagogy. Based on these dialogues and our previous collaborations, we identified theoretical frameworks that have been informing our work. We then constructed a central inquiry to address based on these frameworks: How are we as the AsianCrit Collective practicing relationality, refusal, and desire to create, sustain, and move toward liberatory futures? We elaborated on these frameworks and central inquiry in recorded Zoom conversations, which were then transcribed onto a Google Doc, as well as in asynchronous writing, where we added individual and collective narratives.

Additional Collective Guiding Theories and Practices

One of the ways that we interpret and practice relationality is through the Filipinx concept of kapwa. Enriquez (1992) defined kapwa as "a recognition of shared identity, an inner self shared with others" (p. 5). We are in the AsianCrit Collective to be in good relations with one another and to talk, think, and write about how we can build our relationships with Black, Indigenous, and communities of color. Kapwa connotes that one's being-ness is tied to the being-ness of others and therefore one cannot be liberated unless everyone/everything else is liberated.

We emphasize our stories rather than the analysis that is expected of them. We follow in the footsteps of San Pedro (2021), who resisted reviewers' feedback that asked him to center scholarship in stories. We believe in the ability of readers to learn from the inherent worth of our narratives.

We build upon concepts of refusal in our choice of what stories we share to the academy (Simpson, 2007) and in our rejection of individualistic academic norms (Grande, 2018), including the "traditional" methods of scholarly writing and publishing that glorifies solo authorship. Here and in other works, we continue to share and create knowledge in ways that sustain us. We push against notions of storytelling as "unempirical" while simultaneously refusing to satiate the academy's unquenchable thirst for accounts of deficit. We are thus driven by a framework of desire (Tuck, 2009). While we recognize the many ways that the cisheteropatriarchal, white supremacist, ableist, settler colonial nation-state and its institutions have damaged our communities, we choose to tell narratives of resistance and sustenance instead.

We began this paper by telling stories of who we are, where we come from, and how we navigate our world. The flow of the remainder of this article is an exhortation to our co-conspirators: to create community, to sustain one another, and to move with intention and hope. In the section that follows, we commence with Creating, where we share how we found one another and formed our Collective. We continue with Sustaining, where we provide several examples of our collaborative work. We

conclude with Moving, where we dream with our group and the futures of our communities.

Creating: Coming Together as a Collective

The AsianCrit Collective was created around late 2019 by Asian graduate students (some of whom have since become Doctors) at a college of education on the lands of the Duwamish and Coast Salish peoples. Pour-Khorshid (2017) contends that racial affinity groups can provide spaces for Black, Indigenous, and students of color in navigating white-centric higher education and in coming together for affirmation, healing, and empowerment. We started the AsianCrit Collective as a response to the lack of critical Asian theories, histories, and narratives in the classrooms we grew up in, as well as in courses available at our university. We argue that Asian learners across learning settings need culturally sustaining ways to learn about and grapple with our own stories, legacies, and possible futures, including the extraction and exploitation of Asian laborers, the colonization of Asian countries, the revolutions and movements in our home countries and in the U.S., and necessary actions to disrupt anti-Blackness and settler colonialism in our own communities. We narrate our AsianCrit origin stories below.

Kayla: I had recently taken a course on Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2014) and recognized the power of self-reflexivity. As I reflected on my own positionality and loving critiques I had of the communities I grew up in, I became invested in interrogating anti-Blackness in Asian communities and the histories and ongoing practices of cross-racial solidarity that have propelled collective liberation movements. I sought to learn more. I came across an article by Curammeng, Buenavista, and Cariaga (2017), building on Museus and Iftikar's (2014) breakdown of Asian Critical Race Theory, calling for the interrogation of anti-Blackness and settler colonialism within Asian communities in the U.S. Reading these two pieces became one of the most affirming moments in academia for me. It was like reading about something I already knew yet had never seen in writing before—my experiences and passed down sociopolitical wisdom (Sánchez Carmen et al., 2015) put into words. Before finding these articles, my peers and I were also desperately searching for (what we soon realized was) a nonexistent course on Critical Race Theory in education at our university. It was such a meaningful coincidence to have come across these scholars' work. So, I passed these two readings to other Asian grad students whose values I knew aligned with collective liberation and we realized that we could create the space we were desperately looking for. Asian Critical Race Theory was our lived experiences, the stories our families passed down to us, and the dreams of our communities.

Rae: I was drawn to co-building the Collective by a longing to learn more about the stories and identities of Asian diasporas. I held, and continue to hold, a deep curiosity about my own racialized and intersectional experiences, which I had not had opportunities to examine in formal educational spaces. Although my graduate coursework fed my intellectual curiosity, I did not see myself as an Asian person reflected in most of the syllabi and class readings.

Throughout my first two years of grad school, I began clarifying my research focus: the power and importance of culturally sustaining, emotionally and relationally attuned, anti-racist, anti-colonial, and intersectionally just practices within environmental and climate education. As I gathered theoretical framings and ethical commitments, I felt a longing for something that was missing in my work. I was inspired by an Asian faculty mentor and friend to the Collective, who asked me during my general exam oral defense in the fall of 2019, "What does it mean to you to be Asian? How does your Asianness inform your work?" The timing

couldn't be more perfect, as the seeds of the Collective began germinating that fall through conversations and shared reading, learning, and theorizing with these brilliant peers. I felt uplifted, sustained, and challenged by my colleagues in the Collective and recognized that intentionally deepening these critical friendships would be transformative. And it truly has changed everything!—how I move through the world each day, how I build and sustain relationships, how I understand myself and my communities, how I approach teaching and scholarship, my priorities and desires for the future.

Theresa: I was in my third year when I took a course on identity, engagement, and motivation. During the first couple weeks of the course, the professor asked us, "What makes you feel comfortable in spaces?" I remember thinking about seeing peers who looked like me, being in a space where I was not the only Asian American woman. As a graduate student, my research interests shifted, but my interest in the intersections of ethnic identity and gender identity was always the focus of my research interest. During my third year, I realized that I had a personal yearning to build community, collaborate, and grow with other folks interested in unpacking and moving towards healing as Asian and Asian American folks. I had been in courses with my peers in the Collective, but it wasn't until a deep need, a personal shift in how I was also relating to my research interests, that I sought after and began to foster deeper conversations and relationships.

Kriya: I was unmoored at the end of two years of graduate school. I knew that I wanted to do participatory qualitative research with Filipinx students, but the course offerings in our college did not feel adequate to support the work I wanted to do from a methodological and theoretical standpoint. For example, we never covered relationship-based research or accountability in research. I had to look up literature on these topics on my own. I felt isolated. Graduate education was not serving me or the communities with whom I wanted to work. In my qualitative research class, I found several peers—Theresa, Saraswati, and Kayla among them—who shared my sentiments. The succeeding quarter, we engaged in independent study on humanizing research methods and critical consciousness raising. That was the first time that I felt seen, heard, and understood. I had found my people.

Camille: I had one quarter of grad school in person before the pandemic hit. Fast forward to spring 2021. I was working on my first independent research project as a part of my program, which was all online at this point. Our college's qualitative research methods course gave us a brief introduction to critical race theory, including Asian critical race theory. I was hooked. I decided to individually draw on AsianCrit and CRT in my work because I didn't know there were already grad student-centered movements within the college. Later, my advisor and Rae's housemate both separately mentioned to me the work that Kayla, Rae, Kriya, Doua, Saraswati, and Theresa were doing with AsianCrit for undergraduates and faculty; but time was moving! I had already incorporated AsianCrit into my project's theoretical framework and my online research presentation to the college's community was in a few days.
I think a lot about how to be in good relations. Yet, I feel reluctant about virtual relationship building when social media interactions attempt to proxy the embodied actions needed to cultivate meaningful relationships and collective movements (Simpson, 2017). So, before starting my presentation to various Zoom squares, I attempted to give my flowers first and foremost to those whom I learn from and want to continue learning from. I thanked my advisor and the methods course community. I then extended gratitude to Kriya, Saraswati, Rae, Doua, Theresa and Kayla. We've shared both online and in-person space over the past few

years, but I hadn't worked directly with them and their AsianCrit Collective just yet. Still, I wanted to honor how our commitments to critically disrupting monolithic Asian narratives were in some ways paralleling one another. Whether our respective constellations would intersect or not (spoiler alert: they did), I wanted the Collective to know I was with them.

Sustaining and Nurturing Ourselves

Having told stories of how we came together, we now describe several examples of how and why we maintain our relations within the Collective.

Designing and Teaching Our Class

One of our early projects was the first-ever Asian critical race theory class in our college of education. In the winter and spring of 2020, we designed an educational space to be healing and sustaining to ourselves and to other learners we invited. Amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we piloted the course with our friends and loved ones via Zoom in the summer of 2020 and learned alongside several intimate groups of undergraduate students in the 2020-21 school year. We have continually reworked and reimagined the learning experience in response to our own journeys as well as broader sociopolitical contexts.

Guided by the tenets of Asian critical race theory (Chang, 1993; Museus & Iftikar, 2014; Curammeng, Buenavista, & Cariaga, 2017), we curated course topics rooted in the intersections of social identities and social systems. For example, we explored themes of anti-Asian violence in the time of COVID, honoring multiple diaspora and migration stories, Asian place-making on Indigenous lands, redefining gender and sexual identities in Asian diasporas, and confronting proximity to whiteness and anti-Blackness in Asian communities. We emphasized moving toward social and political action, including petition signing, mutual aid, engaging with community events, and seeking out additional learning. Through these critical conversations, we cultivated possibilities for cross-racial and cross-identity solidarities and shared liberation.

In our learning space, we practiced our commitment to expansive forms of knowledge-making and knowledge-sharing—for example, by including multimedia resources from beyond academia such as podcasts, videos, short articles, interactive websites, zines, and poems. We prioritized critical reflection on our own identities, positionalities, and sociopolitical responsibilities. We encouraged multiple creative forms of personal and group storytelling, including artmaking, love letter writing, photovoice, music curation, video-making, and more. Through reciprocal vulnerability and sharing, we cultivated a space of healing and intimacy. Several students reflected that this was the first time they had talked about their identities and lived experiences in a formal learning space, and that they hadn't known these forms of dialogue were possible within educational institutions.

