

Black Women's Stories of Everyday Racism

Narrative Analysis for Social Change

Simone Drake, James Phelan, Robyn Warhol,
and Lisa Zunshine



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Black Women's Stories of Everyday Racism puts literary narrative theory to work on an urgent real-world problem. The book calls attention to African American women's everyday experiences with systemic racism and demonstrates how four types of narrative theory can help generate strategies to explain and dismantle that racism. This volume presents fifteen stories told by eight midwestern African American women about their own experiences with casual and structural racism, followed by four detailed narratological analyses of the stories, each representing a different approach to narrative interpretation. The book makes a case for the need to hear the personal stories of these women and others like them as part of a larger effort to counter the systemic racism that prevails in the United States today.

Readers will find that the women's stories offer powerful evidence that African Americans experience racism as an inescapable part of their day-to-day lives—and sometimes as a force that radically changes their lives. The stories provide experience-based demonstrations of how pervasive systemic racism is and how it perpetuates power differentials that are baked into institutions such as schools, law enforcement, the health care system, and business. Containing countless signs of the stress and trauma that accompany and follow from experiences of racism, the stories reveal evidence of the women's resilience as well as their unending need for it, as they continue to feel the negative effects of experiences that occurred many years ago. The four interpretive chapters note the complex skill involved in the women's storytelling. The analyses also point to the overall value of telling these stories: how they are sometimes cathartic for the tellers; how they highlight the importance of listening—and the likelihood of misunderstanding—and how, if they and other stories like them were heard more often, they would be a force to counteract the structural racism they so graphically expose.

Simone Drake, Hazel C. Youngberg Trustee Distinguished Professor of English at Ohio State University, is executive producer of *Shutdown* (2023) and author or editor of the following books: *Critical Appropriation: African American Woman and the Construction of Transnational Identity* (2014), *When We Imagine Grace: Black Men and Subject Making* (2016), *Are You*

Entertained?: Black Popular Culture in the 21st Century (2020), and *The Oxford Handbook of African American Women's Writing* (2024).

James Phelan, Distinguished University Professor of English at Ohio State University, is the author, co-author, editor, or co-editor of over 20 books, including *Somebody Telling Somebody Else* (2017), *Debating Rhetorical Narratology* (with Matthew Clark, 2020), and *Narrative Medicine: A Rhetorical Rx* (2023). He has been editor of *Narrative* since its inception in 1993.

Robyn Warhol, College of Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor of English at Ohio State University, has recently published *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Narrative Theories* (co-edited with Zara Dinnen, 2018), *Narrative Theory Unbound* (co-edited with Susan S. Lanser, 2015), and *Love Among the Archives* (co-authored with Helena Michie, 2015).

Lisa Zunshine, Professor of English at the University of Kentucky, is a former Guggenheim fellow and the author or editor of 12 books, including *Getting Inside Your Head* (2012), *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies* (2015), and *The Secret Life of Literature* (2022).

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With

Ronda C. Henry Anthony, Scotia Brown,
Mary Bullock, Stephanie Caraway,
Destiny Faceson, Felicia Hanney,
Lucrezia Hatfield, LaToya Hale-Tahirou,
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This book is dedicated to all the African American women whose lives have been shaped by everyday racism, especially Ronda C. Anthony Henry, Scotia Brown, Mary Bullock, Stephanie Caraway, Destiny Faceson, Felicia Hanney, Lucrezia Hatfield, LaToya Hale-Tahirou



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Preface

Backstory

Black families in America have disproportionately suffered poor birth outcomes (e.g., infant mortality, preterm birth, low birth weight, maternal mortality) for as long as race-based statistics have been collected (Clinton, 2004). Across America in the 2020s, Black families are anywhere from 1.5–4 times more likely to suffer these tragedies than white families and other ethnic groups (Hill, Artiga, & Ranji, 2022). While the annual absolute numbers of Black and white infant deaths have decreased, the disparity in these numbers between Black and white families has changed very little in the past 100 years (Singh & Yu, 2019).

In medicine and public health, we recognize there are direct medical causes for these outcomes (that is, things that go wrong with individual bodies), as well as “upstream” inequitable social, economic, political, and environmental factors that contribute to the direct medical causes (Braveman, Egerter, & Williams, 2011). Our nation continues to prioritize addressing the direct medical causes, as opposed to addressing these social inequities; this focus persists despite the knowledge that the disparity ratio does not shrink with biomedical interventions. While addressing social inequities is a better investment, we must also acknowledge that such investment does not necessarily protect a Black family from these poor outcomes. Black educated families are still two times as likely to suffer infant mortality as white families (Schoendorf, Hogue, Kleinman, & Rowley, 1992), and poor white women have better birth outcomes than affluent Black women (Parker, Schoendorf, & Kiely, 1994).

Underlying these inequitable social, economic, political, and environmental systems is a culture of structural, institutional, and interpersonal racism (Bailey et al., 2017). We must take action to undo the racism that lies at the heart of these inequitable systems to sustainably eliminate these racial disparities and their tragic outcomes. Across my career in maternal and child health, I have learned that no one is more qualified to identify the forms of racism and to propose solutions to the problems they cause than the Black women who have experienced these inequities and their outcomes across their

lifespan. As the tagline for my maternal and child health research and action initiative states, “If you want to reduce infant mortality, Ask the Women!”

Fortunately, some scholars, practitioners, and policy makers are beginning to look beyond the biomedical causes of racial disparities in birth outcomes and are studying how a life lived in the context of structural, institutional, and interpersonal racism affects a Black woman’s birth outcomes (Heard-Garris, Cale, Camaj, Hamati, & Dominguez, 2018). We know that living such a life impacts her physiology and psychology, increasing her risk of adverse birth outcomes (Hernandez-Cancio & Gray, Washington, DC). While I am thrilled to see researchers and practitioners and advocates advance these findings, I believe more Black women need to have seats at the tables of decision makers working to address these problems. To this end, I started the Grassroots Maternal and Child Health Leadership Initiative in 2018. This initiative trains and mentors women from traditionally marginalized communities with poor maternal and child health outcomes and poor socioeconomic conditions to work in partnership with researchers, practitioners, and policy makers to address racism and bring about social, economic, political, and/or environmental changes to improve maternal and child health outcomes (Marquam, Irby, Casavan, Swigonski, & Turman, 2020). Key to our initiative is applying a critical narrative intervention for the women as a strategy for social change (Irby, Macey, Levine, Durham, & Turman, 2023). The Grassroots Maternal and Child Health Leaders’ stories move beyond talking about their maternal and child health experiences to calling for actions that can effect social change. Our collective efforts have worked to bring about systemic changes that benefit women from marginalized communities (Irby, Macey, Levine, Durham, & Turman, 2023; Turman & Swigonski, 2021).

The use of individual stories has a long history in medicine and public health. Stories elucidate the impact of diseases, treatments, and social determinants on one’s life, family, community, and well-being. However, medicine and public health scholars and practitioners are not formally trained in how to elicit stories or apply a rigorous analysis to the stories. While there are many qualitative studies in these fields that use thematic or content analysis techniques, they are done without formal training in narrative theory. In 2019, I learned from Kyle Minor, a faculty colleague in the Department of English, that there was a whole field of literary studies dedicated to narrative analysis. While I had done qualitative studies as a maternal and child health researcher, I had never heard about this field of scholarship. I was thrilled to learn more and predicted that something wonderful to help advance social change could emerge from a partnership between Black women and narrative scholars.

This Project: Black Women’s Stories of Everyday Racism

When I first met James Phelan, Director of Project Narrative at Ohio State University, in the summer of 2020, I learned that narrative scholars use different lenses to study a story and that each of these lenses can reveal

something different about a narrative. I believed that applying multiple lenses to the stories of Black women I work with would give their stories the full dignity and honor they deserved. Jim knew many excellent narrative scholars with different types of analytical expertise, and I knew Black women passionate about social change. Jim and I developed a plan for these Black women and four accomplished narrative scholars—Simone Drake, Robyn Warhol, Lisa Zunshine plus Jim—to collaborate on the project that resulted in this book. All of us—the women storytellers (more on them below), the narrative scholars, and I—agreed that the goal of our collaboration would be to help members of minoritized communities, narrative scholars, biomedical/public health researchers or practitioners, and policy makers understand how narratives and narrative analyses can be used to reveal the texture and pervasiveness of everyday racism and to provide the impetus for work designed to combat it.

Here is a brief review of the process that produced this book. My first step was finding funding to support the work of the women telling their stories, the work of the scholars to analyze it, and any publication costs. I first reached out to the National Endowment for the Humanities and learned that the project we envisioned would not be a priority for their funding in 2019–2020. Next, I approached my local community foundation, the Central Indiana Community Foundation, which I knew was prioritizing work to undo structural racism in our community. They were very willing to provide support. They were assisted by funding from Riley Children’s Foundation, the Citizen’s Energy Corporation, and a private female philanthropist passionate about women’s empowerment. We are all very grateful for the generous support of these individuals and organizations.

I then started recruiting the Black women storytellers. We wanted to include the stories of Black women who represented different generations, income levels, education levels, and professions. According to the conditions of the funding, all needed to be from the Central Indiana region; as it turned out, all but one resided in Indianapolis. Having worked in storytelling settings before, and understanding the vulnerability associated with storytelling, I invited women with whom I had previously worked with and with whom I had trusting relationships. Their trust, I believed, would give them the confidence and comfort to share their stories with the knowledge that they would be treated with respect. When I reached out to the eight women whose stories are in these pages, all immediately agreed to participate. The women represent eight different occupations: Lucrezia Hatfield is a stay-at-home mother whose story reveals she is certified to operate a forklift; LaToya Hale-Tahirou is a community health worker; Mary Bullock, LCSW, MBA, is a social worker; Stephanie Caraway is an insurance agent; Destiny Faceson is a university student and an administrative assistant; Scotia Brown, MA, is a school principal; Felicia Hanney, MPH, is a public health leader with the local health department; and Ronda Anthony, PhD, is a professor of English and Africana Studies.

I then brought the eight women together with the narrative scholars for meetings to outline the process for story collection and analysis. We collectively decided that the scholars would provide guidelines for the storytellers (see Appendix), and that the women would have six to eight weeks to prepare for their storytelling experience. The women wanted to tell their stories orally rather than writing them down, and the local community foundation funder provided a comfortable room for them to do so. They were videotaped by Kyle Minor, who had prior experience in shooting footage for documentary films. Kyle met with the women before the taping to explain the process and address any concerns or requests associated with it. Kyle shared the videos via YouTube with the narrative scholars for their analyses. (The videos were subsequently transcribed to create the written stories in this book.) Each scholar shared their essay with all the women. In addition, Lisa Zunshine shared an early draft with the two women, Ronda Henry Anthony and Destiny Faceson, whose stories were the focus of her cognitive narrative analysis. She discusses their feedback in the final version of her essay published here. In addition, once the essays were completed, the women and the narrative scholars met to share their reflections on their experiences with the project and to plan for future actions: publishing this book in print and online for open access is our first collective action step for social change.

The women's stories have been transcribed and lightly edited for inclusion in this volume. Hearing the women's voices speak their truth has an even more powerful impact than reading these transcriptions. I encourage readers to watch the unedited videos of the stories, available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJ6Pd4N63E8>

Concluding Reflections

I learned much from this project and its wonderful process. I knew from my work with these women that they are all strong and brave women fighting for change. After reading their stories, I learned more about them and realize that they are even stronger and braver than I previously thought. Their stories depict the dynamics of everyday racism in so many of its forms, and they show how it can seep into one's being to impact one's physical, mental, and spiritual health. The stories reveal institutions we need to target for social change that will support rather than undermine the health and well-being of Black women. They reveal why it is essential that Black women sit at tables with decision makers to bring about changes to improve outcomes for Black communities. Those of us who have not walked in their shoes need to listen to their voices.

Finally, this project and the work of the narrative scholars demonstrate why it is essential that we have scholars in the liberal arts and that we support them. This is critical as universities and governments advance a narrative that diminish the value of a liberal arts education. We need liberal arts scholars like these narratologists for the advancement of biomedical, public health,

social work, nursing, and public policy research and practice. Years ago, I was inspired by a lecture from the great medical sociologist David Williams, PhD (Harvard, 2023). He discussed his perspective that healthcare teams should not just be made up of physicians, nurses, pharmacists, dentists, or therapists; it also needs to include political scientists, journalists, economists, historians, anthropologists, and sociologists. Williams's perspective is shared by Paul Farmer, MD, PhD, whose biosocial approach to advancing global health emphasizes the inclusion of the “resocializing disciplines” (Farmer, Kleinman, Kim, & Basilio, 2013). To that list, I would add literary and cultural critics. After a careful study of this book, you will see the valuable contributions that narratologists make to our understanding of processes to advance the health, well-being, and social equity of traditionally marginalized communities.

Jack Turman, Jr.

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Contributors

Ronda C. Henry Anthony is Associate Professor of English and Africana Studies, Public Scholar of African American Studies and Undergraduate Research, past Director of Africana Studies, and Founding Executive Director of the Institute for the Study of Undergraduate Researchers of Color and the Olaniyan Scholars Program at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis. She also directs the Racially Inclusive Classrooms Program and the Racial Healing Project Initiative. She received her MA and PhD from Loyola University, Chicago, and published her book, *Searching for the New Black Man: Black Masculinity and Women Bodies*, in 2013. Dr. Henry is the winner of the 2019 IUPUI Chancellor's Diversity Scholar Award and a 2012 Outstanding Woman Leader Award.

Scotia Brown has committed her life to giving voice to the marginalized. With a formal background in business, counseling, and educational leadership, her efforts to positively impact the lives of students has included serving as building administrator at an Alternative School and a Title 1 middle school. Brown is often commended for creating safe spaces for students and developing transformative programming. Notably, Brown was nominated for Principal of the Year by the Indiana School Principal Association.

Mary Bullock retired as a licensed therapist in 2021 from Eskenazi Hospital in Indianapolis, Indiana. She worked in social services for over 45 years. Mary has a master's degree in business administration and a bachelor's degree in social work and public affairs from Indiana University. She is the proud mother of two daughters, two sons-in-law, and four grandchildren. She also loves working 10 hours per week to still help counsel women coming out of prison through the Mothers on the Rise program.

Stephanie Caraway is a Grassroots Maternal and Child Health leader in Indianapolis, Indiana, with a focus on housing equity for women and children, and on building the capacity of faith-based organizations to serve the maternal and child health needs of their community.

Simone Drake, Hazel C. Youngberg Trustee Distinguished Professor of English at Ohio State University, is executive producer of *Shutdown* (2023) and author or editor of the following books: *Critical Appropriation: African American Woman and the Construction of Transnational Identity* (2014), *When We Imagine Grace: Black Men and Subject Making* (2016), *Are You Entertained?: Black Popular Culture in the 21st Century* (2020), and *The Oxford Handbook of African American Women's Writing* (2024).

Destiny Faceson is a native Hoosier passionate about advancing human rights and elevating humanity through faith, philanthropy, and the arts. As a current Assistant Manager overseeing three properties in Indianapolis, she supports individuals and families in securing and retaining their housing needs. Destiny also has a background in policy analysis, public speaking, and managing cases for federal and state aid benefits, including SNAP (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program), health coverage, and TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families).

Felicia Hanney currently works for the Marion County Public Health Department. Felicia manages day-to-day operations of the Indianapolis Healthy Start program, which provides case management, health education, and outreach to pregnant and parenting women in eleven zip codes in Marion County that have the highest rate of infant mortality and poor birth outcomes. In her role, Felicia collaborates with policy makers, state agencies, and community stakeholders to spread awareness about infant mortality and to educate the public about Maternal Child Health and IHS's goal to eliminate health disparities in birth outcomes and infant survival rates in Marion County. Felicia has over 19 years of combined volunteer and professional work experience in public health, with focus areas in population health, women, and minority health-related issues. Felicia has contributed to and presented at local, state, and national conferences with focuses on maternal mental health, safe sleep practices, quality improvement, and strategic doing. Felicia is a board member for the National Healthy Start Association and The Martin Center Sickle Cell Initiative. Felicia enjoys spending time with her husband and two kids and being intentional with self-care.

LaToya Hale-Tahirou lives in Indianapolis, Indiana, and is a proud mother of three amazing children. She currently works as a Community Health Worker (CHW) for the Marion County Public Health Department within a program called Indianapolis Healthy Start. She is also a Grassroots Maternal and Child Health Leader (GMCHL). She will forever be a community advocate, promoting innovative approaches to strengthening disadvantaged communities while fighting for positive systemic change for women, families, and people of color.

Lucrezia Hatfield is a Grassroots Maternal and Child Health Leader in Indianapolis, Indiana, with a focus on promoting breastfeeding, especially in minoritized communities.

James Phelan, Distinguished University Professor of English at Ohio State University, is the author, co-author, editor, or co-editor of over 20 books, including *Somebody Telling Somebody Else* (2017), *Debating Rhetorical Narratology* (with Matthew Clark, 2020), and *Narrative Medicine: A Rhetorical Rx* (2023). He has been editor of *Narrative* since its inception in 1993.

Jack Turman, Jr., PhD, is a Professor in the Dept. of Pediatrics at the Indiana University School of Medicine. Dr. Turman has dedicated his 30 years in academia to growing education, research, and outreach programs that optimize maternal and child health (MCH) outcomes. He is the founder and director of the Grassroots MCH Initiative for Indiana. This initiative is focused on advancing systems change to improve MCH outcomes. The initiative is grounded in human rights and grassroots philosophies and serves mothers experiencing homelessness, mothers deprived of liberty, and faith-based organizations, early childhood education programs, and legal aid services in marginalized communities. Dr. Turman's work has been recognized by state governments, the American Public Health Association, the US Dept. of State, and the Honduran office of the United Nations Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights for its impact on addressing inequitable social systems that impact the health and well-being of women and children.

Robyn Warhol, a College of Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor of English at the Ohio State University, has recently published *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Narrative Theories* (2018), co-edited with Zara Dineen; *Narrative Theory Unbound* (2015) co-edited with Susan S. Lanser; and *Love Among the Archives* (2015), co-authored with Helena Michie.

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Part I

Black Women's Stories of Everyday Racism

The first part of this book presents the stories told by each of the eight participants in a conference room at Indiana University—Purdue University Indianapolis during the Summer of 2021. All but one of the women offered two stories in response to the researchers' prompt, one in which they felt they had been able to overcome racism and another where they felt they had been less successful. The only other person in the room—the videographer—did not interact with the storytellers once the camera was on.

Un-edited videos of all the stories can be accessed on YouTube at <https://tinyurl.com/aawnproject>



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1 “I Keep Most White People at a Distance”

Ronda C. Henry Anthony

Ronda’s First Story

So right now as I think about the two stories that I’m going to tell, um, I feel of two minds, because I have both of these experiences that happened when I was around 17 years old or a senior in high school and I didn’t realize it until I wrote them up, I feel of two minds. I have for the most part suppressed and just kind of put these things aside and not really dealt emotionally or mentally with what they said about things, but certainly my-my mind, heart, and spirit has absorbed it and sort of adjusted in terms of how I live my life. And so as I talked about previously, I think that I’m in two spaces. There’s the previous to these kinds of events and how I felt as a young person in that space of innocence, and then there’s the person that I am now and who I got to be after a certain point where I keep most white people at a distance. I don’t let them really affect me in the way that these two incidents kind of affected me or I’ll say the second incident that I’ll talk about.

The first one where I was able to, uh, really overcome, um, the-the racist assumptions that were made about me was, um, when I was in high school. I had a guidance counselor like most of us do and he was advising me on what colleges or universities to apply to and to go to and his—it’s well maybe I shouldn’t say his name—but anyway, um, I went to him because you know we would have these appointments dur-sometime during the day and you get a pass to be excused when you were junior or senior, so that you could go consult about whether you want to go to college and all of that. And my parents are first generation and so they didn’t push us to go to college, and so for me, it was a decision I made that I was interested in this. They had said that education was important, but they weren’t like you got to go to college, you got to do this, you got to do that, you got to go to this certain college because they were more blue-collar and so, um, at Lawrence Central, you would go at that time to see your guidance counselor and they would sort of guide you. They look at your grades and tell you what they thought would be the best places for you to apply and, um, how to apply what—help you with the applications blah blah blah, right? And so I went to see Mr. Macafee and he told me, um, that based on my grades I should apply to certain places.

But I had been to DePauw University, it's in Greencastle, Indiana, it's the DePauw with a W, with an older cousin, um, I think in my like sophomore year and for some reason I fell in love with it. Um, it was a vexed situation because they didn't have many black students there in the middle of nowhere, Indiana, all of that, but for me as a first-generation student I wasn't paying attention to that, you know? What's the ratio of black faculty to white faculty, um, how many black students are there? I wasn't thinking about any of that. I went and I fell in love with the atmosphere, I fell in love with the campus, I fell in love with I think this picture of who I thought I wanted to be in the future and what DePauw University represented in terms of that. I think that's why, as I think back, I wanted to go there, but for a long time, I didn't know what-really-why I had chosen it, I just liked it. And so I mentioned DePauw to him and he told me, I don't remember the-the words he used or the phrases he used, but basically the message he gave me was that I couldn't get in. It was a higher caliber university than I could qualify for and that I should apply for the University of Evansville, I should think about Indiana University (IU), and maybe think about Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) or Butler, some of the-the, um, universities in the city, but I had my heart set on DePauw. So I listened to him and I went and visited IU Bloomington and I went and visited the University of Evansville. Neither one of them did I like or want to go to and I knew I was not going that place. So I applied to DePauw University; I can't remember whether I told Mr. Macafee or I did it behind his back. I think I did it behind his back, and I got somebody else to help me apply. Um, I was horrible at standardized tests, I have always been horrible, um, but I remember it was the only university that I applied to for undergrad so I was just doing it real risky. But I was innocent, I didn't know what I was doing and clearly my adviser wasn't telling me, um, what I needed to know what I was doing.

But I remember, um, I came out of the finance center where I was doing early release, and I'll come to that in a minute, at Fort Benjamin Harrison, um, which is just a little, it's like maybe five minutes down the road, uh, down 56th street from Lawrence Central, and my mom had my acceptance letter to DePauw, and she had already opened it and I—but I didn't know anything about it. She had, uh, taken it and opened it, and she was just sitting there grinning at me, and I was like what's going on Mama, and she hands me the letter. Well of course it's already open or the envelope already opened, and I pulled it out, and I had gotten accepted to DePauw University.