Mahjong Night

While white supremacy culture and higher education favor individualism and competition over community and collaboration (Jones & Okun, 2001; Kemp, 2013), we instead choose to refuse the university by centering relational responsibility to sustain and nurture ourselves. We celebrate our cultures, traditions, and life events. One highlight included Mahjong Night, when some of us in the Collective gathered in hybrid in-person and Zoom space to share food and (try to) play mahjong. Rae and Kayla had played a few times before with their families but couldn't remember most of the rules—and as it turns out, everyone plays with different rules! Rae initiated a video conference with their mother to walk through the rules in a mixture of English and Mandarin, then did their best to relay these instructions to the group. Kriya joined in through Zoom. With a lot of confusion and clarification, we engaged in three successful rounds of play! These moments of unearthing,

remembering, and sharing cultural practices and finding joy together are crucial for sustaining our relationality.

Writing as Sustenance

Our writing collaboration is also one way we continue to be in good relationship with each other. As previously mentioned, some of us who started the AsianCrit Collective have since graduated and moved on to other endeavors. Despite the distance, we have facilitated workshops, presented at conferences, and co-published writing pieces together. We were especially drawn to writing collaboratively for multiple reasons. In the following section, we (Doua, Rae, and Kriya) share an excerpt of a Zoom conversation, differentiated by font type from the narrative writing of the rest of the paper, on what it means for us to write and co-create knowledge.

Rae: When I think about co-writing or writing with you all, I think it's partially that it just feels like a natural extension of sharing space. Because when we spend time together in person or online, there's just so much collective wisdom and brilliance there that I think it makes a lot of sense to me for us to share that. It feels important to think about writing more creatively and more expansively than within academic contexts. I love writing. And I pretty much always really loved reading and writing. I know that those are two of the main activities of scholarship in an academic and institutional context, but I don't think that that has to be the case. I don't think that has to be the limit to why and how people write together. I think also, and maybe this sounds egocentric, but I think the world needs some of what we've been working to build together. I think we're talking about really important things, talking about Asian identities, Asian histories, positionality, and role and responsibilities in justice work in really important ways that can really shift how educational systems function and how other systems function more broadly. So it feels important and fulfilling and purposeful work to share that. I feel inspired by the way that we're playing with this format of a forum and being more about conversation and about building off each other in that organic and holistic way. I think that's a fun way to think about writing and feels sustaining to me, and also is, from a critical scholarship perspective, really pushing on how academic journals think about how knowledge is generated. So I'm excited to be a part of that. So yeah, I think it's just inspirational and motivating to me to be practicing these different ways of producing knowledge together.

Doua: I didn't realize how lonely academic [writing] was because as first gen[eration college students], you don't really know these things. You kinda figure it out on your own. When writing solo pieces, it’s like my thoughts existed in a vacuum, and I couldn’t talk to anyone except myself. So when I heard there was the possibility of us collaborating and writing together, I was so excited because I get to learn from peers who can provide knowledge where I may have gaps. There's this pressure to publish by yourself, to be the sole author, in order to keep your [faculty] position, and I really want to push against that. Once you find amazing collaborators, you want to hold on to that village.

Kriya: It's funny because in grad school, they teach us that we need to collaborate. The world functions in a way that collaboration is necessary. And it's also ironic that grad school encourages all of us to work collaboratively, but then you have to solo author a dissertation! And to me, when I was writing my dissertation, it felt like I wasn't doing justice to the stories of the people that I did research with. My co-researchers, who were my students, and I really wanted to rectify that by co-writing. But it's still only my name written on the first page.

Rae: Thank you, Kriya. I'm just resonating a lot with what both of you have shared and I think

Kriya, especially in that dissertation process. And I feel like the heart of the learning that I did in grad school was not necessarily in classes, right? It was being in these little intimate independent study spaces or shared, hanging out at someone's house and talking about things. I feel that's where most of my learning happened, as well as through co-teaching and through co-writing, like being in those different roles along with you all, with people who are brilliant and have so much to share and so much to teach. Maybe what would be called "informal" or "less formal" spaces are where I did the best learning.

Doua: The thing with grad school too is that as Asian/Asian American grad students, there's really no courses for us. Most of it is for undergrads, so for us to be really intentional about AsianCrit was pretty powerful. That's one of the ways that we refuse the university's curriculum: we created our own.

Kriya: I think definitely designing our own, whether it was independent study or the AsianCrit class, was part of refusal. But also in terms of what you've touched upon, Rae, about knowledge generation, that's supposed to be happening in confined spaces, controlled spaces. That's obviously not been true as we know from experience, right? Our conversations, much like this one and the ones that we have in all the restaurants and cafes that we've been to and Kayla's house, and other places, virtual or in person, have been so generative. We've been theorizing and generating knowledge the whole time. It's just that it's not in a format that is recognizable by the academy. So I suppose what we're trying to do is translate what we're doing, what we know, into a format, such as a journal article, that is then accessible to the academy. And it feels like we're doing the academy a favor in this way. And I don't know how I feel about that. But as an aspiring academic, I have to admit that writing is a necessity. I do think that we're refusing the traditions of how an article is supposed to look like and how the writing process is typically structured. And I'm excited because this is also something that I have not done previously. The methodology of our writing process is already fulfilling to me.

Doua: I feel like talking like this, too, it's also another form of refusal. So often the academy wants us to write things down. But you know, we've taken this route where we talk first, and then we transcribe later. This is my first time doing this, so it's still very wild for me. Sometimes I feel like when I'm writing, I sound more "scholarly." So it's like, "Oh, I prefer to write as opposed to talking. That way I can sound 'smarter' and more 'intelligent.'" But we don't have to follow the same format that we've been taught. We can change it up, cause once you learn the rules, you can break the rules. And I like the fact that we're slowly breaking the rules, and finding more rules to break as we go along.

Kriya: I think that I find beauty in having our thoughts printed on a page, whether that's a virtual web page, or like an actual journal page. I suppose that that elicits a sort of...maybe I'm thinking about legacy? When I'm thinking about writing, I'm also thinking about, "Oh, this is forever gonna be part of either the world wide web or some archive somewhere," which may or may not be useful to a lot of people. That's one of my gripes with academia. Because everything is niche and siloed, who the heck is going to read this thing? Like, maybe we're just writing it out into the void? But now that I'm thinking about this out loud, writing it into the void is still writing it, as opposed to it just staying in our minds. And then it may not necessarily be for my grandchildren; maybe I'll never have grandchildren. But maybe a group will uncover it when the world ends and be like, "Oh, these people seemed like they were doing cool stuff."

Rae: "These people loved each other," right?

Kriya: That too! Our writing is a testament of our love for one another and our good relations.

We have shared how we practice refusal, relationality, and desire in our collaborative projects. Overall, we engage with the Collective because it sustains us. In the final section below, we turn inwardly and orient ourselves to the possibilities ahead of us

Moving Towards Liberatory Futures

Doua: I see us coming together for perhaps an annual retreat to just give space for each other to be in community, write together, and offer feedback on whatever projects we are working on. It would be amazing to just come together to learn and be inspired. Sometimes that is all we need in order to rejuvenate ourselves. I also see the spirit of the AsianCrit Collective within my own work with queer and trans HMoob youth, especially when it comes to relationality, refusal, and desire.

Rae: Each time I share space with this Collective, I think, "So much is possible." I am dreaming of all of us having space, time, and energy to engage in artmaking and storytelling in relationship with land and community. I see us sustaining and strengthening these Collective relationships, making and sharing food, talking and writing together, and continuing to find playfulness and joy as we dismantle systems of oppression and build ecosystems of liberation. I see us holding each other in light and love over the years, through times of grief, loss, remembrance, celebration. I see us dreaming and creating possibilities with our elders, our youth, and our more-than-human companions by our sides. I dream of us living our ancestors' wildest hopes and striving every day to be good ancestors to future generations.

Saraswati: Text chains, Zooms, hybrid hangs, food, laughter, crying, and dreaming—I want to continue it all. Six years into a Ph.D. program can feel dragging and not good enough, but our Collective reminds me of the "for whom" and "why" of my dissertation. I see us celebrating life milestones, connecting between them, and honoring the generations to come and that came before us.

Kriya: We are sitting at a table with mahjong tiles, sweets, and smiles. Saraswati draws a tile and declares herself the winner. She's achieved another 13 don't touch victory. The rest of us groan in disappointment, inured to losing at this point. We continue to hone our mahjong skills every time we meet, sometimes playing virtually. We discuss emerging theories and news of critical race theory and ethnic studies finally being mandated in the state of Florida as well as the lands that are being rematriated to Indigenous nations. We gossip. We ask about each one's personal lives: who's getting a new book published, who's getting their art installed in a museum, who's having a grandkid, who's going to host the next writing-and-mahjong retreat. We play, eat, and chat until a grandchild needs to be put to bed. As we part ways, we take solace in our to-go containers. We won't be going hungry anytime soon.

Kayla: I see us as creators. Our Collective was born out of need and desire for something more—out of our impatience with a society that actively seeks to harm and invisibilize us. I envision us continuing to be space cultivators, dreaming and creating spaces that we wish we had growing up but too impatient to wait for others to create these spaces for the next generation. We will create these spaces in our relationships, on the lands we set roots in (no matter how far apart we are physically), and with our elders, our youth, and one another. We will create zines as our textbooks. We will create guided meditations to make spaces for our collective grief. We will grow ampalaya, gai lan, lemongrass, daikon, and lotus roots that are so damn hard to find at the grocery store. We will record the stories of our elders and learn

their recipes, making adjustments for our vegetarian friends. We will collaborate, check each other, and practice boundaries with our time and labor. We will move with love for ourselves, one another, across and beyond our communities, the land and waters, biological and chosen ancestors, and future generations.

Theresa: I think back to how we started, when we got together at least two or three times a week to plan, discuss, unpack our AsianCrit course. As time passed, we moved into different roles. But the work that we have done and continue to do has moved and shaped me as an individual and as an educator. I am grateful for the times we have together, discussing relevant topics to AsianCrit and creating space to support each other in the best way we can. I deeply appreciate the love, warmth, and grace that we have for one another. I see our future as a mix of professional and personal work as a community. I see us continuing to inspire one another and coming together for projects to move towards a liberated future for all. We will continue doing the work within Asian communities, and I see us expanding beyond to think about the relationship we hold with the land, with other communities of color, and how we can take our learning into our own individual communities.