And so that's where I went for four years. I graduated, I did really well. I was an English major and then I went to graduate school at Loyola Chicago and within the last few years of finishing that, DePauw called me up because one of my mentors there in the English department was, uh, the chair and they wanted me to come back and teach because they-they needed black faculty, they needed minority faculty at DePauw as you can imagine, and so I went back there to teach. I taught there almost ten years before moving on to IUPUI, but I never you know, there were several times when I was tempted to

go back to, uh, Lawrence Central and Mr. Macafee and say *singsong* haha ha haha you told me I couldn't even get in *end singsong* and I got in, I did well, and now I even teach there. Boo. Anyway so, of course I was able to overcome, uh, in that situation and I felt like he really—he really didn't have the power to set me back because I wasn't-as soon as he told me I couldn't do something I was like no, I don't receive that, so I'm gonna do what I want to do. So that's the first story.

Ronda's Second Story

The second story where I wasn't able to overcome things is a little more vexing and is still, um, a little more emotional for me and so as I mentioned earlier, I worked, um at the finance center at Fort Benjamin Harrison during my senior year. I had early release, I had Distributed Education Clubs of America (DECA) I had at first thought that I was going to go into retail, so I tried to work at like, uh, what was the store called, Harry Levinson back in the day, and I just, I was so scared and timid and afraid, and I didn't want to work the cash register. And they always wanted me to work the cash register. Because I was afraid I would make a mistake with the money, um, and so after a while I just got so nervous, I couldn't do it. I would just feel this thing in the pit of my stomach when I try to go to Harry Levinson and Glendale. So I went back and told my teacher Mrs. South, she was fabulous, that I couldn't do it so she switched me to the other program. So DECA was retail, and I can't remember what the name of the other program was that allowed you to do secretarial and clerical, because I knew how to type and all of that. I had taken typing classes and so I went to the finance center and I was doing clerical stuff and so I was working there. I enjoyed it, the people were nice, they were all older than I was but they were hilarious, um, and they were really nice to me during that time.

So my parents, usually my mother but this time it was my mother and father, came to Lawrence Central you know they come earlier in the afternoon before school release because I had early release and they would drive me over to, uh, the finance center, uh, and drop me off there and then they come pick me up a few hours later. I had my parents really working. Anyway so, one day they came, they got me, it just so happened my father was with us. My father had gotten a new Ford 250 and, um, this was back in the day, so I remember the colors of it. It was navy blue, and it had a wide beige stripe down the side. He was really proud of it because it was new, he really liked it. My dad is a trucker and, uh, he owned his own trucking company so trucks and pickups and all that, that's his thing.

So I got in. I was sitting on the end, I believe, and my mother was sitting in the middle next to my father. Well we all knew back in the day when you got past like 56th and Franklin road and you entered Fort Benjamin Harrison, um, the military, uh, installation whatever you want to call it, you had to slow down. They had a different speed limit than the city of Indianapolis side on 56th street so every time you entered it, you slowed down, and

that's what my father did. And so we were driving along all of a sudden we heard, uh, these police, um, sirens and we saw lights behind us and we're like okay what's going on maybe he's after somebody else. But lo and behold he pulls up at the back of us, right? And he wants my father to get over. So my father gets over, the guy gets out. There's two of them, one walks around on the right side of course and stands kind of back like they do. The other one walks to the left side, the driver's side where my father is, and so, um, he walks up. He's like I need your driver's license and registration and my father was like, okay so what did I do? Why are you stopping me? I need your driver's license and registration. So my father was like okay, um, I'm sitting on my wallet. Is it okay if I get out so I can get it out of my back pocket? He's like no, stay in the truck, no, stay in the truck. My father was like, but I can't really—I can't really reach my wallet. Because it was three of us on the seat, my mother was sitting next to so she starts trying to move over. My father's like just let me get out man and—and give you my wallet. He's like no, stay in the truck. So my father's like man, here's my hands. I'm getting out of the truck so I can get my wallet and give you. He's like stay in the truck so at this point, they start drawing their weapons and the guy steps back, he draws his weapon. The guy on the other side is drawing his, on my side. He's standing back a little bit though I can see him, uh, I think probably in the rearview mirror.

One little detail that I always remember whenever I recount this story is the guy who approached my father on the left side, he had, um, his mustache cut ... he had a Hitler mustache and so I always think of him in my mind as, um, I always think 'Heil Hitler' whenever I think of this incident, and I think about him. But anyway, he had kind of a mean, abrasive, authoritative attitude. Me and my mother were urging my father not to get out of the truck, but of course he's a typical black man, he's not listening to the women in his life, um, and of course me and my mother were just afraid. Um, my father is more defiant, I have to say. So he did not stay in the truck, he got out of the truck to get the man his wallet. He gets out the truck, um, the-as he's getting out, he's standing there trying to, uh, give the MP his driver's license because these are military police, um, and you can hear them radioing for backup. So before we know it, there's at least five or six, we're surrounded by five or six military police, um, they have my father probably I think at first at the bed of the truck. They've taken his driver's license and everything, but they're yelling at him, they're yelling at us. Um, my mother is telling me go on in the finance center, go on in the finance center because if you know where the finance center is, it sits way back, there's a lot of lawn in front of it. She wanted me to go ahead and leave and go in, but of course I was not leaving and going in, and leaving my parents there, um, experiencing this because I wanted to know what was going to happen and I was afraid that they would hurt my father.

So, my mother was also afraid, so we got out on the other side because my mother was telling me to get out and go on up there, um, and—and thinking

back on it, we probably should have stayed in the car too because anything could have happened. Um, so we get out. Somehow, I don't remember all the details. They end up with my father at the front of the hood, and they're telling him to put his hands on the hood, spread his legs. I can remember, uh, the-the 'Heil Hitler' MP standing behind him kick—sort of roughly kicking out his legs almost to the point where my father was off balance and was going to fall and then ... the next instant I don't know what happened, what was said, I know my father was saying something like 'um, man, don't kick my legs out so far, I'ma fall, I'ma fall.'

The next instance we look around because we're just standing there, and there's like an MP over next to us as well, kind of trying to keep us back and make sure we don't do anything we're not supposed to do. Um, they have my father ... *sighs* on the ground, in the mud, there's five or six of him on-five or six of them on him. I don't know what all they're doing, I--you know, it looked like they may have been like, there was some on his back with their knee in his back and on his neck. He was saying you know he was trying to turn his head in the mud, um, and saying he couldn't breathe, get off of him, you know, those kinds of things and, um, I must have been I-I don't know what I was saying or doing, but I must have been hollering or screaming because the MP next to us kept saying to me 'it's okay, it's okay, it's gonna be all right, it's gonna be.' But I'm looking at them do this to my father and we're trying to figure out why are y'all doing this? Why did y'all stop us in the first place? What have we done?

And so, um, my father is covered with mud, they finally pull him up, they put him in their car, my mother tells me to go on into the finance center. Of course, I didn't want to but at the end of it, after they, um, took 'em, took my father and put him in the car, I ended up going on into the finance center and going to my job. And then I think my mother got into the driver's side of the pickup, and I think she followed them to where they were taking my father.

In some ways, I-I-I think that I put that whole incident aside, I never really, um, dealt with it. And I can't really describe the feelings except to say that you know here's my big, physically strong—my father is-is he's not tall, big but he's-he's big and he was strong and-and you know he changed truck tires and he picked up engines and you know all this kind of stuff. And to see my father, um, degraded, yelled at, treated in that way, and then sort of thrown down into the mud was really traumatizing for me.

Um, I'm not sure how the rest of that day went. I know my mother came and picked me up at the end. I know I said something to the people at the finance center when I went in, um, but I don't remember them, uh, saying anything one way or the other and it's hard to remember because it was an emotionally charged time. I do know that they kept my father for a few hours, then they released him and then, um, my parents had to get a lawyer and go back to court, but they ended up dropping the charges because they didn't really stop us for anything. We weren't speeding, we weren't doing anything. I

think they basically stopped us because we were black and because my father had a new truck. I really think that that's what it was. Nothing ever came out of it except for the trauma of it.

Um, my father I found out later had been harassed by the police at different points in his life, um, and kind of prided himself on standing up to them. I hadn't been a witness to any of those except this one, and I know my mother was upset, but we've never really just sat down and talked about it and talked about the effects of it or whatever. She was angry, we were both angry and frustrated, and my father of course was enraged, but we've never really dealt with that whole thing. One thing we did find out later is the guy, the 'Heil Hitler' military policeman, later on that year, um, because he couldn't, I think he couldn't be at the appearance, and that might have been partly why they-they dismissed the charges so quickly. Evidently, his brother had drowned overseas in the military, so his brother died shortly after that. Um, but anyway, like I said I-I don't know that I've ever really processed it. Um, I would love to write a story about it at some point and just do a cathartic thing. I'm hoping that in some ways this is cathartic, because I still get emotionally, um, upset just thinking about it.

2 “I Would Love to Have Had that Conversation with Him”

Scotia Brown

Scotia’s First Story

There have been a number of experiences that have, um, shaped my life, and if I had to recall one that is probably at the forefront of my experiences. I, uh, grew up in East St. Louis, Illinois, district 189. Jonathan Kozol identified district 189 as a desperate school corporation. Ninety-nine percent of the population is African American to this day, and I went through elementary school and junior high school at that time. After junior high school, I moved to St. Louis County, and I attended a high school, McCluer North High School, which was out in the country, an all-white area. I was one of probably six African Americans in the school, and, um, I had an experience that I reflect upon. I’ve reflected upon that, countless times throughout my life.

I was successful. I was, uh-a good student made good grades. I was involved with what was going on in the school, and in the eleventh grade, I took the ACT, which is an indicator of how students are going to perform at the college level. I was called into the school counselor’s office, and I recall that gentleman sitting me down beside him at the desk and showing me the results on my, um, ACT test, and I had not done well. That was the one and only conversation I ever had with that school counselor, and what he shared with me was that I had performed poorly on the test, I hadn’t scored well. He told me that I was not college material and that I-I needed to consider going to a clerical school because I would never be successful at the college level.

I guess what was ... so interesting about that was this man made an assumption about my level of success, and he didn’t know me, didn’t know my background, the only thing he knew about me was that I was one of six African American students in that school and I had performed poorly on that test. He didn’t know the-the data which showed that African American students typically perform poorly on standardized tests. He just read the score and that’s what he said ‘consider clerical school.’ That was really impactful.

Fortunately, I’d come from a home where academic success was expected, attending college was never an option and so I enrolled in college, but throughout my life, I’ve always reflected on that and I-I wanted to go back and have a conversation with that school counselor to ask him what was it about me

other than that score that would have him sow that seed into my life that I would not be successful at the college level. I never got the opportunity to do that, but I did go into college and graduate and interestingly became a school counselor and—committed myself to never sowing that kind of seed into the life of a student, because it brings burdens, you know. There were times along my path that when I was challenged to do something, I questioned whether I had the ability to do it because that professional who was in the position of guiding students in their chosen career paths said I didn't have the ability to do it. But I did in fact become a school counselor, and I've gone on to become a, um, building administrator, and I'm in a doctoral program. But I would love to have had that conversation with him because I don't know how many other students he shared that information with, how many seeds were sown into the lives of other African American students that did not perform well on a standardized test, how many lives were thwarted because of that kind of advice. So, I-I-I reflect on that and, uh, it causes me to work that much harder as I interact with young people.

Scotia's Second Story

My husband and I have three children. We've got one son and two daughters, and, you know, your first child is your experimental child, you don't want to mess anything up, you don't know anything about really child rearing. So, Charles, uh, went to university school at Indiana State University, and he had been in kindergarten, in first grade, when he entered second grade. Well, let me back up—at the end of first grade, he was tested and he tested above average in all the areas he was ready to advance to second grade. So that experimental child of mine I would dress him up in the V-neck sweaters and shorts and socks, real nerdy, you know? Nothing that I could get him to do later on in life, but I just enjoyed him as a little boy, and I would dress him up and send him into school.