We hope that our stories and conversations prompt critical reflection and provide a model for current and future Collectives.

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Theorizing Collective Praxis Rooted in Epistemic Disobedience and Responsibility

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Teaching While Muslim
United States

As researchers and educators, we are committed to engaging in critical participatory action research (CPAR) that raises our critical consciousness, disrupts colonial structures, and is responsible – epistemically and ethically – to the communities to which we belong (Ayala, et al., 2018; Guishard, 2009; Torre & Fine, 2011). In this manuscript, we write about the epistemological and theoretical reflections of our critical research collective, how we unpacked our colonial yokes, and how those reflections shaped our research and informed our collective praxis (see Figure 1). The evolution of our collective praxis is the central focus of this paper. We describe how we became aware of our complicity, and gave ourselves permission to disobey and disrupt the oppressive systems in which we were operating. Through continuous self-reflection we acknowledged our anger and collective trauma. This process allowed us to heal as a collective and dream radical dreams (Kelley, 2002).

In 2018, we formed a research collective driven by a desire for liberatory narratives (Kelley, 2002; Kumashiro, 2000; McGee & Stovall, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2014) and a need to affirm one another's experiences while contesting the dehumanizing portrayals of Muslims in the U.S. (Al-Sultany, 2012; Mogahed et al, 2017; Shaheen, 2003). As educators we have all experienced the double-bind of participating in institutions built on structural racism that maintain white supremacy (Ayala et al, 2020; Bajaj et al., 2016; Patel, 2016), while trying to resist the binaries of "good" vs. "bad" Muslims (Ghaffar-Kucher & El-Haj, 2018; Ghaffar-Kucher, et al. 2022; Mamdani, 2004) and the assimilationist expectations to disappear into the mainstream (Grande, 2015). Aware that Muslim educators were not included in the scholarship on teachers of color (Kohli, 2021), and that anti-Muslim and anti-Black tropes dominated the mainstream narratives about Muslims (Diouf, 2013), we were committed to disrupting the racial contract (Liou & Cutler, 2021) not for the sake of disruption itself but rather to offer a more inclusive representation of Muslim educators and the communities to which they belong.

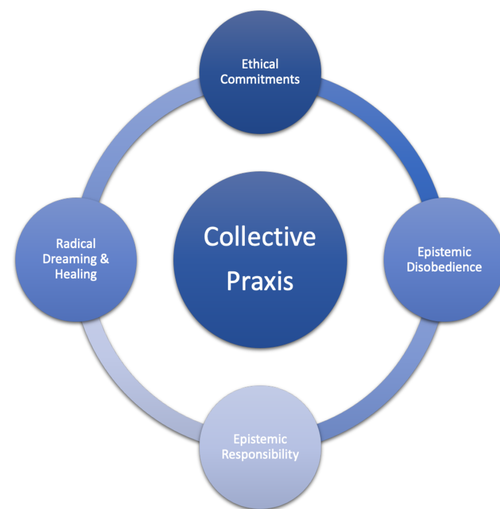

Figure 1: Our Collective Praxis

By describing how we wrestled with and negotiated tensions, we invite readers to interact with the questions we posed to ourselves and to one another—questions inspired by Laenui's (2000) phases of decolonization and critical participatory action research (CPAR) scholars (e.g., Ayala et al., 2020; Fine et al., 2021). As teachers, teacher educators, community members, activists, and researchers, we asked: To whom are we accountable? Who creates knowledge? To whom does it belong? How do we, as a community of scholars and educators, initiate and promote the ideological decolonization process *in* each other and *with* each other? How do we formulate questions that help us unearth multiple answers that are relevant to the communities we hope to engage? How do those multiple answers help us initiate and enact solutions that address the systems of inequality that exist in schools? And as McKittrick (2021) insists, "what do we want from these solutions, politically" (p. 106)?

As an anti-colonial framework (Canham, 2018; Patel, 2016; Tuck & Guishard, 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2012), CPAR calls us to align our ethical commitments through our actions and our words. As a philosophical framework, CPAR reflects the Islamic concept of collective responsibility, or ummah (Denny, 1977). CPAR provides us with epistemic and organizing tools that help us think through: the structure of our collective, the division of labor, the resources and knowledge that inform us, how we frame our questions, and how we hold each other accountable (Ayala, et al., 2018; Guishard, et al., 2018). From CPAR we draw guidance as we develop trust and agreements with one another to examine our positions, our experiences, and our analyses (Krueger-Henney, 2016). Bringing together our embodied theories has given us the opportunity to formulate more nuanced understandings of our historical and current sociopolitical and cultural contexts.

Through our collective, we embody a collaborative communal ethos that brings together our varied, complex, racial and ethnic identities that are interconnected with our responsibilities. It is within this complexity that nests the significance of our research as a process. In the context of our work, the term "collective" means a number of individuals from various backgrounds, with multiple strengths, skills and knowledge engaged in a common endeavor defined by their shared research values, goals, decision-making, and responsibilities. We are all current or former teachers in K-12 public schools in the United States. All of us identify as Muslim with different social locations. Our relationships to religion *as* faith and religion *as* culture across multiple Muslim communities exists along a continuum. In terms of our ethnic and racial identities, our collective includes ethnic backgrounds that are non-white, ranging from African American, Latin American, Middle Eastern, North African, and South Asian. Three of us are Ph.D. students (who teach), one is a recently graduated doctoral student, two of us are teachers/leaders in K-12 schools, and one is a professor. Some of us have experience as community organizers. Some of us have formal research training, and all of us have deep knowledge about the ways we, and many in our communities, have struggled against oppression, racism, and dehumanization. While we share identities (i.e., as Muslims and as educators), our individualized experiences against systems of oppression differ temporally and geographically. Recognizing our intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1995) makes our collective work more nuanced and allows us to build on our shared understandings.

We began our work with an exploratory pilot study to document the experiences of Muslim American teachers. While analyzing and interpreting the results of our pilot, we encountered theoretical tensions and epistemic dissonance that led us to interrupt our analytical process and redefine and restructure our research. We became increasingly uncomfortable with the ways our criticality and commitments were not reflected in our research design. While we approached our research

through an anti-colonial lens, our internalized biases became glaring as our participants reflected back asset-based, "diversity" rhetoric in response to our questions. Instead of honoring our place as members of the community which we studied, our research design fell into the trap of much conventional research on marginalized communities, leading participants to justify their value as Muslim teachers in their schools.

The results of our pilot forced us to re-evaluate our purpose—the language we used, and the methods we employed. During our weekly meetings, as we poured over transcripts, we wrestled with the results of our focus groups. In particular, we were struck by the ways teachers tried to prove their worth and how they were compelled to share stories of the ways they worked to get along. These implicit assimilative narratives were contrary to our commitments. As we engaged in a deep process of analysis, we stopped to ask ourselves: Were our questions really helping us to better understand Muslim teachers' experiences in U.S. public schools? How could we ensure our questions did not perpetuate white supremacist and capitalistic models of success, like meritocracy and value-added measures? How could we disrupt the ways in which proximity to whiteness is rewarded within schools? Our conversations were intense, invigorating, and eye-opening and led us on a journey to "change the terms of the conversation" (Mignolo, 2009). Acknowledging and intentionally "disobeying" colonial research methodology (Smith, 2012), led us to epistemic disobedience (Domínguez, 2020; Mignolo, 2009).

The practice of epistemic disobedience acknowledges and values diverse ways of knowing. Furthermore, it uplifts Indigenous knowledge that challenges dominant systems. Epistemic disobedience allowed our collective to not only operate outside the colonial knowledge systems, but also emphasized that colonial ways of knowing intentionally suppress non-dominant knowledge, particularly Indigenous knowledge, produced outside of Eurocentric epistemologies. Our constructs of epistemic disobedience and ummah ultimately led us to center epistemic responsibility (Calderon et al., 2021; Seawright 2014). By engaging with epistemic responsibility, we aim to interrupt oppressive structures within research and educational institutions in order to honor our commitments to the communities in which we reside.

We posit that collective praxis is built on shared values, agitation of the research process, and intentional epistemological disobedience of the dominant norms. To create a truly transformative space that honors our collective and our communities, the responsibility to which we hold to each other must be central to knowledge building. Only then can we create spaces of radical dreaming, hope and healing.

Defining Ethical Commitments: Operating in an Anti-Muslim Context

In the U.S., Muslim identity has long been framed outside of the white, Eurocentric, Christian norms (Said, 1979; Shaheen, 2003) that erase histories and lived realities of Native Americans (Grande, 2015) and African Americans (Daulatzai & Rana, 2018). The earliest Muslim populations in the U.S. were Africans who were enslaved and brought as colonial property (Diouf, 2013). Therefore, the context in which the Muslim American identity exists is rooted in anti-Blackness *and* Islamophobia. Exacerbated by the "Global War on Terror" (Ghaffar-Kucher & El-Haj, 2018), the Muslim American identity is often politicized into a binary of assimilation. The "good Muslims" represent assimilation through a colonial lens, whereas "bad Muslims" retain their identity as "other" and are vilified as radicals or terrorists operating outside of U.S. values (Ghaffar-Kucher et al., 2022). The U.S. Census exemplifies this binary, forcing Muslims from Middle Eastern or North African descent to claim whiteness, and thereby excluding Blackness and further erasing the experiences of Muslim Americans (Kayyali, 2013).