His father would take him and drop him off, and at that time we had a beauty supply in Terre Haute: Scotia's Beauty and Barber Center and it was kind of a-the heart of the community. A lot of people came in and bought hair supplies and got their hair done and we just had conversations with them. And one day, I had a lady to come into the, uh, shop and she says 'Scotia, I need to talk to you about something, I need you to go to school and check on Charles.' That's all she said, 'you just need to go to school and check on Charles.' I didn't know what that meant because as far as I knew everything was fine, but I took her advice and I went to school shortly thereafter.

And I walked into the classroom one day. All the students had been released, and I just asked the teacher how Charles was doing in the class and she said that she was having some issues with Charles, some real concerns. He didn't really seem to be capable of focusing and grasping the material and so, because he was so distracted, she had to move his desk. Now the way the university school was set up is there was a courtyard in the center of the

building so there were windows on the interior of the classrooms, and the teacher had moved his desk so that it faced the wall and the window looking away from the classroom ... which was troubling. He had his back to instruction, and I asked her why she had placed him there, and she said again that he was easily distracted, wasn't capable of, uh, grasping instruction. He was struggling with that and so that was her way of helping him to focus, was by moving him away or turning his back on instruction.

So that was on a Friday. I went home and talked with my husband about it, and on Monday, I went in and had a conversation with the teacher and said well I want his-desk moved so that he's facing instruction. And if there were any behavioral issues that she needed to notify me and my husband and I would address those. At that time, the schools were teaching whole language, and so the students were given-were given words on their word ring and so as they progressed and learned those words, you're supposed to learn by sight that 'apple', when you saw the word 'apple' that that was apple. You don't sound it out, you just understood that that word was apple. And she would give them words as they achieve success or learn the words on the word ring, but Charles wasn't given any new words. Other students had any number of words on their word ring but Charles only had a few. And that goes back to her explanation that he was having trouble grasping the concept, he was struggling with, uh, the material, and, uh, so he only had a few words on his word ring. I asked her about that. I went to the principal's office and said 'just had this conversation with the teacher, want to make you aware that I expect his seat to be changed so that he's facing instruction. And again if you have any behavioral problems from Charles, please let me or his father know and we'll address those.'

In my gut I believe he was the only African American child in that class. I believe that she made a determination that this black child was special ed, did not have the ability to grasp the instruction, and probably therefore needed to be tested. So her treatment of Charles was in line with her expectation of him. Long story short, we made the decision probably later on that week to pull him out of that school and we placed him at another school, under the instruction of another teacher and he flourished.

To this day, I'm so thankful that we did that because I believe had we left him under those low expectations of ... that teacher, I don't know what the outcome would have been. I know what my experience was when I talked to that school counselor. I was eleventh grade when that happened to me, he's second grade. What impact would that have made on his life had we left him under the instruction of a teacher who had no expectations for him? So when I fast forward to today, he's a doctor and is doing extremely well and I believe because he was in an environment where high expectations were had of him and, he was able to rise and succeed.

He's done well, but how many other children have come under that same kind of low expectation that I experienced as an eleventh grader? And that's just a story that doesn't get told a lot and a lot of African American children

who can achieve, but work and live and strive every day under those who have low expectations of them, have their dreams shattered because their self-esteem is shattered, and that's troubling but it happens every day. Just like I didn't have the opportunity to go back and have a conversation with that school counselor, I never had the opportunity to go back and have a conversation with that lady who came into the shop and said 'you need to go to school and check on Charles.' She happened to be the educational assistant in that classroom, and had she not cared enough to say go check on your child, we would have gotten much further down that road and much more damage might have been done had she not had the courage to speak up, and I'm so thankful that she did.

3 “Something I Never Recovered From”

Mary Bullock

Mary’s First Story

Yes, my name is Mary Bullock and I want to tell my story about how structural racism has impacted my life. Um, there were two incidents in particular, one that I felt that I recovered from and another where I felt that I never recovered from.

The first incident actually happened when I was only 16 years old. When I was 16 years old, I decided to, um, I needed to get a job. I’m the oldest of four girls, my dad was the pastor of a church and, uh, he, uh, a lot of times he said the doors of the church always had to be open, so a lot of times we would have to do without because, if the members couldn’t pay the rent or the utilities, my dad would come up with the money. So as soon as I turned 16, I said ‘you know what, I’m going to get a job.’ My first choice was, there was a library that was down the street from us, and it was about 20 minutes away. So I went there for an interview and so the lady told me she said, ‘well we pay a \$1.60 an hour which is minimum wage, but you’re limited to working 20 hours a week.’ So I said ‘okay’ and that sounded pretty good. However, the next day, there was a fast food restaurant, and it was only like 10 minutes away from the house, and I thought ‘oh that’s great,’ and it had a sign that said ‘hiring teenagers,’ so I thought, well I’ll go there and apply. So, I went there and applied and so the manager told me, he says, well he was and he was, uh, he and his wife were the owner, he was a white, a male and his wife was a white female and they were the owners of the restaurant. So he told me he says ‘now the bad news is it only pays a dollar an hour, the good news is you can work as many hours as you want.’ He’s like now ‘what are what time do you get out of high school?’ and I said ‘well, I’m-I’m there from like 3:15, I get home at 4.’ He said ‘well you can work four in the evening to 11 at night if you want to and you can work as many hours as you want on the weekend.’ So I thought, I added it up and that could have been over, almost 60 bucks for a week, and I thought, yes I’ll take it.

So I started working there and I worked there with, there were two other white male teenagers that went to my high school. They worked there and then there was a male, um, a black male, he was the manager, and the owners.

So we worked there, and I'm working all these hours. I'm trying to keep my grades up because a lot of times I'll get off at eleven, and I would do my homework and I would stay up to like sometimes two in the morning.

So one day in particular we were all working there, and we got ready to leave at around it was about 11:10. We opened the door and we got ready to leave and I never forget, there's-there was a man with a gun and he said, 'everybody go back into the restaurant.' So of course I was thinking of this project that I had to do the next day. I was like 'are you kidding? I have homework to do,' and he says 'I'm not playing, go back in.' So we all went back in and I actually stood there with my hands folded in front of me like, you know this is really inconvenient to me because I have homework. So, um, after it was all said and done, the police came and-and you know they got the story of what happened. So, my two male co-workers, um, they looked at each other and one said to the other 'man, we're risking our life for a dollar sixty an hour. This is not worth it' so I looked at them and said 'You guys make a dollar sixty an hour?' and they was like 'Yeah, that's minimum wage, Mary,' so I was too embarrassed to tell them that I was only making a dollar an hour, I was too embarrassed. So, um, I went home and I start feeling ... I don't know, I felt sad in a way, but I felt cheated.

So, the next day I ... asked the manager, the owner, if I could talk to him and of course he thought I wanted to talk about the robbery and he was like 'Mary, I'm so sorry about the robbery.' I said 'Well, thank you but I actually wanted to talk to you about, um, the two guys that went to high-that goes to high school with me. They said they're making a dollar sixty an hour and-and I'm only making a dollar.' He says, 'Mary, they want to buy a car, and they need more money so that's why they get a dollar sixty and you only get a dollar.' And I said 'Well, I need more money too, because I'm using my money to supplement, because you know we have to buy clothing from second-hand stores because my dad needs the money for the church.' And so he said 'Well, Mary that-that's, I feel bad for you, but it only pays a dollar an hour, and if you want to get another job, you can, but that's what it pays.'

So that particular incident actually changed my life, because I thought to myself there's got to be a better way of life than this. Because there was nothing that made me think if I graduated from high school that I was going to get any more money. So after that I started to really plan on how do I go to college. No one in my family had ever been to college, so I started to talk to counselors. I started to, back then we didn't have the internet and computers, so I started to write letters, and so I figured out a way that I wanted to go to college. So-so what I did was, and my parents was against it, they were 'no, you're supposed to stay at home, marry a boy from the church, and have a good life.' And I'm like 'no, I'm going to college.' So I ended up getting into Indiana University. I had a full-ride academic scholarship, and I got the basic opportunity grant that paid my tuition.

So that incident although it was—it was traumatic and bad, it changed my life because it made me want to do something better and made me want to be educated so that no one could discriminate against me again.

Mary’s Second Story

So during the next years I—I decide I have this mission to just be the best that I can be. So I go on and I become a licensed social worker. I studied and got my license, become a licensed social worker, I then decided I wanted to get a master’s in business. I got a master’s in business administration. I went on to develop many programs. As a matter of fact, I have a program that I developed, one here is called the Sister Friend Program, and it’s to help women, um, that, um, are pregnant and teens that are pregnant. And we match them with professional women, and we call it the Sister Friend Program. So I develop programs like that, um, other mentoring programs.

And then, um, I—I landed the job that I thought was the job of my dreams. Um, I was the program director of a large center, um, that, and what the center did they place people on jobs, and they help veterans and people on welfare get jobs. So, my center, um, that I end up getting was the largest center and I have an article—an article was—was done about my center, and if you can block out the name here. But it says here that in six months, um, Mary Bullock was proud that her center had placed 460 people on jobs and job training. So, it was—it was really, um, a wonderful job.

There was myself and there was, uh, one other white male and there was a white female because there were two other centers. My center was the largest. It—I had seventeen-seventeen staff members that I supervised, uh, and it was downtown, in a downtown location. The second center was on the east side, and there was the white male director, my coworker, and, um, there was, he had 11 staff members, and then the, um, third center was on the east side, and she had about 7, uh, staff members. So, everything was going fine, we were placing people, everything was, when we had, uh, weekly meetings every Friday.

So one Friday in particular, the three of us were there, so the vice president of the organization comes in and he says ‘I have an announcement to make’ and we were like we were wondering what is the announcement? So, he says, and I’ll refer to my co-worker as John Doe, not to mention any names, so he says to myself and my, um, other, my co-worker he says ‘Well, John Doe is now going to be your boss, he’s—we’re going to make him, you guys are a director, we’re going to make him senior director.’ And, um, so we were kind of like ‘okay,’ and so I was like ‘Was this job posted?’ And he was like ‘No, because John wants to be a senior director of one of, he wants to actually be president of one of the, our organizations in different states and so this is a way to give him some work experience for that job.’ So I was like ‘Well, I would be interested in doing that,’ and he was like, so he didn’t say anything at that time.

So anyway, I left the meeting and I felt-I felt some kind of way because I felt all the hard work that I was doing and all the people I was supervising, it-it-it seemed to me to be a waste of time. So, I went into my office, and I wrote this little parable. And the parable said, 'There were three students in class, one was an A student, one was a B student, and one was an F student. The F student, um, is you know, he-he-he doesn't do his work, you know he just kind of comes to class. The next day the teacher comes in and announces that the F student is now the teacher of the class. The students feel confused, they feel like: why is the F student getting to be the teacher?'