The contemporary term Islamophobia is a presumption rooted in colonialism and Orientalism. It is rooted in the social constructions of race and assumes that Islam is inherently violent and unassimilable. Islamophobia is a system of exclusion and racism that affects people at home, in schools, the workplace, and in society (Beydoun, 2018; Sirin & Fine, 2007; Zaal, 2012; Zaal et al., 2007). Though it takes on many more subtle forms, a quantifiable indicator of Islamophobia in the U.S. is the surge of reported anti-Muslim hate crimes that closely correlate with two major events in our country's recent past: 9/11 and the 2016 U.S. election, in particular the Muslim Ban. In the wake of 9/11, anti-Muslim hate crimes increased more than sixteen-fold (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2002). The lead up to the 2016 election saw right-wing populist politicians on the national and local level increase the vitriol of their Islamophobic attacks to fire up their electoral base, and as a result, the number of anti-Muslim hate crime offences reported in 2014 more than doubled by the year 2017 (FBI, 2015, 2018; South Asian Americans Leading Together, 2018). That sentiment inevitably permeated schools and about half of Muslim families said their children experienced faith-based bullying in 2017; a quarter of those incidents involved a teacher (Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017). The stereotypes that are produced have permeated the discourse on Muslims in America and have even found their way into public schools in the United States through erasure in school curricula (Liou & Cutler, 2021).

Stories of Muslim teachers in K-12 schools in the U.S. who have been reprimanded, censored, or made invisible were familiar to us (Kohli, 2021). Some stories were circulated as whispers, some as public shaming. Some of us had direct experience being censored, but we all felt the chilling effect of friends and colleagues who had been silenced in the classroom by anti-Muslim forces. Whether it was having our social media activity monitored and surveilled or the intrusive wonderings of colleagues about our religious practice and its link to our political beliefs, we had all experienced invasive questions disguised as mere curiosity. As we analyze our positionality vis-a-vis our research, we realized that this chilling effect predisposed us to avoid asking difficult questions and to fear that by asking them we would be risking ourselves and increasing the likelihood of professional consequences.

Centering Epistemic Disobedience

Initially, we focused on documenting the experiences of the Muslim American teachers in one state. We recruited participants (N=18) through our social networks, including teacher educator networks and social media groups. Grounding our research in CPAR led us to a focus group structure (Chilisa, 2020; Kidd & Parshall, 2000; Wilkinson, 1999), where our participants would be valued as knowledge holders and builders, instead of subjects to be observed. The focus group setting served as both a place of community conversation and affinity spaces for teachers who had never met to connect and share experiences.

We opened our focus groups by asking our participants "what assets do you bring to the classroom or to your role in school as a Muslim American educator?" The participants were palpably relieved by the question, demonstrating they wanted to talk about their experience in the classroom as a whole person, and not just as an instructor of curriculum. The enthusiasm of participants is difficult to capture in text, but over and over again, our research questions would be addressed without prompting, as the participants continued the conversation without the facilitator. They wanted to talk about how they navigated their school communities, how they related to their colleagues, and how they felt an added sense of responsibility to protect students who were marginalized and minoritized. On many occasions, we noted our own struggle as researchers to remain outside of

the conversation when our own identities were so enmeshed in the stories being shared.

As we reviewed the data, we began naming an uneasiness we felt with some of the responses and subsequently some of the questions we had asked. For instance, in one interview, a participant spoke about how she was responsible for organizing the Christmas toy drive at her elementary school. Her demographic survey described her school as a K-5 public institution, where the assumption of secularism is foundational to the system in principle but not necessarily in practice. She chuckled as she narrated how even the people involved in the drive were surprised that an identifiably Muslim woman would organize a Christmas event. She even went on to describe how she adapted parts of the toy drive to be more inclusive, so that students who were Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, could participate and receive a gift.

There is a pause in the transcript after this story, as the implications of this vignette sat with the participants and the facilitators of the focus group. At face value, the story held up as an example of how far this teacher would go to care for her students. However, after revisiting the story, we realized that the space after the story, the pause, was telling. While we had been eager to hear Muslim American teachers' stories, once we began our analysis, we recognized that there was something missing and that the stories our participants shared deserved to be unpacked further. We had to ask ourselves if our questions were in fact prompting participants to report on how they were conforming to the status quo.

We needed to go deeper to make space for reflection (Tanaka et al., 2007). In our collective discussions of the transcripts, we asked each other: Why did the Muslim American teacher organize the Christmas toy drive every year? How did she feel, occupying this position? What impact did that have on the students, the school community, and the teacher? We realized that we all shared the same discomfort and rage pertaining to the participants' implicit assimilative manifestations. Their stories resonated with us more than we may have wanted to admit. We were agitated because the deeper we dug into their narratives, the more we felt that we, as Muslim educators, often needed to offer more, to go beyond our comfort zone to prove ourselves to others, to justify our worthiness, to legitimize our conditioned and superficial belonging. We recalled incidents and instances when we each needed to mute our identities to blend in to the institutional landscape. These intense, and often painful conversations about teachers' experiences in their school settings fueled our anger. We felt a sense of failure and raged at how our well-thought out study had in fact undermined our ethical commitments. We had failed our participants and our communities. These were not findings we wanted to report.

We wanted to disrupt stereotypes and delve deeper into Muslim teachers' narratives, but in the process, we watered down the experiences of our participants and fell back into reifying binaries. Even our initial question, "What assets do you bring to the classroom?" asked participants to assign value to the inclusion of Muslim educators thereby elevating "value-added" paradigms promoted by neoliberal reforms. We were inadvertently feeding into the commodification of one-dimensional identities and promoting a capitalist idea that one's value is based solely on the benefit they provide to society. Although we were clear that we did not want our research to reproduce or perpetuate bias and damage-centered narratives (Tuck, 2009), we still found ourselves operating in service of the oppressive systems.

Through our iterative analyses, we came to recognize the limitations we had imposed on ourselves, and that as McKittrick (2021) plainly states, documenting or describing our pain is in and of itself not liberation. In other words, we had been focusing on convincing others of our experiences of marginalization and how we should be viewed as "assets" in order to be included in the profession. While the focus

should have been on interrogating these views, we were instead catering to the ideologies we wanted to resist. These discourses permeated so much of our contexts, that breaking free from these constructs required us to be critically conscious. Why were we adopting them in the first place? By not interrogating our questions, our focus groups instead became mere stories of Muslims adapting to or justifying their positions within the systems around them. Yet the grander question of what actually positioned Muslims to adapt to these systems was left unasked.

Shifting from Disobedience to Responsibility

As we wrestled with the unease we felt about the superficiality of our findings, we began digging deeper to understand how we got there. During our meetings, our collective shared mainstream news, articles (Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017), videos, and podcasts that illustrated the enactment of Islamophobia (explicitly and/or implicitly) in the U.S. We read texts that centered critical theories and critical participatory methods. We listened to talks and read the texts of radical transformative scholars (hooks, 1994/2015; Kelley, 2002; Love, 2019; Stovall, 2021). We spent hours, in person and virtually, in deep discussions about the incidents of Islamophobia, racism, sexism, anti-Blackness, and classism we were witnessing or of which we were aware. We shared our disbelief, frustration, and outrage about these conditions. We collectively raged at the normalization of anti-Muslim sentiment in the sociopolitical climate of the U.S. We named the ways in which Islamophobia permeated our experiences as educators—whether represented by the part of ourselves we suppressed at school when we were expected to, for instance, decorate our classrooms for Christmas, or teach about Muslim civilizations only in the context of wars. We read and re-read more of our transcripts, discussed analytical memos, and coded our data again to understand our responses to our data. In these discussions, we contended with our colonial wounds (Maldonado-Torres, 2014).

What had gotten in the way of our critical examination of teachers' experiences? What discursive narratives were we centering? We allowed ourselves to voice the doubts, the uneasiness we felt with creating a conversation that served to feed the asset-based narratives. We had created artificial boundaries around our lived realities and had failed to recognize our embodied knowledge for fear that drawing on our experiences would be deemed anecdotal in the context of research. While we did not encounter the messiness documented by other research collectives—difficulties establishing trust between members, identifying shared goals, and dividing labor—we wrestled with the question of the legitimacy of our research given that we operated in western research paradigms. By ascribing to research norms that did not align with our values, we were deepening the colonial wound instead of dreaming.

We found we had not prioritized asking our participants what motivated their behaviors because we had not asked ourselves that same question. We sought to bridge a divide between Muslim and American, but for whom? We revisited questions of who gets to decide what knowledge is and is not acceptable, and the impact of the way we collect and use knowledge while conducting our research. Most notably, we wrestled with defining for whom we were doing this research. What exactly were we trying to disrupt and to what were we contributing? How far were we willing to push ourselves, our participants, and the research direction to reveal the real nuances of the stories we shared during our group and those of our participants? We needed to give ourselves permission to disrupt epistemological notions that surrounded research in academia.

In shifting our research from a small-scale study to a national one, we needed to be committed to examining and excavating our own intersectional experiences in the contexts

of hierarchical systems of oppression and power. The constructs of "strengths" and "challenges" were not getting at the root of the structural inequities or the positioning and framing of Muslims in society. However painful and difficult it was to admit, many of the narratives shared by our participants were in fact strikingly similar to our own, no matter how much we tried to sideline this awareness or remove ourselves from the stories. As we discussed and sometimes argued, we went to theories that helped us frame the kind of epistemological disruption that we were undergoing as a group and as individuals. We centered what we cared about, what we wanted to know, what we wanted to upend, to disrupt, to destabilize. We attempted to untangle the threads of Orientalist, anti-Black, anti-immigrant, and classist ideas that had woven themselves within us, our language, and even our questions.

As we began rupturing our epistemological contract with dominant research guidelines, parameters, and terminology, we came to terms with the urgency of a new self and the communal research dispositions needed to activate our disobedience. We collectively understood the importance of ridding and cleansing ourselves of our loyalties to oppressive systems, and thereby centering our mental well-being. We allowed ourselves to be angry, to embrace the emotions and try to learn from them rather than suppress them. By embracing the wisdom of our positionality, we accepted the anger as necessary mental "cleansing"[3] for epistemological clarity.

Our rage against the injustices experienced by Muslim Americans was complex, boundless, and unassimilable into the flattened depictions perpetuated in the media (Alsultany, 2012). We engaged our rage, and our ability to hold space for each individual's journey with rage (community rage) allowed us to see each other. We strategized our responses ranging from articulating our rage in our work to repressing it from "the academic gatekeepers who assure us that our rage has no place" (hooks, 1994, p. 17). We used critical scholarly texts for sensemaking—to interrogate and to construct our own theories.

One particular quote from Eve Tuck resonated deeply. "[E]ven when communities are broken and conquered, they are so much more than that—so much more that this incomplete story is an act of aggression." (Tuck, 2009, p. 416) We did not want to center our communities' trauma, which in turn highlighted the damage-centered framework built in the empty spaces in the transcripts. To truly value our communities, we needed to acknowledge their stories in their entirety—what makes them who they are, the pain, the heartbreaks, the dreams, and the joy. There was more to these Muslim American teachers running Christmas toy drives, but to attain that complexity from our participants, we would have to do something different.

Our monthly meetings became a space for negotiation, resistance, and reimagining. We engaged in a "re-vision." We asked ourselves: Who are we as a collective? What is our research committed to? What responsibility does our collective have in upholding complex stories about Muslim American teachers? How can critical participatory action research allow us to upend who holds knowledge? We refined our research questions and unearthed ideas and desires about what we imagined schooling and teaching as a profession could be. We made our

[3] The idea of "cleansing" is metaphorically analogous to the Islamic religious term "Wudhu", which itself is an act of purifying the body and mind prior to practicing prayers. The goal of Wudhu is to prepare the Muslim practitioner for the task of engaging in a symbolic responsive dialogue with the self and the creator through which full attention is paid to the moments of prayers while blocking away any other thoughts that might unnecessarily occupy the mind and thus disturb the silent dialogical contemplations of submission, higher truth, acceptance, healing, firm belief, and hope for change. Similarly, our epistemological cleansing is in itself an attempt to decouple our stories from neoliberal representations and to render their power over us as useless.

commitments explicit by grounding our work in the desire-based framework described by Eve Tuck (2009), in the healing rage of bell hooks (1995), and leaned into Mignolo's (2009) epistemic disobedience. By engaging Tuck's (2009) desire-based framework, we centered desire and emotions. Within settler colonial structures, Tuck emphasizes that colonial contexts are not solely an economic or political movement, but rather intertwined with human emotional investment beyond material gain. The framework highlights that the desire of settlers help sustain colonial structures that call for land theft, cultural erasure, and displacement of the indigenous peoples. bell hooks' (1995) concept of healing rage acknowledges the deep emotional nature of decolonization and the clarity and power inherent in reclaiming one's agency. While Mignolo's (2009) challenge to make space outside of the limitations of western academic expectations supported our disobedient exploration. As we operated in the margins, we found ourselves unlearning, disobeying, refusing, and cleansing.

The process of learning and unlearning together is a vulnerable experience that requires trust and investment. We gave each other permission to make mistakes, to uncensor ourselves, to expose the gaps in our knowledge, and to speak truthfully about our biases. We shared meals, celebrated holidays, and mourned losses. We intentionally created a space to wholly belong without having to assimilate or accept the "conditional belonging" offered to us by white supremacy. We embraced our rage at the systems designed to silence, no longer assuaging the western fear of Muslim violence, and developed the communal agitation we needed to grow.

We wanted our work to do more than free us, but to also contribute to the collective liberation of marginalized people. We welcomed the differing views within our collective because we thrive in debates that transform into new ideas. Sometimes we could compromise on the next step, so we honored and lifted up each individual journey in the collective and pushed forward.

Through our border thinking and working in liminal spaces, our collective disposition helped us grow our critical stance and intentional disruption of the positivist norm. As participants in the western academy, we recognize that research is positioned as the most legitimate way of knowing, mirroring a "colonizing formation" (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Tuck and Yang (2014) reposition social science research as settler colonial social science research to show that this form of knowledge possesses limitations that we can expand on, rather than viewing it as the universal knowledge that is then threatened by epistemological refusal.

Our collective draws from beyond the parameters set by settler colonial social science research to better understand our participants' experience as well as our own. We decided to name our epistemic position as disobedient in response to the ways in which the knowledge and experience of Muslim Americans has been historically positioned with subjugated knowledges that are marginalized and excluded because they are stripped of social currency (Medina, 2011). To honor our communities, we needed epistemological responsibility to cradle the ways of knowing that are rooted in our lived experiences.

Through our journey as a collective, our collective praxis grew from our responsibility to each other. Our critical PAR framework grounded us as a collective. We acknowledged the liminal spaces in which we sometimes operated—spaces of power where we could enact our agency. Together, we held space for our anger and frustration. By naming our realities and engaging one another vulnerably, we felt a sense of healing, and through the rage, we grew. Most importantly, we continue to learn and unlearn with one another. As educators, we are seeped in hegemonic institutional structures that operate within colonial logics and maintain white supremacy.

Whether we like it or not, we are undoubtedly influenced by those ideas, and ridding ourselves of our epistemic yokes is an ongoing task.

Conclusion: Radical Dreaming, Hope and Healing

Through our disruptive and agitative questioning of the systems of oppression, and through a shared commitment to expose those systems, we developed our collective praxis. What began in 2018 as an opportunity to break fast during Ramadan and think together about research, transformed us. Working through the challenges we faced as a research collective helped us emerge with greater clarity about the purpose of our research—as public pedagogy and as a space for collective healing and cultivating hope. Our theory of collective praxis is participatory and challenges western epistemic traditions, while acknowledging the affective domains of research. While the process of developing a collective praxis rooted in epistemic responsibility is not the same for everyone, we posit that the facets that define our process are crucial for growth. Without ethical commitments, intentional epistemic disobedience, and epistemic responsibility grounded in our communal commitments, we cannot create truly transformative collective spaces that allow for growth, healing, and radical dreaming.

We are committed to understand the experiences of marginalized groups such as Muslim American educators and to make their voices heard, to understand what drives them to be educators and what drives them to stay in the profession. We are committed to amplifying the authentic aspirations and hopes from participants and surrounding communities. We aim to provide participants with the space to shed any colonial and assimilative layers accumulated over time. We recognize that sharing our experiences of marginalization is not liberation; and yet, stories of Muslim teachers are invisible in the current landscape, and thus sharing these stories of pain and joy are the seeds of resistance. To be clear, we are not providing justification for identity politics and why schools should hire Muslim teachers. We are simply telling the stories of Muslim educators as they see it.

Through our participatory process we explored our shared questions, and unpacked what we were learning from others and about ourselves. Recognizing the superficiality of our research questions that reified the good/bad Muslim binary, we challenged ourselves to hone our critical stance and to draw on those perspectives. We named our visceral reactions to our findings, drawing on critical texts that helped us name damage centered narratives (Tuck, 2009). We had to wrestle with value-laden terms like "assets" and give ourselves permission to throw out concepts that fueled the assimilationist narrative. We had to challenge our own essentializing ideas, and admit that identifying as "Muslim" did not mean we would automatically recognize others' experiences. We held ourselves back in an effort to eliminate any possible "biases," when in fact research is subjective and the positionality of the researcher informs how the research is conducted, and how the findings are interpreted. While we did not expect that our research would lead us through this process that was at times uncertain, our work is proof that decolonization is an ongoing process of criticality and conscientization (Darder, 2019; Freire, 1973 cited in Billies, 2010).

Engaging in epistemic disobedience by rejecting narratives that center and uphold Eurocentric individuals and institutions as unbiased and transparent sources of knowledge (Dominguez, 2020; Mignolo, 2009), we are developing a process of unlearning, healing, and liberation that can be carried on beyond any institutional structures. Our hope is that in sharing our process of collective sensemaking and by creating spaces with our research for our participants to do the same, that others also practice epistemic disobedience in their everyday lives. The lines of our journeys weave together to create a rich tapestry of who we are,

where we come from, and what we stand for—stories of perseverance, triumph, and humanity that are worth cherishing and sharing. Our value comes from within. It is bolstered by intergenerational wisdom and legacies born of struggle, resistance, enslavement, and migration. We dream of groups of teachers that come together and create communal spaces where they can question and create knowledge, heal, dream, and liberate themselves from the narratives placed upon them as they work towards collective liberation for themselves, their students, and their communities (Kelley, 2002).

There is always an unsettling sense of not being included in educational and academic spaces, and through our research we are able to identify that our discomfort in various spaces is because we are not given the space to truly be ourselves and to be part of the conversations that informs the field of education at large and teacher education specifically. Engaging in a collective research process allowed us to channel our unease into actions, which was our first step of healing. Acceptance of our own collective narratives was the first step to recovery. By being upfront about the obstacles we face and the joys we celebrate, we have been able to begin the healing process from our experiences. And through that process, we have generated tremendous hope and optimism. It is through this dialogical healing process we gave permission to ourselves to heal, hope and engage in a radical dreaming.

Collectively, we dream of schools as spaces of love. We dream of creating fluidity in schools where students and teachers can be their whole selves. We dream of a widespread curricula that truly sees all students with their nuances, histories, their desires, and imagined futures. We dream of a world and an education system in which everyone stands against exploitation.

We dream of a world in which power and wealth are distributed and where resources and opportunities are not hoarded but instead shared. We dream of education systems with no police and punishments, where there is constant healing and a focus on humanity. We dream of schools that nurture a truly critical and liberated mind in every student and teacher alike. We dream of schools as spaces of curiosity, exploration, and criticality, where all groups of people are learned about even if those groups do not work or attend those schools.

Our epistemic evolution has required that we disobey the dominant paradigms of research. By reclaiming our story, we have created space for hope and healing, thus allowing ourselves the freedom to dream radical dreams. Our hope is that our work informs other collectives to utilize, improve, and expand these methods in order to reach their goals of liberation. We acknowledge that the work towards liberation is a continuous effort that requires solidarity of all marginalized peoples. We hope this invitation of communal agitation promotes further solidarity in healing, dreaming, and activism across marginalized communities. Revolutionary education necessitates difficult and provocative conversations within ourselves and amongst one another (hooks, 1994). After all, we are not free until we are all free (Kaba, 2021).

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K-20 Anti-Racist Educational Activism in Post-2017 Charlottesville

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In May, July, and August 2017, white supremacist rallies were held in which KKK members and other white supremacists gathered shouting racist and antisemitic slogans, coined the Summer of Hate (Bromwich, 2017; Spencer & Stevens, 2017). At the August 2017 rally, counter-protester Heather Heyer was killed when an automobile drove into a crowd of counter-protesters (Astor et al., 2017). While media attention centered around these events on August 11-12, Charlottesville activists and public historians drew connections to the historical racism and inequities of the area. Since the Summer of Hate, community activists, organizations, and scholars advocated for anti-racist policy changes around issues of systemic inequities, discrimination, and racism in housing, policing, and education. In July 2021, Charlottesville City removed the Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, and Lewis & Clark statutes, an initiative started by Author Bryant that sparked much of the backlash in 2017.