So I wrote this down and I put it on the vice president's desk that morning. So by the afternoon, I got a phone call and he said, 'Mary, I need to see you in my office immediately.' So I went to his office and he said 'sit down,' and I sit down and he said, 'First of all, I'm gonna pretend like you never wrote this letter.' And he said 'Second of all, you know we're giving him more money because his wife, you didn't know this, but his wife is pregnant and they need more money, that way his wife won't have to work.' And, like about five years, prior to that I had gone through a divorce and I had two daughters that were in high school, and I said, 'Well, I'm a single parent and I need more money.' And so he said, 'Mary, you know this is a white man's world, and the sooner you realize that the better off you're going to be, Mary.' And so I looked at him and said, 'What did you just say to me?' He said 'no,' and he comes over, and he puts his hand on my shoulder. He said, 'Mary, I'm doing you a favor by telling you this, the sooner you realize this is a white man's world the sooner off, the better off you're gonna be, Mary.' So I just got up, and I left and I, um, I went back to my office and I said, I thought to myself, 'I can't work here anymore because, you know, no matter how educated I am, no matter how much experience I have, I ca-I can't-I can't-they're not gonna promote me, I'm not gonna be able to work here.'

So what happened was, um, when the, um, I guess the bid came to run those centers again the organization I worked for decided not to go after the contract and so basically everybody got laid off. So with me and it's ironic I think because I bucked the system all the other people, the other two center directors were kept and they were offered other jobs within the organization, but I wasn't offered another job within the organization, nor was the staff members that I worked with. And so I, um, you know, I thought to myself where 'it's probably for the good, it's probably for the good.' So, uh, but I just never forgot that, I remembered that, and it haunted me.

And so, what I decided to do, I decided to start my own little company and because I didn't get a fair chance I named my company Indiana Fair Chance, so, uh, Indiana Fair Chance LLC. And I end up hiring two of my employees that work for me. So basically we just help people with resumes and help them find jobs and-and-and you know it didn't pay a lot of money but it was something that I felt good about doing. So then about a month

into it, uh something happened and the federal government, uh, the housing authority, uh, put out a request for a pro-proposal for, uh, to help people that live in public housing find jobs. And so my company decided that this would be a great contract for us to go after. So we went after that contract, I put in requests for a proposal.

Uh, there was an information session concerning individuals that wanted to apply for this grant. So, at this particu-particular session were two of my former co-workers and they were there, uh, asking about the grant. So, one of my former co-workers raised his hand and said, um, ‘Is there an opportunity if we wanted to match the grant?’ So this is a 300,000 dollar contract. ‘Our company is willing to put in an additional 300,000 if you give us the contract.’ And so of course the facilitator was like ‘course, that’s great.’ Everybody there was feeling like we don’t have a chance, who can match 300,000 dollars, but nevertheless I said ‘You know what, I’m a put in for it anyway.’

So anyway I put in for it and a month went by and I received this call and they said ‘Mary, your company was awarded the contract.’ And I was like ‘You’re kidding,’ they were like ‘yes,’ and I thought ‘vengeance is mine, said the lord.’ So I-I was so happy and I said, ‘Well, what happened to the organization that was going to do the match?’ They said they got it in electronically 30 minutes late, and they got disqualified because anybody that knows anything about grant writing knows that you have to do exactly what they tell you to do. If they say they want a smiley face at the end of every corner you have to, and if you get it in late, you’re disqualified. So, I was so thrilled and, um, and I felt at that point, I felt like that, I had you know, that I was even in in a sense.

Uh, but unfortunately the contract was only for, you know, we got the 300,000 for a couple years and then that grant was over. So I decided at that time to go ahead and take a job, um, take a job as a social worker because I was a therapist. And I did that for the next 20 years, and I was fine because I was helping people, and I was just making a difference. But then one day I decided to just look up the name, um, of the person that used to have that position. And now this person was an executive director in another state, and when I looked at how much he was making now and what I was making when I retired, the salary difference was 279,000 dollars. So that’s what, and I thought to myself ‘You know, had they invested in me and had, um, you know, they, you know, kind of groomed me to be an uh-uh director like that, what a difference 279,000 dollars a year would have made in my life, you know?’ But then I had to think, ‘But you-you made it, you’re okay.’ But I think it also affected me in that the whole 20 years I was at my job as a therapist, I never wanted to apply to be a director or apply to be a manager because I think that I never wanted that to happen to me again.

So that's why I say in that particular situation is something I never recovered from both financially because I never recovered that way or emotionally because I never felt like I wanted to feel that way again. So, um, so I say to, you know, companies 'Invest in everybody just not some people that you see potential because there may be other people in the organization that have those same dreams and hopes. But if people don't try to invest in them, then it-it-it may or may not happen.' So that's my story that I wanted to share.

4 “Women of Color Really Have to Understand, or Overstand”

Stephanie Caraway

Stephanie’s First Story

I believe it was late 1982. I was 14 at the time and was allowed by my mom to walk about six blocks to a friend’s house. I was glad to be given the opportunity, because I usually didn’t go anywhere and the time parameters were: be back in two hours. Not a lot of time but I’ll take it. I left my house. I began my journey down the street, going to the bridge toward my friend’s place, and then it happened. I saw a young man in the distance across the street walking on the north side in my direction. As I recall, I was walking on the south side of the street, and when I noticed him looking at me, he said ‘hey you’ and I turned and looked around there’s nobody but me, but I didn’t recognize him, so I kept walking, kept my head down, ignoring him, wishing I was already at my friend’s house. He called out again ‘hey,’ I kept thinking I don’t know you, and I don’t want to know you. His steps seemed to get quicker as he started crossing the street. I saw him walking even faster, his strides got longer, and I thought I don’t know him so why is he even saying something to me, should I run? As he got closer, I thought oh my god what’s he gonna do? why does he look so mad? So I tried to walk faster. I held my breath and tried to walk toward the grass and before I-I knew it he-he hit me, WHAM, right in my nose.

Oh my god. I remember the pain, the throbbing, the shock like I don’t-I don’t even know you and then he ran off. By the time I got to my friend’s house I was very dazed, I was confused, and all I could think about was I don’t know what happened. How could I call the police, press charges on somebody I didn’t even know. I-I-I couldn’t describe what happened to me. Who do I talk to? How do I tell my friend that I just got assaulted by somebody because I didn’t respond to him calling my name? How did I tell my mom? She would say it was all my fault, and she can’t let me go anywhere without causing trouble. Great. One of the few times I get out of the house and I don’t want to blow it for the next time, I won’t worry about telling mom.

That’s what I thought, it’s not important. She has enough to worry about with him. I hope he’s not there when I get home, because I know if he is she’ll act differently and again it’ll all be my fault. She always thinks I’m going to

be just like her, get pregnant at 14. Well, no, it's not gonna happen to me. I call him my stepfather; however, he and my mom they were really common law. Oh, but I forgot they don't have a common law in Indiana so they were just partners from the time that I was 6 until I was 14. Um, she lived with him. He was very domineering. She was very submissive. He was very abusive. She was very submissive. He verbally and physically abused her pretty much the entire time that I was there. She had no family in Indiana, and I believed that her lack of education caused her to be in a relationship with someone who really didn't care for her.

It was that time frame that I was told children should be seen, not heard. So let's go back to where it all began, back to the late 1960s where TV went off at midnight. Small town in Arkansas back in 1967, you have a 13-year old soon to be 14-year old and a 15-year-old boy and they were obviously doing things they shouldn't because I was born the next year in 1978, October 31st to be exact. Yes, I was born on Halloween, not quite sure yet if that's a trick or a treat. I know that my mom was still living at home at the age of 14 of course. Uh, and my mom had a baby sister so when I left the hospital I went home to grandma's house, and I'm pretty sure there was a lot of stress, there's a lot of tension. Um, you had my mom, her sister, my grandma, and there was no father figure so, um, for many years I-I-grandma took care of us. I remember I vowed that I was not going to get pregnant at 14. My mom came to Indiana, she did not continue her relationship with my dad. She went one way, he went another, um, and I can honestly say I'd never had a very good relationship with him and honestly didn't meet him until I was almost grown.

Mom decided she wanted to get a career in computers; however, her soul mate didn't want her to make time for that. All he wanted her to do was be available for him, so I watched my mother for many years, and I felt sorry, um, because she had no financial assets, um, her education was-was very limited, um, she had no transportation and very few friends. Um, so with her not having any family, I quickly adapted to his family, because for me being an only child, I loved playing with his nieces and nephews. It was a highlight of my childhood, playing with my cousins and going to school because, you see school, school was my safe haven because home was not fun. I learned quickly to adapt to different schools. I, um, I moved ten times in eleven years so as a child, as an only child, um, many times, there were many days where I played by myself. You heard a lot of what happens in this house, stays in this house. I remember days wanting a little brother or sister and my mom's response was 'I don't think so.' Um, she never really told-probably told me why but after I think about it, as I got older it's probably was for the best. Um, I was very shy as a kid. I was teased for my color and, uh, it's not just the color of being black but just the shade of my color even among the other kids, um, and the gap that I used to have in my teeth. Um, I was disciplined a lot and not just with belts or shoes, um, so I realized very quickly *chuckles* I didn't like to be hit, so I should be good. I was afraid of him and so was my mom. We

walked on eggshells most of my childhood. *sigh* I can honestly say though he was an entrepreneur, he owned a business, actually several businesses. He ran a car lot when I was little, um, back in like 1975, and then he moved from there to a convenience store, and it was the neighborhood convenience store which, um, I have a gunshot wound to prove it. I was a victim during a gunshot robbery back in the early 1980s so needless to say that business didn't last very-very long. Afterward, since my birthday was on Halloween, um, the one good thing that came out of that business was that's where I did my trick-or-treating because my mom was too scared to let me go out and do trick-or-treating in the neighborhood.

Um, it's interesting the things that you see when your birthday's on Halloween, um, and I guess like I said the bright spot was I didn't have to go trick-or-treating, um, as I got older though, um, I remember my school teacher telling me that our teenage years was going to be the most frustrating, emotional, hardest times of our lives and that was so true for me. The challenges that my mom experienced of course, they were basically passed on to me. It was, uh, it was apparent that, if you know better, you do better. Um, I was very sheltered, and I stayed close to her and like I said I love to go to school so when I got the opportunity to go to college, um, I took it. I began my freshman year 1987, and I came back 1988 with a baby girl. So when I found out I was pregnant I was in shock, I'm scared, and I knew it was definitely not planned. My relationship with her dad was-was, it was friendly but it wasn't loving, um, and my decision at that time was you know, based on the knowledge that I had and I decided you know, if you were not going to be in with me 100% with Brianna then that-that just, I was gonna be a single parent. So he continued on to college. I continued on, um, leaving college and taking care of my daughter.

Um, I can say, uh, the health care system back in the 1980s went really really well for me, um, I went to my doctor's appointments, I stayed up on the women, infant, and children, I breastfed, um, I went for long walks because at that time, *sigh* similar to my mom who went back home after having me with her mom and her little sister, I had to go back with my baby girl, um, to my mom's house with my two little step brothers and my stepdad. Uh, had to get a job, most of the jobs available for me were in telemarketing, uh, which did not pay much money, um, and my paycheck didn't let me leave me enough to get a vehicle let alone a home, and, when I tried to save, mom said 'hey I need a little bit over here for this rent.' So as I think about it, my mom, my stuff that they never talked to me about finances that wasn't the conversation. Uh, so, um, I was a young 20 senior-20 year old single mom who wanted to look like a million bucks but living on less than living wage salary and at that time I can remember the struggle being truly real.