This article focuses on activism after 2017, challenging white supremacy in K-20 educational policy. It is derived from the accounts of community activists, leaders of community organizations, and educational researchers who have engaged in anti-racist and equity policy reforms in two local Charlottesville area public school districts, Charlottesville City Public Schools (CCS) and the surrounding Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS), as well as at the University of Virginia (UVA). CCS and ACPS are two distinct Virginia public preK-12 school divisions serving the Charlottesville metro area. This interpretive qualitative analysis is framed by various pathways to challenge white supremacy in educational institutions (Heidemann, 2022). It draws from various qualitative data sources centered on the authors' and participants' lived experiences and autoethnographic accounts of challenging white supremacy in Charlottesville's public educational institutions. The emphasis here is on community and scholar activism challenging white supremacy in educational institutions.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

In this article we focus on anti-racism (Lund & Carr, 2008), in the context of public education in Charlottesville, Virginia. Anti-racism operates with the assumption that public schooling in the western world was founded in white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and anti-indigeneity and that schooling has interpersonal, systemic, and structural forms (Du Bois, 1968; Heinecke & Beach, in press; Taylor et al., 2009). In this article we employ several tenets of critical race theory (CRT) including the permanence and ordinariness of racism within the United States; a critique of liberal notions of color-evasiveness, neutrality, and meritocracy; exposing and challenging 'master' narratives through counter-narratives of people of color; the challenging of white supremacy; and the commitment to social justice that includes both curriculum and pedagogy within education (McMillan & Aronson, 2020, pp.120-121). We also employ

critical whiteness studies (CWS). According to Matias and Boucher (2023):

> *CRT undergirds CWS in that CWS more closely examines how whiteness operates in ways that deleteriously impact people of Colour and…also dehumanises whites (see Allen 2013)….If CRT can produce vital scholarship that reveals how white supremacy and racism impact our educational system, CWS can reveal how whiteness operates in schools and education. (p. 71)*

We combine CRT with CWS, as modeled by Reyes (2022), because by doing so:

> *We can more precisely attend to the nuances of how, where, when, and towards whom whiteness and racism show up, adapt, and morph. …because of the ways that… whiteness and racism are intimately intertwined within the culture and structure of educational institutions. (p. 781)*

In this paper we aim to employ CWS in order to critically study activity surrounding systems of education in post-2017 Charlottesville that shifted and worked to dismantle whiteness.

These examples of anti-racist activism do not aim to expose racial ignorance but rather to highlight activism which "acknowledges that if racism is a nuanced, complex, and entrenched practice and ideology, then simple remedies are not the answer." (Matias & Boucher, 2023, p. 68). We argue that whiteness manifests in Charlottesville-area public schools in the form of "material, institutional, and societal benefits, often times at the expense of people of Colour" (Lipsitz, 2006). We seek to consider intersections of power and racism in material educational policies and practices as challenged by community and scholar activists.

Additionally, we adopt the mindset furthered by CRT theorists who view education "as one of the principal means by which white supremacy is maintained and presented as normal in society" (Gillborn, 2014, p.26). The violence of White supremacy is not the sole focus in Charlottesville and elsewhere. White supremacy includes all of the institutional systems in place that routinely privilege white people in ways that seem neutral when they remain unexamined (Gillborn, 2009). Therefore, critical anti-racist education policy analysis must directly consider how educational systems are oppressing people of color. The counter-stories shared here allow us to "discover the relationships between nuanced experience, individual responses and macro-policy" (Stovall, 2006, p. 253). This study focused on action-oriented responses challenging white supremacy in educational policy and seeks to uncover places within educational systems where seemingly neutral actions have contributed to white supremacy and how those actions might be challenged and dismantled.

Without direct action, educators often participate in "white educational discourse" (WED), as it is called in CWS, in which they "gloss over issues of race, racism, and white supremacy in ways that reinforce the status quo, even when they have a stated desire to do the opposite" (Haviland, 2008, p. 41).

Conceptual Framework: Anti-racist Social Movements as Education Change Agents

We examine the research question: How do those engaging in activism organize the work of enacting anti-racist strategies to challenge institutionalized racism in educational policy and practice? We employ Heidemann's (2022) "Pathways of Education Reform 'From Below'" as a conceptual framework that theorizes four overlapping pathways in which citizens can enact educational policy change through grassroots practices. The four pathways toward change are infra-institutional, in which actors work within systems; inter-institutional, in which actors from outside the institution work with actors within the system; extra-institutional, in which organizations or coalitions form outside of an institution but make direct action efforts to change it; and para-institutional, in which completely new systems are created as

alternatives to the system. An essential assumption underlying each of these pathways is that systemic anti-racist reform will not happen without grassroots pressure through multiple pathways.

Using the frameworks of CRT, CWS, and the Pathways to Reform (Heidemann, 2022), this study examined how local school systems operate as sites of white supremacy, how action research and community organizing are challenging educational policies rooted in discrimination, and how, in a post-2017 context, these actions impacted change in educational policy.

Design And Methods

The team of authors has been collaborating since 2020, bringing our own racially and generationally diverse perspectives and identities to this work. The findings presented are triangulated from three different types of data: auto-ethnographic narratives, interviews, and print media.

Auto-Ethnographic Narratives

The previously published auto-ethnographic narratives that serve as a data source detailing anti-racist projects arising after the 2017 white supremacist activity in Charlottesville were selected to highlight the ways in which community activists, organizations, and scholar-activists worked to challenge and resist white supremacy and racism in the educational system (see Heinecke et al., in press). They detail the stories of the authors in combatting racial discrimination and white supremacy in local educational institutions.

Interviews

Additionally, we conducted nine interviews: six with scholars and/or activists who shared their counter-narratives and three with institutional actors including a city councilor and two Charlottesville school board members. Initial interview participants were invited due to co-authors' knowledge of their activism or institutional positions in Charlottesville. Snowball sampling was used to expand the sample because of our interest in the interactions between educational activists in Charlottesville.

News Media Review

To establish context around the activism examples, we conducted a systematic review of local print news media, including the Daily Progress, C-ville Weekly, Cav Daily, and Charlottesville Tomorrow, as well as the New York Times and Washington Post resulting in a sample of 57 articles published after 2017. Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA; Altheide & Schneider, 2013) was applied because it is "strongly oriented to qualitative data analysis, that involves description, attention to nuances, and openness to emerging insights. ECA entails reflexive observation as one becomes immersed in relevant documents, aiming to identify similarities and differences in how the documents—or parts thereof—reflect other aspects of …the cultural context" (p. 27).

Data Analysis

Using the CRT, CWS, and the pathways framework, we employed interpretive analytic induction (Erickson, 1986). This involved repeatedly reading the data corpus consisting of the narrative accounts, interviews, and media reports in order to generate working assertions, or preliminary meaning-making of the data, within the frame of Heidemann's conceptual framework. These working assertions were developed via critical partner dialogue by two of the authors, which included the sorting of examples into the pathway categories. After the establishment of these themes, the entire data corpus was searched for confirming and disconfirming evidence.

Findings

Below, the findings of this study are presented by assertion including participants' thoughts about The Summer of Hate as a catalyst for

activism, anti-racist actions as organized within the pathways framework, and participant comments about moving forward with activism as a social movement.

The Events of August 11th and 12th, Not Surprising but a Catalyst for Action

Participants cited the events of the Summer of Hate as a spark that either began their advocacy initiative or pivoted their advocacy in some way. For example, one participant shared:

> *For me [the Summer of Hate] felt like a central driver of everything. I remember when I was first coming in [to the area], that would always come up in meetings and conversations, this reference back to the events of August 11th and 12th*…and so a lot of the initiatives I was *brought in to work on, from my understanding, the funding was a reaction to those events. (Scholar-activist, January 11, 2023)*

Author Moxham, a founding member of the Hate Free Schools Coalition, notes that when the events of August 11th and 12th unfolded, she quickly immersed herself in understanding her role in activism work. With three school-aged children, the events of that day were a catalyst to work toward ensuring local children are educated in historical truths, enabled through equitable access to education, and provided with the tools to challenge racism and discrimination on a daily basis. These changes are not just important but critical.

ACPS School Board Member Torres shared how the Summer impacted her role on the School Board, noting that on August 11:

> *I had planned to be on the downtown Mall [a pedestrian street in Charlottesville] as a contact of support, and after we sat in the church that night, I said, I've got to do more than that. We've got to be on the street. I can't just be on the Mall, so [my friend] and I were right there [on August 12]. Pushed down, walked over…that was really a turning point for me, as far as showing up. I just had never really experienced anything like that. But I knew that I had to be part of it.* (School Board member, February 22, 2023)

While this was a new experience for some, other activists were quick to share that while the events were shocking to some, for others, they were already involved in activism against white supremacy:

> *I thought that folks were pretty active [in activism] prior to 2017, and most people were aware. So 2017 may have been a shock for some people, but it wasn't a shock for everyone, right? People in the Black community, for instance, or the more progressive community here in Charlottesville, Black, White, Latino, Asian, what have you. They weren't as surprised…. I've been in many conversations where people said, 'oh, yeah, we knew this could happen, and it could happen anywhere, but it certainly could happen in Charlottesville.'* (Scholar, January 12, 2023).

An interviewee in a news article similarly asserted:

> *The white supremacist violence of August 11 and 12 was a catalyst… but these massive curriculum overhauls were years in the making. Grassroots organizers and activists, along with individual educators, have been advocating for and implementing anti-racist curriculums across Virginia for some tim*e (quoted in Entzminger, 2020).

The results from the anti-racist activism challenging white supremacy in educational policy and practice sparked and supported post-2017 are presented below, framed within possible pathways for applied, action-oriented, anti-racist activity.

Infra- and Inter-Institutional Pathways: Working Within Existing Systems

One method of promoting anti-racist change is working within existing systems to promote grassroots change. As Heidemann

acknowledged, there is often overlap between pathways. Because of the overlap between the infra-institutional pathway and the inter-institutional pathway in the activism within this range of data, these pathways are presented simultaneously within this section. The Black Student Union (BSU) at Charlottesville High School, the Anti-Racism Policy for ACPS, and the curriculum rewriting initiative described in this study were post-2017, anti-racist initiatives focused within institutions themselves, often with support from external partners.

Black Student Union Forms at Charlottesville High School

The petition to start the BSU began in 2015 before the Summer of Hate. This was an infra-institutional case because students who were inside of the school worked to create change completely within that organization. The lead organizer, author Bryant, was a high schooler at the time and wrote in the petition to form the BSU that it was intended to "empower the Black student body and to educate the student population in Charlottesville on issues dealing with social injustices and racial inequity" (Bryant, 2015). The petition was met with administrative pushback, but the BSU was allowed to form and met for a year followed by a hiatus. While they were involved in anti-racist activism prior to the Summer of 2017, they continued organizing after the white supremacist events.

In October 2018, the New York Times/Pro-Publica authored an article highlighting both historical and current institutionalized racism in CCS (Green & Waldman, 2018). This article, which included interviews with BSU members, and the activism that followed resulted in a power struggle with the school administration in which student activists were blocked from leadership opportunities and experienced negative confrontation with several teachers. In 2019, the BSU organized a protest and presented a list of demands to the school board in response to a racist threat, which included having school law enforcement officers participate in culturally relevant training and allowing for greater access to advanced courses for racially marginalized students. As the BSU participated in activism around issues of race, staff became more aware and more likely to be willing to engage in conversations regarding these issues.

This example shows how powerful students can be as change agents within the system. By engaging in activism and working with those who they interact with regularly in their roles as students, they can help make changes to policy and practice.

Anti-Racism Policy for ACPS

In 2018, pressed from the events of 2017, neighboring ACPS created space for several students within the division to help create an anti-racism policy. This policy was developed through Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) with scholar-activists from the University of Virginia. YPAR positions youth as experts in their own experiences who conduct research and create change, especially around social justice (Cammarota & Fine, 2010; Ozer, 2016). Since this YPAR project partnered with the school district, it had an exceptionally clear path toward policy change. Following the Summer of Hate, the district became more aware of issues that students had faced for many years, including disparate opportunities, educational outcomes, and school climate (ACPS, 2022).

The School Board directed the staff to develop an anti-racism policy in the summer of 2018. The division staff in turn hired author Dickerson as a consultant to facilitate the YPAR process. Accordingly, she was working in both an infra-institutional and inter-institutional capacity as she was hired by the school division but working along with edges as an external consultant.

Seven students (three Black/biracial Black, two Asian, two white) from three of the four county high schools were active collaborators

throughout the whole process. The students and adult leaders worked together in a week-long training to prepare for the policy-writing process. At these meetings, students determined that the policy should include tactics for addressing individual and institutional racism. At the end of the week, students had created an initial draft of the policy, presented to division staff and community members for feedback.

Over the span of the year, the students developed five iterative drafts informed by surveys and interview data from over 120 students and families, teachers, division administrators/staff, and community members. The final policy was presented to the school board, and school division staff incorporated the school board's feedback. A follow-up meeting was held with the students to ensure that the changes did not impact their intended policy goals. In February 2019, the School Board adopted the policy.

The anti-racism policy acknowledges that "personal and institutional racism have historically existed and continues to exist in the Division" and includes regulations "designed to dismantle the individual, institutional, and structural racism" (ACPS, 2019). The regulations direct a series of actions about how the policy is to be communicated and implemented in the areas of administration, curriculum, professional development, and policy enforcement. For example, the regulations direct the division to conduct a systemic equity needs assessment, implement alternative discipline processes, utilize curriculum and instructional materials that reflect cultural and racial diversity and include perspectives of historically underrepresented groups, and train all school board and division staff on the anti-racism policy and cultural awareness. ACPS continues to implement the directives in the anti-racism policy regulations, and the policy has been unsuccessfully challenged in court. Additionally, after developing the anti-racism policy, students sought additional opportunities for student voices to be included in policy decisions, and the student equity advisory team (SEAT) was created.

This example illustrates how students can be powerful change agents and provides an example of how advocacy actors and scholar-activists working both within and outside of the school system can partner with students to help promote anti-racist change. After ACPS adopted its anti-racism policy, the CCS School Board also adopted an anti-racism policy.

Local Teachers Engage in Anti-Racist Curricular Reform

Initiatives centered on anti-racist curricular reform were examples of the inter-institutional pathway to reform (Heidemann, 2022). While similarly named, Changing the Narrative, Reframing the Narrative, and Embracing Our Narrative, each had slightly different funding and aims, as detailed below.

Changing the Narrative. In 2017, the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities at UVA received a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for their projects about racial healing and transformation in order to focus on a curriculum rewrite for Virginia schools (Virginia Humanities, 2017). This external organization worked to make changes within the educational system by focusing on social studies content under the project name Changing the Narrative.
Teachers noted even before starting to work on Changing the Narrative, their positioning within the system allowed for an intra-institutional pathway for change, saying: "Teachers are in a position to push back…and encourage children to ask questions about history and be prepared to advocate for new policy" (Teacher, as cited in Smith, 2018). A series of anti-racist workshops helped set the stage for the rewrite. One interview participant had previously served as a teacher in CCS and discussed these anti-racist trainings calling them "such good classes" (Scholar, February 7, 2023). She said she found a lot of benefit from networking and the

information shared in the trainings. She noted, however, that because the initiatives were voluntary, a lot of teachers who could have benefited from the workshops did not attend.

Reframing the Narrative. During this same timeframe, ACPS received a grant to update their social studies curriculum which was entitled Reframing the Narrative (Knott, 2019). This project partnered with Montpellier, the historical home of James Madison, who enslaved people on this property. Division staff within ACPS noted their hope that "this new curriculum will make a long-term and systemic difference in the schools and community as its goal will be to improve the teaching and learning of untold history" (ACPS Administrator, cited in Knott, 2019). Like many efforts during this time, progress slowed on the curriculum rewrite as schools experienced the pandemic; however, teachers continued to meet virtually.

Embracing Our Narrative. Additionally, in the fall of 2019, CCS forged a partnership with the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center, a nonprofit in Charlottesville whose mission centers around local African American history and cultural advancement. This initiative, called Embracing Our Narrative, included a week-long training for local educators that was first held in June 2020 and has been held every summer since. Embracing Our Narrative was created because local public historians realized that while teachers had some anti-racist resources, they did not have many local resources and also needed support to learn how to use them. The idea behind Embracing Our Narrative was that African-American history should not only focus on enslavement, but should also include narratives about how the Black community resisted, empowered themselves, and thrived in spite of historic and contemporary racism.

Embracing Our Narrative includes sessions with University faculty and community educators, including elders who personally experienced historical racism and their descendants. The presenters discussed local history across various time periods and topics including free Black people, enslavement, reconstruction, the development of a Black middle class in Charlottesville, and the long civil rights era including local school integration. Additionally, the program continues to emphasize place-based learning at local areas such as the Ivy Creek Natural Area, which was formerly a Black-owned farming community called River View Farm, and Vinegar Hill, a once thriving Black community that was destroyed during urban renewal in the 1960s. The landscape of Charlottesville is used in the curriculum to discuss property ownership, Black wealth, and local Black accomplishments. Close to 100 local educators have participated in Embracing Our Narrative over the last four years and have been able to develop a deeper understanding that allows them to better incorporate local history, and specifically African-American history, into their social studies curricula.

Extra-Institutional Pathways: Activism Working Outside of Institutional Systems

As exemplified below, there are times when collaborators who are outside of the system are best-suited to meet the needs of marginalized students as was true when a group of activists organized and formed a coalition to apply pressure and advocate for change with the ACPS School Board and when historical research of a scholar activist was presented to start-kick direct change to CCS's gifted program, which was rooted in white supremacy.

The Hate-Free Schools Coalition of Albemarle County: Changing a Racist Dress Code Policy

One example of the extra-institutional pathway to change is the Hate-Free Schools Coalition of Albemarle County (HFSC-AC). HFSC-AC was inspired by a Black-led activist organization called Hate-Free Schools of Orange County in

North Carolina. This group of organizers had been working to create a ban on confederate imagery within the dress code of their school system since early 2017. As a result of community activism, the Orange County school board approved the ban on confederate imagery on August 13, 2017, one day after the tragedy in Charlottesville.

Author Moxham was a founding member of HFSC-AC in January 2018. The organization met bi-weekly and used tactics such as public comment at school board meetings and an email campaign to get fellow activists involved. Their first win occurred in February 2018 when the school division removed mention of the Lee-Jackson holiday from all calendars (Hays, 2018). Encouraged by this success, HFSC-AC activists met with school staff to educate school employees about the importance of additional policy shifts. Over the summer, school staff informed HFSC-AC that a dress code ban on racist imagery would be addressed through the YPAR equity policy detailed above; however, while the policy addressed many of the same concepts that HFSC-AC organized around, there was no mention of the dress code.

In response, at a school board meeting in August 2018, over 60 students, parents, and community members attended to support a policy amending the dress code. During the first public comment, an HFSC-AC organizer and parent requested a vote on the banning of confederate and white nationalist imagery in the dress code, which was met with resistance as the School Board Chair abruptly ended the meeting. One week later, a special meeting was called with no public comment. HFSC-AC organized a silent protest inside this meeting while simultaneously over 50 students, parents, and community organizers gathered in the lobby outside to peacefully sing and chant in protest. Within 15 minutes, dozens of police officers were called to the meeting, violently assaulting and arresting six activists and sending one to the hospital (Baars, 2018). While success was being stymied within the ACPS system, days after the arrests the neighboring CCS Board drafted their own version of a dress code policy that banned racist imagery with support of HFSC-AC members. The new CCS policy was passed in November 2018.

By the end of February 2019, the Albemarle School Board still had not made any progress on a dress code policy, but under continued activist pressure, the superintendent, without board approval, sent out a communication system-wide declaring a ban on racist and confederate-related imagery within the dress code. The school board refused to take a vote on this policy, despite continued activism and protests by HFSC-AC and others, until August 2020.