Stephanie's Second Story

So I began my career with numerous telemarketing jobs, uh, my voice is what led me to my first real job in 1990. I found out that I truly love this job, um, and when I began working there, I interviewed for a, um, position that

required me to answer the phones. But before the interview, they asked to give me an aptitude test. This test, not quite sure what it was for, I feel like it was to test my mental attitude, but they said it was to test whether I was an introvert or an extrovert. Um, test showed I was half and half so they never had that happen before. I don't know why but, um, I do-I do know that, um, the way that I felt at that time was, at work I could be this very outgoing person, but at home, I could be extremely shut down and do nothing.

So I got the job. I was excited I was the first black female to work for this company, and, after a few years had gone by, they-they tried to hire others. They didn't last long, and some of the questions I hear were 'how come they're not, um-they're not like you?' I said 'what do you mean,' 'I mean' they say 'you're so nice and approachable,' and I realized at that time most of the, my friends of my color, they didn't react to white people the way that I did. At that time I was 23, I loved my job, my goal was to impress, make money, and once again I was a single parent. And I remember in-in the early 1990s part of my job was to contact customers so they could come pick up their cars, and I had a co-worker, Stephanie. Stephanie was her name. She was new to the job, very-very timid, um, I was not much-much older but a little bit. And I told Stephanie, I said 'Stephanie I'm going to give this customer a call, need to have them come pick up their vehicle.' So I call them. When the gentleman comes in, he says 'hey I'd like to speak to Stephanie, I'm here to pick up my vehicle.' Um, I believe that's her right there, now mind you we both have name tags. I said 'no sir, I believe that was me that you spoke to' and he said 'no-no it wasn't you it was her.' So I had to argue with the gentleman that the person that he spoke to over the phone, who looked like me, this is really who you spoke with. And it wasn't until she told him, 'no sir I didn't talk to you I wasn't available,' that he actually believed the story. Um, it-it-it really hit home to how a per-how you can be judged by your voice, and for me at that time, um, that's why I was hired, strictly for my voice.

Um, I really finally decided to break free from the job when it came time for my daughter to begin school, because they wouldn't allow me as a single black mom to go to her first day of school. Um, I didn't think my request was asking too much, and I knew that other employees there had talked and they were experiencing the same thing. Um, ... it really hurt, um, to have to leave something that you like doing, but when you're doing it for the betterment of your-your family. And I wanted that to be a moment for her that she remembered because, you know, going to school some-sometimes can be a very traumatic thing.

Then after leaving this job of almost five years, I decided to send my first grader to a good school system, and back in 1984 is when I experienced another type of racis-racism and it was more so toward, uh, me being in a supervisory position. I was in my late 30s and this other gentleman, he was in his late 50s. Nice guy, but once again another very timid to the point that employees said he didn't have a backbone. So he was a good worker. Um, we were both hired on the same day to do menial jobs actually, uh, machine

operators. We both quickly advanced into supervisory roles or acting supervisory roles, um, but then there came an opportunity for both of us to become, uh, regular supervisors so we both are looking at trying to get this opportunity. Um, there was an interview session, there was a written session throughout. Both of those I passed, I did well, was told ‘okay you did great, you passed.’ He didn’t. Then, I find out a few months later they say ‘you all, you know what, we’re we’re not ready to put you in that position, we’re going to have it again,’ And I’m like ‘why,’ I said. ‘Well, we want to have him have another opportunity.’ I’m like ‘he failed the first time.’

So this next special session that they had, he made it and I didn’t. I was, I was shocked. I-I was told that if I wanted that position, I had to reapply. Why? My stubbornness got in the way, because at that time I-I thought I didn’t need to reapply for something, um, only to find out that there’s only one position and that I wasn’t the person who fit the bill for that position. It was very hard for me ... *long pause* *softly* it was very-very frustrating ... You know, I actually thought, I had gotten over it, but a lot of times, you don’t feel it’s fair. When you’re-you’re not given the opportunity *choked up* to show-to show your skills and how good you are due to the color of your skin ... *sighs* I guess you could say sort of pre-judging someone by their looks and not their talents.

Um, I had said to myself that, um, women of color really have to understand or overstand so that we can overcome. Overcome the situations, the obstacles that happen in our lives. Uh, I look at those things that I like to change, um, for those coming up now. Those laws that we have for the living wage so that you’re able to make the money you need to, uh, to raise your children. So what does this say for someone who earns, let’s say, less than eighteen dollars an hour? How do you overcome that? And so my call to action is: empower young people, to let them know that they are worth so much more and don’t let anyone tell them that they’re not. Um, I want to educate youth on their worth, on their awareness, young women to empower them in the community, to overcome the stigma even today wh-which is a really big thing with mental health. Um, finding those things that help you in life to get through. Um, I didn’t get that-that promotion; it ended up being for the best. It ended up being for the best for me to even leave because at this time in my life it’s better for me to work for myself and to be of service and that’s what I’m looking to do. To be of service to others as much as possible.

5 “No One Even Knows the Real Story”

Destiny Faceson

Destiny’s First Story

I’m not too sure what year it was but, essentially I was ... maybe 16 or younger, no younger than 14 so I was either, 14 or you know between 14 and 16. Well, Saturday nights in Indianapolis for black teens at the time was to go downtown to the Circle Center Mall. That’s what we did Saturday nights, that’s where everybody was going, doesn’t matter what side of town you were from, doesn’t matter what school you went to, you was going to the mall. We spent money, downtown capitalized off of our dollars, for sure we always bought something whether it was as small as a pair of earrings or a shirt from, you know, Aeropostale always had a sale, um, and this was around the time also where McDonald’s used to be at the hotel basement adjacent from the Circle Center Mall so it was like, they they got their dollars, we were spending money.

On this particular day, me and some people that I know, we were a group of-of about 10 to 12. We decided to go downtown as usual. As we ... get to the mall, it’s kind of like, since everyone’s meeting down there, it’s like a big network so you may come down there with one person at least, but you might meet, someone in your class from, you know, over here or someone who used to go to your school that you grew up with, it doesn’t matter. So by the end of the night, the largest I’ve seen is you could get in a crowd of 30–40 people, of people that just know each other. It was the same this day ... but for some reason, this day we were being over policed more-more than usual ... one of the people that I was with at the time, had their children with them and they needed to go change their kid. So we all stopped at the food court, here comes the police, keep it moving keep it moving, can’t stop here, and it’s just like why can’t we stop here? Any other day, any other Saturday, like where, any other Saturday we’re going to stop at the food court, what’s-what-what are we doing wrong and it just goes to the whole thing of just, you’re just bothering us just to be bothering us, you’re antagonizing us, you’re pestering us, it’s ... you’re agitating us, so as teens with rights, because human rights have no age. It’s a human right, we spoke up on what we

believed, we're down here every Saturday, we're not doing anything, why are you bothering us? We're only stopping to change a baby, don't you want us to, we're being responsible teenagers like can you please leave us alone? But it was at that exact moment that we begin to speak up for ourselves, it's now that we're harassing the police, but you came to us, we weren't even doing.

I could see if we were doing anything, but you have to realize it's like, um, what are those groups that come into town?, um, 4-H or I could be totally wrong, I'm butchering it, but the farm scholarship students, just the same crowd except we're black teenagers. Now I've been down there when the farm scholarship students come into town, there's no police at all ... why is it that when we come into the establishment that we're targeted? I don't understand.

So then you have to realize that it's 20-30 of us speaking up for ourselves, essentially they all kicked out, but as we're going down the escalator that's when things begin to transpire. The lady that I was with, who had the baby, was being pushed by the police that was behind her because she was speaking up for what she believed. Her ... the other people that were with are in front of her, which it is a mixed crowd, so it's male and female, and then you have to think of family members and friends as well so them seeing that, of course now with your offense, now we have to play defense, but you're offending us now you're putting her in a position where she's about to drop her child and we're on a escalator and you're putting all of us, 20 to 30 teenagers, out so the escalator is packed So protecting her and her child, the one who's pushing her purposefully, we see this at the top of the escalator because they're the first ones down, and you have to think there was police—there were police officers throughout the escalators as we were going down So to defend her, those who I was with fought back, because now you're pushing her, you're endangering her so now I have to basically turn into a brawl to say the least ... defending ourselves Because now you have two or three police officers on one individual, and seeing that, you feel that you're in an endangering environment and you have to defend those that you love, that you care for, friends and family, blood.

It's not just it's-it's it was you are retaliating against us for no reason, you're attacking us so we attack you back, but how are we in the wrong when we're standing up for ourselves? Those are our basic human rights. If we feel endangered, we are to defend ourselves. If you put your hands on an individual first, then am I just to stand there? No. You had young men protecting a young lady from the start I don't understand how it takes two or three police officers to ... get one teenager. Why do you even have to ... what-what for what?

So you probably can, I-I hope you can edit this in, Kyle ... uh, it's a scene from the civil rights movement-the civil rights movement, it was peaceful, but they were speaking up for themselves and the police begin to attack them. If you could edit that in some way, that-that's exactly the situation And by the end of it all, as we all I believe about ... the majority of us that night

who came together got locked up that night, but as they were taking us down into the garage of Circle Center Mall to put us in the paddy wagon, we all continued to speak up for ourselves even in handcuffs Well the officers, two officers specific-specifically did not agree with what I was saying, were getting very upset, picked me up, took me into the garage where no one else was, and slammed my head up against the paddy wagon. Two white police officers. I'm 14 to 16 years old. I'm already in handcuffs and you're grabbing my hair. You see this ponytail? Just imagine someone grabbing that whole thing and slamming your head up against a paddy wagon You know what they said to me? 'If you don't shut the f up, we'll send you to the hospital' Now at the time I'm-I'm just in my head like I can't believe this is even happening because I'm already in handcuffs You sat us all on the ground but you single-handedly picked me up, both of you, picked me up and took me to the garage to threaten me, to tell me to shut up, to shut the f up

And then media didn't do any better, they twisted the whole story: teenagers, downtown mall, brawl with police officers. Oh the radio lit us up, people don't know how to take care of their kids, they need to stop having kids go down there if they don't know how to act And it's just like ... no one even knows the real story like, if you knew what happened you would-you would understand, it's modern-modern day civil rights movement

We ended up asking my lawyer if he could, if we could sue the city for what they did, the answer was no, it's better to just leave it alone, it's a losing fight. But you're my lawyer, I'm a minor, you understand two police officers with witnesses, with witnesses, yeah, but they too are just minors as if we're some subordinate It didn't get fought, we essentially let it go Traumatizing for me, so I didn't in a sense let it go. That's why I'm here today doing what I'm doing,

Destiny's Second Story

[*long pause*] I'm not sure what semester it was, 2018–2019, eh it was definitely pre-COVID ... in a humanities class ... humanities, humanities, and it didn't bother me I was the only black kid. I call myself a kid because you know I'm-I'm getting younger not older, but I didn't mind being the only student that was black in the class, I didn't mind that at all, ironically in humanities, we began to talk about black culture, didn't mind at all. It was when ... we began to cover, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* ... something just didn't sit too well with how the teacher at the time was ... teaching it in a sense. Well, eventually it came time for you know, does anyone else have any questions? Before I move on to the next slide? No one had any questions, but with the smirk on her face, very nonchalant, devious, she turned and looked at me, and she said 'Hey Destiny,' if I just took like a men—it was like a mental pause at it was like time kind of stood still at that moment because, she single-handed-handedly targeted me in that moment. I don't know, 'has-has anyone ever called you an Uncle Tom?' ...

I couldn't fathom, so many things ran through my mind, it was, the main thing for me was I don't want to be the angry black woman in this moment, I didn't want to do that I didn't want to be the angry black woman in that moment, I didn't want to show my butt, I wanted to act as professionally as I could among my peers. I swallowed that, but still caught off guard I just, I said 'what?' And at the same time I was asking her what did she say, two of my white male peer-peers sitting adjacent from me: 'did you hear what she just axed (asked) her?' and it's just like okay so I'm not, I'm not, I'm not just hearing things, they heard it too Offended with her but at the same time offended that no one in that classroom said anything, in that moment, no one even hesitated to speak up for me, or to just say 'hey, that's wrong.' It was more of me just letting it go and just not only watching her reaction as she asked me again: "Destiny, has anyone ever called you an Uncle Tom?" 'No,' and I said it just like that, 'No.'

Well okay, next slide, how she just so smoothly just went on to the next thing, how everyone in the class just moved on to the next thing. Things it-you're not blind to it. I'm-we're going to stop saying that ... you're not blind to racism at all. A whole classroom of students and a teacher went along with ... what was just said her having the audacity to ask me that in the classroom just having just no cares in the world of just ... as if they too were wondering, has anyone ever called you an Uncle Tom?

I didn't go back to school for about a month and a half, I quit going because for me it was an institution of carelessness toward race, racism. I sat in a classroom where, but two people, said nothing, did nothing, just it was normal. I can see if the classroom said something, but to just to sit in the midst of a classroom that's an institutional frame, my view, this school is not where I want to be. I-I just about don't even feel safe here in a sense, if you can be as bold as that to-to say that.

I eventually came back ... I eventually went back ... and I'll just leave it at that, I still go to that school ... yeah.

6 “At That Moment I Felt—Dismissed”

Felicia Hanney

Felicia’s First Story

Hello, my name is Felicia Hanney and I would like to share a story with you eh, about a time that I experienced not being heard and seen as a black woman and a first-time mom. I delivered my first child in March of 2018, and, after 36 hours plus of labor, I had to have a C-section. So, the experience was not, um, the best for both me and my child ... the recovery also was not the best. Normally for someone who delivers and has a C-section you have to wait at least four weeks, no driving, try to keep your feet elevated and so that’s what I was trying to do. However, I also developed baby blues. I was struggling with breastfeeding and having my baby latch on, and I was dealing with severe pain as a result of the C-section. So, in April of 2018, um, I noticed that I had a tear on the right side of my C-section which caused a lot of pain. And at that time my parents they told me: ‘well you need to go to the doctor, you need to be seen,’ you know? ‘We need to get this taken care of.’ There was some pain medicine that I was allowed to have, but I had ran out of that pain medicine, and I also felt guilty for thinking that if I took all the pain medicine that it may go through my child, through my breast milk. So, I was dealing with a lot of emotional, um, issues at the time.

So, my mother and I, uh, went to the doctor’s office, and we also took my newborn baby, so when we arrived, we got checked in. We sat there and waited to be seen and so they finally called my name and I went back into the exam room with my mother and my daughter. So when we were waiting in the exam room, there was a resident doctor that came in, and so she introduced herself and I was able to explain to her what was going on. I showed her my tear and I expressed to her about the severe pain that I was having. And so I was also, at that time when I was talking to her, my breast became engorged because it was time to pump. And so at that time while the doctor was listening to me, she requested that a nurse go get one of the hospital pumps to kind of help assist me with pumping. And so, as I explained to her, um, my situation, I did ask her, you know, could I have some additional pain medicine. And I’ll never forget she looked at me real strange as if why-why do you need more pain medicine? And so when she looked at me, I-I was

a little bit confused,’ but at the same time I was trying to explain well I-I explained to you, I-I’m in pain, I-I my C-section has tore so I-I really like to have some more pain medicine because I-I’m in a lot of pain.’ And so she basically proceeded to explain that it’s not the common practice, um, once that first prescription runs out not to refill that prescription for pain medicine. And so as she’s talking to me, I’m trying to not only pump but then I had experienced a really sharp pain in my C-section area. And so for me trying to get my my milk to pump out, dealing with postpartum depression, hearing what the doctor had to say and basically dismissing me for eh-even asking for the pain medication I just started to stop and I was crying uncontrollably. So I remember the doctor was looking at me, she was still talking to me, but she said ‘well you know I’ll be back and I’ll provide an update’ so she left me in the room.

I was still trying to, you know, uh do my, uh, pumping. My mother was there, she was doing the best that she could with the baby, trying to keep her consoled. We did have a bottle of breast milk so my mother was able to feed her, but I could tell that my mother was extremely irritated, and I was trying to get myself together because I did not want to sit in the doctor’s office and just continue to cry. But I was in a lot of pain, and I just felt at that moment I wish somebody, I wish I could give somebody my pain so they could experience what I’m feeling and see that I’m-I’m not making this up. I’m not playing, like I am really in a lot of pain and my C-section had tore on the right side.

So we waited for about, I want to say additional 25 to 30 minutes, and no one had came back in the room to see us. So I went down the hall, the same hallway that the doctor went, to go see if I-maybe I could wave somebody down to see what the next step would be. So, when I went down the hallway, there was a little, um, water cooler area where the doctors were, and it was some other healthcare providers and my doctor was there and they were just having a conversation. They were laughing, they were joking. I didn’t know what the discussion was about, but I just remember ... really feeling ... not heard and knowing that, okay they’re able to go in there you know have discussions, do-do whatever. I’m still sitting here in pain so I went back to my exam room and I told my mom what I had witnessed, what I had observed. She got up and took my baby with her, she went down the exact same hallway and she went to go have a conversation with all of the healthcare providers, including my doctor. So, she came back in the room and not even five minutes later two doctors showed up in my room.

And so during that, um, that, um, discussion, the doctors were talking to me both this time and saying, you know, explaining to me, you know, we typically don’t provide additional medicine because normally women who have experienced a C-section they are they are pretty much healed, they don’t have as much pain. So, they were pretty reluctant to provide me with pain medicine, but they ultimately had agreed to give me some but at a lower dose. So for me I-I-I felt glad that I was able to get pain medicine, but I also felt that I

should not have had to go through everything I went through and talking to the doctor more than once. She saw that I was in pain, physical pain, crying, and that what I had to say was not-was not relevant or how they were. I perceive it as they must think I'm an opioid user because I'm coming back after four weeks and I'm asking for more pain medication, when that was far from beyond the truth. Um, my thing was I was just trying to get a balance and trying to heal so I could be readily available to take care of my baby and be able to move and function normally like a mother would after they delivered their baby. So, that is my story about my C-section experience.

Um, I encourage women to speak up and be vocal. I still to this day I'm so thankful that my mother was there as my support person to help me through that. Um, and this is just something that I'll never forget because I have a scar on my body to remind me and looking at where the scar has torn that's a constant reminder that, you know what, you have to advocate for yourself you have to stand firm on what you're saying even if people don't believe you, you have to make sure that your voice is heard. So that's the first story.

Felicia's Second Story

So the next story I would like to share with you all is about a time that I experienced implicit bias, um, and racism and because, um, people believe that you know some people can look alike, um, and some people you know they have a dibble doller (doppelgänger) or twin or however they, uh, say that word, but this was not that kind of situation for me. I used to work for a company that allowed us to travel across the country. I-I loved that job. Um, one particular time we were all in the office. There's about 14, maybe 16 at the max, of us that are in this, uh, team that I call and the majority of the team is comprised of white males, there are some white females and there was about four or five black women. So we are all working. We do have, you know, standard uniforms, but, um, we were all working to get some tasks done in the office before we set off to go on to a trip.

So I remember I was working on a task and there's a front office assistant and so normally she helps assist us with any paperwork. If there's something that's missing, she will normally provide us some guidance on, you know, what needs to be completed. So as I was working on my task, I was going to approach her desk and ask her a question when I noticed one of my black colleagues had went over to have a conversation with her. So, I just waited my turn, I didn't think anything of it. I know that they were having a conversation, but I couldn't hear what they were saying so I went back to my paperwork and just waited until, um, they were done. Once I saw that they were done, I approached the front desk assistant as well as one of my white colleagues. And so I remember asking her, I said you know, 'I have a question about this document' and I said you know, 'could you assist me?' And I remember she looked up and she said 'I already had explained that to you,' and it caught me off guard because I looked at her, I was like how did you explain

it to me. I said ‘I just came up here for the first time, I’m asking you this question now.’ And so I told her, I said, maybe she got me confused, I said. So I said ‘but my other colleague she came up to you and she maybe she had axed (asked) you maybe the same question or not.’ I said ‘I’m not sure’ and so the lady looked up at me and she said ‘well you both look alike,’ so I remember when she said that to me I said ‘excuse me?’ And my white colleague was there he was standing right next to me he said absolutely nothing. And so when I questioned her, she just broke—she brushed me off, and she was just like oh she was like ‘I didn’t mean anything by it.’

So I walked away from that and I was like, this is not right, I don’t appreciate you just making an assumption that we all look alike. So I remember going to talk to my manager across the hallway and so I sat down in my manager’s office and I had explained the situation to her that I was very upset about it. And my manager she was a white, uh, younger woman, she looked at me, and she was just like, well, don’t mind her, she didn’t mean anything by it. And at that moment, I felt dismissed as if what I had to say and how my feelings were not taken into consideration at all. But it was okay for her to make statements like that and at that.

After that, I just felt I lost trust and respect for both the women in the office because it just seemed to me that it was okay for her to make any kind of statements and I don’t know if they thought maybe she’s older, you know, she didn’t mean anything by it, but you can’t just glaze over when somebody is being is being, uh, biased toward you or, you know, making statements. It’s-it’s not right, and I felt at that moment that she should have been educated on implicit bias, educated on racism, and educated on why it was wrong for her to make the statement the way that she did. Because you can’t just clump people together like that and make an assumption that we all look alike because the fact is me and my black colleague we don’t look anything alike. Yes, we are both black women. Her hair is short, my hair is long, there’s a height difference, there’s a lot of different differences about us. We have different names, and so, it was just kind of a lesson learned Ah Ha! moment for me. For me to make sure that I was educating myself and making sure that the next time hopefully that does not happen, but, in the future if it does, I could be better equipped to address it in that moment. Because I’m not sure if I make a complaint how far it will go and in that case it didn’t go far at all, it just went to the manager and my manager dismissed it as it was not a big deal.

So those are my two stories.

7 “I Was Never Considered an Asset to Their Company in the First Place”

Lucrezia Hatfield

Lucrezia’s Story So I applied for this job and I applied for a forklift position, um, I’m certified in like all the forklifts, um, so when I went in on the interview, I interviewed with like five different people. They had me come back twice, um, am I saying, um, too much? They had me come back again for another interview where I met with someone else, and, you know, they just asked me like: What do I feel like I bring to the company? What am I looking to gain from working with them? So I explained to them, like, I’m looking for stability, somewhere I can grow. They basically tell me like that’d be like the perfect place for me. So, on my last interview, they had me meet with a manager. Um, he took me to a different part of the warehouse and he pretty much informed me, I want to be a forklift driver, that I would be a picker *chuckles*. So, at this company they have like robots that like, pick everything, and so what I would do is stand in the station, verify the account, take the box up, throw it back on the conveyor belt. It seemed, um, pretty simple. So they also let me know that I would be full time and be placed on salary. So I thought it was like really cool, I was like really excited.