Other anti-racist changes in policy in ACPS were directly related to the activism efforts of HFSC-AC, including the removal of Lee-Jackson Day from all school calendars, the creation of the anti-racism policy that centered student voice detailed above, implementing policies and procedures for renaming schools with racist namesakes, advocating for and getting two anti-racist candidates on the school board, and collaborating with other anti-racist organizations in the area.

The ramifications of this work are still influencing the greater Charlottesville/ Albemarle community. Though HFSC-AC has not led a direct action since 2021, their work sparked movement which led to larger change. For example, ACPS expanded their culturally responsive teaching requirement for all teachers, and ACPS, CCS, and UVA renamed buildings that had originally memorialized racist namesakes. While ACPS still has much progress to make to address issues of systemic racism, the pressure and activism brought by HFSC-AC has succeeded in challenging white supremacy and making for a more equitable school system.

Scholar-Activism: Reframing "Gifted" Education in Charlottesville City Schools

In another example of an extra-institutional pathway to anti-racist change, a scholar-activist,

author Thornton, then a graduate student at the UVA School of Education and Human Development, initiated her own independent research into the racist foundations of the gifted and talented program. Learning about how re-segregating schools happened in many contexts through the implementation of gifted programs in the 1970s, she examined and uncovered the specifics of this process within CCS. Immediately after the Brown v. Board of Education decision, Charlottesville school personnel engaged in Massive Resistance to integration efforts, and while schools were eventually integrated, district leadership received many suggestions about how to circumvent these new demands. One of these suggestions by a community member included introducing a gifted program that would keep students separated by race. The community member cited IQ testing as a means of identifying gifted students, acknowledging that "some of these gifted and above average children will be negroes" (Charlottesville, 1958). The gifted program would serve these students separately, not allowing for social interaction between students of different races. In this letter, the community member explicitly noted this plan would allow the state and federal requirements of segregation to be met. Nine years after this letter, Charlottesville's gifted program, entitled Quest, was born.

After connecting with interviewed School Board Member Torres, scholar-activist and author Thornton presented the results of her research to the Charlottesville School Board citing the racist origin of the city's gifted program in the spring of 2019. This prompted the school board to change their gifted policy to an enrichment-for-all model in which all students receive enrichment activities rather than only those selected into a program based on separation and privilege.

Para-Institutional Pathway: Building Alternatives and The Charlottesville Freedom School

In summer 2020, a para-institutional anti-racist pathway focused on informal education outside the school systems, Charlottesville Freedom School (CFS), was created in order to challenge white supremacy in the community and give students a space to receive an anti-racist education. This summer program is modeled after the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer Project and is part of a network of Freedom Schools under the Children's Defense Fund (CDF).

Scholar-activists at the University associated with the Freedom School give Valerie Bass-Adams credit with pushing for the idea of a Freedom School in Charlottesville. At the time she was a professor at UVA's School of Education and Human Development (EHD), who advocated for the CFS after experiencing a racist incident toward her child at the local public library (Bass-Adams & Coleman-King, 2021).

The Freedom School is an initiative of the Center for Race and Public Education in the South (CRPES) at EHD. The Center itself is another example of an infra-institutional pathway, as it is a space created within EHD working toward anti-racist education practices. While CRPES had been proposed prior to the Summer of Hate, it was not until after August 2017 that Professor Derrick Alridge, director of the Center, was able to convince the EHD leadership that CRPES should exist.

While there had been advocacy for the Freedom School as soon as the Center formed, it took a few years of advocacy from Professor Bass-Adams before the Freedom School was established. The community supported the need for this type of alternative anti-racist educational space. As one public historian shared:

> *...freedom schools exist because we knew that Black children could not be taught in white schools and in white spaces adequately.... I don't necessarily need to work to alter spaces that*

were never meant to be altered to begin with. There's nothing wrong with those spaces. They're doing exactly what they're supposed to do. The question is do you have enough guts to create something that works better for you? (Public historian, February 8, 2023)

The first CFS planned to serve CCS and ACPS students in summer 2020 for six weeks in person. Due to the pandemic, CFS was held online in the summers of 2020 and 2021 and was in person at UVA in 2022. A CFS leader explained that while the morning followed the scripted literacy program provided by CDF as required by all Freedom Schools, the afternoon allowed for the scholars involved in the program to draw on their own expertise as well as the needs of the community. For instance, a staff member shared, "That first year, we [knew] that the pandemic disrupted relationships, so we made sure to have one-on-one mentoring sessions between the SLIs [Servant Leader Interns, i.e., instructors] and the students where they could talk and connect" (Scholar-activist, January 11, 2023).

Each of the subsequent years of CFS have focused on a particular theme dictated by CDF. However, due to staff members' expertise around oral histories, those were incorporated into the Charlottesville model. Accompanying student learning, CFS offered parent workshops to help address topics that parents were interested in learning more about, including learning during COVID, racial socialization, youth development, youth movements, and activism.

Additional educational spaces external to the public school system exist in Charlottesville, such as the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center. These are necessary, not to completely replace the current systems of education, but to serve as alternatives outside of those systems. As a public historian shared in response to recent book bans:

It is not really the crisis that you can't read Maya Angelou in your classroom. The crisis is if nobody ever gave you Maya Angelou to read. Period. Right? And that's why…alternative spaces of learning become so important, and they've always become important especially when you're thinking about an activist space. (Public historian, February 8, 2023)

Discussion

Implications of this analysis of activist activity challenging white supremacist roots of education in Charlottesville Virginia after the events of the 2017 Summer of Hate include the realization that actions from within and outside of organizations are both needed in order to challenge white supremacy. From a CWS perspective, the actions taken by these actors were conducted from the understanding of the harm caused to people of color from white supremacist ideology as translated into, and reflective of, the institutional racism embedded in the educational organizations. According to Reyes (2022),

As a social construction that "embraces white culture, ideology, racialization, expressions, and experiences, epistemologies, emotions, and behaviors" (Matias et al., 2014, p. 290), whiteness is designed into our institutions, normalized in our cultural practices and interactions, and pervades our intimate thoughts and worldview. It is like the foundation of the building upon which we live and work.…White supremacy is the condition that results and is reproduced when whiteness is normalized, naturalized, rationalized, and invisibilized. (p. 782-83)

Therefore "disrupting, dismantling, and eradicating" white supremacy must be constant (Reyes, 2022, p.783). In many discussions of educational reform, white educational discourse (WED) reinforces the system as-is even when there are progressive intentions, and the Charlottesville context is no exception. This WED was challenged by anti-racist activism. Activism challenged and changed the harm caused by: a) school district dress codes allowing

confederate and Nazi imagery, b) white supremacist and segregationist gifted and talented policies, and c) anti-Black policies. Anti-racist policies, teacher trainings, and a Freedom School were implemented, spurred by actions enacted by grassroots movements and scholar-activists employing a variety of institutional pathways and strategies as outlined by Heidemann (2022).

It is doubtful that the policy changes would have been accomplished without the energy released and channeled through community activism in the post-2017 climate. The embeddedness of white supremacy in social institutions such as education is formidable and seemingly intransigent. We acknowledge that anti-racist activism had been pursued prior to 2017, mostly by African-American community leaders and activists and that this article does not address all anti-racist educational initiatives that have arisen in Charlottesville since 2017. Nevertheless, we affirm the anti-racist energy of 2017 amplified the pressure to address racism and white supremacy in institutions beyond the structures of WED.

Challenging white supremacy in K-12 schools and implementing anti-racist policies will never be accomplished with one single tactic or initiative. While not organized as a unified grassroots coalition movement, we assert that each of the efforts detailed here, motivated by activists and scholar-activists to combat white supremacy in educational practices and policies, are foundational for the potential development of a more unified social movement aimed at challenging white supremacy in the local educational system.

Ideas from CRT, CWS, and Pathways Theory (Heidemann, 2022) highlight community-based and scholar activism in order to expand theories of change related to challenging and dismantling white supremacy in educational organizations. Scholar-activism and community activism are highly relevant and should be addressed in theories of change related to institutional racism. The various initiatives chronicled here were operating concurrently, and thus were reinforcing each other often influencing change across organizational boundaries. Importantly, activists and scholars from elementary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions as well as community advocates and students were actively involved in pushing for change across the various institutional pathways increasing the possibility of anti-racist reforms.

Barriers to Social Movement Change

In line with our critical framing, we want to clearly acknowledge that many of these steps forward have been a result of interest convergence (Bell, 1980) as a result of the public pressure associated with media coverage about the Summer of Hate. Heidemann (2022) also warns about stalling and cooptation as possible barriers to change, regardless of the institutional pathway utilized. Participants raised this as an issue. One scholar-activist shared, "This is the service that black faculty give and do. Their ideas are often co-opted with no credit, financially or otherwise" (Scholar-activist, February 1, 2023).

Many of the changes chronicled here are first steps. It is clear that real systemic change will take years of sustained advocacy if substantive, transformational anti-racist change in the institutions of public education is to be furthered. However, the efforts of these activists illustrate that challenges to white supremacy in educational policy are possible. Multiple pathways to substantive change– para-institutional, inter-institutional, infra-institutional, or extra-institutional– should be employed in a manner that will both affirm historically marginalized individuals and push for systemic change. The work of this research has been to "point to spaces where transformations can and must go on and… act as a 'critical secretary' who documents those actually existing programs that interrupt dominant ideologies and practices and embody significant gains" (Apple, 2022, p. 749).

Conclusions

We conclude by asserting that challenging white supremacy and racism in our educational systems requires pressure from the outside, the inside, and across institutions. Our school systems need activists and advocacy organizations to challenge the status quo of what appears to be invisible instantiations of white supremacy. This research supports that actors in educational systems looking to produce more than symbolic change that actually benefit those who have been, and continue to be, harmed by the education system, must be committed to enacting anti-racism reform alongside activists and community members. The conflict and tension between activists and institutional administrators can be, and should be, seen as a source of constructive and positive change. The analysis presented here reinforces the idea that institutions rooted in white supremacy cannot do this work alone without pressure from social movements and the community. Activism in various forms can help expose those white supremacist fissures and lead to needed change in an ongoing struggle for social justice in education.

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