Once I started there, I noticed that ... they had stations set up so the first six stations were their, um, full-time employees that, and then it was me and another woman that started. So the other employees were already there, but they came from like within the company, you know? So, they were part-time hourly, they worked themselves up to the position that they were in now, um, so once they learned that I didn’t come from a different department I was like off the street hire, um, they started not being so kind to me. I was being called out my name, being bumped into, like basically harassed by these employees, and it made it even more hurtful because they were black women, but they were women my mom’s age you know? So I didn’t want to be like in work fighting or whatever, I went to like the management, I try each time to file like the chain of command, you know? So start off with the supervisor, then the team lead to his supervisor until finally I just like went to HR you know? So I just, I didn’t like see any results in what I was experiencing, you know? So they move everyone around. These women will still find themselves at my station talking crazy to me like I was going home crying. Um, when I would report it to like a supervisor I was told like: ‘hey no one wants a difficult

employee' *chuckles*. So apparently because I'm being bullied and harassed and physically assaulted that, you know, I'm the difficult employee.

So, after talking to my mom about it, you know, crying and stuff she told me to do like more research about the company. Um, once I did, so I learned that they were sued for millions of dollars and part of the settlement was that they hired so many African Americans and women. I fit into both of them *chuckles* so it's kind of like a two-for-one, you know. So that made me feel like that's why they didn't care that I was being bullied or being harassed or shoved or anything, because I was never considered an asset to begin with to their company, you know? Something legally they had to do. Um, I try to keep working there. I end up just quitting the job because I just feel like I'm not being taken serious, my safety's not being, you know, taken serious.

My dad had a friend that worked there as well, you know, and he would come up there and, you know, check on me and, you know, ask who is-was bullying me, and, you know, he would handle the situation. I'm like 'we'd both get fired,' you know? All the supervisors, the managers, the, um, HR people they were, you know, white of course, you know? Um, I feel like that played a role into why they weren't doing anything about you know, me being bullied, you know? I'm just like this young girl who's complaining about ... these women, you know, bullying but to them it wasn't like bullying, you know? And they were all men, you know? So I think that they thought that I was just being like, overly sensitive or just being, you know, this young girl who's being the difficult employee instead of the one that was actually like being bullied, you know?

Um, yeah, is there anything else I should add into it? Um, yeah so basically long story short, *laughs* I end up just quitting the job and just finding somewhere that I'm not just going to be a lawsuit statistic or somewhere I'm going to be heard and where they don't think that because, you know, I'm a certain age or whatever that is okay for me to be bullied you know? So yeah, that's the story.

8 “Racism Has Truly Shaped My Choices and How I Act”

LaToya Hale-Tahirou

LaToya’s First Story

‘I always wanted to know y’all,’ is what I told two of my grandmother’s brothers Ronnie and Donny and their wives, as tears raced down my face. I was crying so hard I could barely get the words out. As I began to brainstorm and scan my mind to recall racist incidents that I’ve encountered that might make the most impact, I struggle. I think that I bury them so deep because if they stay at the surface of my mind and my heart that I would grow bitter. As I began to recall incidents, it made all the emotions of sadness, grief, frustration, and anger fresh.

I come from a biracial family. My mother’s mother is Caucasian and her dad was African-American. Like in most families we didn’t have hard and transparent conversations that could potentially lead to healing. We just let huge elephants sit right among us, ignoring them instead of addressing them. From an early age, I had an understanding of racism and it plagued my self-esteem, my choices, behaviors, and life experiences. To this day, I carry so much anxiety and stress. That day at my grandmother’s home I had an internal conflict as to if I was to speak up or stay silent, something nagged at me to tell me *clears throat* tell them how their choices intentionally excluded us, hurt my grandmother, my mother, and myself. Their denial to include us in their family I feel set us up on a path of generational bondages.

My grandmother is one of seven siblings, four girls and three boys. Their mother was severely disabled due to a car accident when most of them were very young. Their dad tried to raise them, but six of the seven siblings ended up living in an orphanage at The Soldiers and Sailors Home in Knightstown, Indiana. I only know these details because, like I said, I was very interested in learning about my grandmother’s family. I’d always ask her questions and she’d tell me stories, I was about 13 when I first got to know one of her siblings, my Auntie Millie. She had taken me shopping for school clothes. I don’t remember all I got, but I do remember getting some red Levi’s and a black Mickey Mouse shirt. As she got ready to drop me off, I asked if I could live with her, I was growing up in chaos and uncertainty at the time. Something told me if I lived with her, I’d be safe, happy, and have stability. She looked

at me and said ‘I love to have you but you wouldn’t be happy living where I live, there are mean people there.’ She was trying to tell me in the kindest way that you would not be welcome in Newcastle, Indiana. Though she was trying to be very gentle in her approach, it still felt like a stab in the heart.

A short while later my Aunt Millie came to live with my Grandma June in Indianapolis for approximately 20 years up until she passed away. She is the only one of my grandma’s siblings I ever got a chance to build a relationship with. I love my great Aunt Millie. In 2018, Aunt Millie wasn’t doing so well so her brothers came to my grandmother’s home to visit from Newcastle, Indiana. Which brings us back to where I opened, as I stood there in my grandmother’s living room pouring out my heart, I knew that it wouldn’t change a thing, it just felt good looking them in their face and getting it all off my chest. It-it was as if a heavy burden was lifted. I wanted my words to convict their hearts and remind them of the pain that they caused my grandmother by intentionally pushing her out of the family. She was deprived of a support system because she had biracial children. This lack of support and love set the foundation on which my family’s disparities and dysfunction continue to manifest.

There is a stat that says about 80 plus percent of those living in poverty will not be able to climb out of poverty. Most of my grandmother’s siblings are upper middle class, my grandma and her children mainly lived a life of survival, paycheck to paycheck. Intentional systematic oppression has maintained the status quo that Caucasian people thrive and people of color barely su-survive. Because my grandma had biracial children, her life was thrown into the black and brown life struggle cycle. Skin color kept us from our own flesh and blood.

I can remember when I was little being very excited to tell people that I had a white grandma. Even to this day, I love announcing to people that I’m biracial, partially because it’s my unique and interesting fact about myself that you can’t tell by just looking at me. My grandma has always called me her toy bear and made me feel loved. It is mind-boggling that we have a family that feels the exact opposite. They felt embarrassed about it. I came to learn about this very early age-at a very early age. I remember when my grandmother’s mother passed and again when her father passed, there was a big controversy about her children: my mom and her siblings attending the funerals. My grandmother said if my kids aren’t welcome, I’m not coming. Having blood family that had no desire to know me was very hurtful. I have been around my grandmother’s siblings a handful of times in my life, and it always felt very awkward.

If racism, biases, and prejudice can divide blood relatives, think of how it strongly affects the majority of people of color when people in positions of power have these same mindsets. I urge all people to take personal accountability to self-assess and to be aware of their own prejudices, biases, and racist mindsets. Put yourself in someone else’s shoes and let that motivate you to constantly strive to see people and not color and treat others as you would like to be treated.

LaToya's Second Story

One morning I woke up and, um, I felt as if. . . . I had just recently had my son, I think I was home about one day, maybe two days, and I woke up and I felt like I needed to change myself, um, I felt like I was bleeding a lot. So I went to stand up and blood brushed down my legs and so as I walked from my bedroom to the bathroom, I left a pretty significant trail of blood. I wasn't in any pain and didn't-wasn't alarmed, you know? So, I cleaned myself up, um, this happened two more times in less than an hour and I knew that, um, there was no way that, um, losing this amount of blood could be normal. I spared, I actually spared some graphic details because it was a whole lot of blood, so I decided to go to the hospital.

I'm gonna have my cousin come over and watch my new baby and my other two children, and the entire time whenever I would stand or move blood clots would just continue to fall, um, from me. They were like the size of, uh, a cutie or a tangerine, like a small like-like they were really big, and on the car ride there they were accumulating. So when again when I went to stand up and walk into the hospital, um, I could just feel this massive clot that was getting ready to fall. So they got me back to the room, and, sure enough, when I got back there this clot that was like the size of, I don't know, maybe a large cell phone, it was really really big, um, and the doctors and the staff were just looking at me in amazement like this is something they had never seen, and, like I said, I was never in any pain.

And so till this day, um, I can't tell you exactly what caused it, I can't tell you exactly, um, what they did to, um, fix the issue, because I was scared to ask questions, you know, I was scared to advocate for myself as I sat in that hospital. They explained to me initially what they thought it was, they explained to me initially what they were going to do, but I still wasn't clear. And then so I bring this up and the way racism affects this is because of my own insecurities of looking like an unintelligent black woman or looking like an angry black woman because I wanted to push for further answers or get further clarity. Um, I just stay silent, you know, and I think that's what a lot of black women do when you think about health care and the disparities that exist in health care when women of color have the highest rates, um, a lot of time, um, the microaggressions that we've experienced, the-the-the forward racism that we've experienced caused this internal battle within us to struggle within ourselves.

Now some women are boisterous, they're going to say what they mean and mean what they say, but as for me in my case, uh, racism has truly shaped my choices and how I act. So, if I was in a hospital visit, I wouldn't voice any questions or concerns because I didn't want to push and look like your typical angry black woman or that I'm a difficult black woman. There was always an internal struggle of just wanting to take it easy, just not wanting to push, not wanting to cause any trouble because I feel like it was my duty to prove to other races that all black women aren't angry, all black women aren't aggressive.

And so in doing so, I never really advocated for myself I would never really push for myself which is an issue. You know, who appointed me the person to smooth everything out and set an example, um, so in telling that story, um, I could have died you know? I could have lost my life, and it wasn't until I, um, was pushed to review my life and think about racism and think about how racism has impacted me that all of these different things became together.

And so now with that story being told, um, I feel like that aspect of my life with racism I'm overcoming and it's a success story because it allowed me to review my life and ... do things differently. So now I'm in a position professionally and personally where I advocate for women, I advocate for, um, women to ... advocate for themselves when they go to doctor's visits to ask questions and push for clarity when they're concerned about their babies to push and ask questions and get clarity, to advocate for policy change for things to happen, um, so that they are in a better, we all are in a better position. So, um, I will say that that was a particular story of racism not directly toward me, but an internal struggle that, um ... due to racism and the way I've been felt, felt in the way I've been treated I just had this internal struggle that I have started to overcome and help other people overcome.

LaToya's Second Story, Retold

This particular story, um, as I thought about telling it ... was the first time it made me say, 'wow, my life was in danger, I could have literally died.' I never had thought about it at the time when it happened in the moment, it didn't really register as being that serious, uh, but as I look back now the path that God has my life on just shows that how everything that I went through aligns to do His will and the work that I'm doing now.

So, uh, after having my son when I returned home, I woke up one morning and felt as if I needed to clean myself up. I felt like I was bleeding really heavy, so I got up when I stood up, um, blood began to rush down my leg and so from my bed all the way to the bathroom, there was a trail of blood and I had never experienced this before. So I cleaned myself up went back to bed. That happened two more times in less than an hour and though I wasn't in any pain or anything, um, something told me it's not normal to lose this amount of blood. So, I went ahead and went to the ER, had my cousin come and watch my new baby and my two other children and, um, on the ride to the hospital the blood clots begin to accumulate.

And so let me back up, as I was leaving the house, I went down the stairs and walked down my living room and out the patio, and as I'm, each step that I made blood clots very large blood clots began to fall out of me and so on the ride to the hospital, which was less than 15 minutes, I could feel them just continuing to accumulate and so when I stood up I could feel this big mass that was ready to drop, but I tried to hold on until I got into the room so I wouldn't mess up the lobby. And so sure enough once that they got me in a room, I went to stand up to put on the gown and this extremely large

mass of blood clots fell from me. The nurse, which was a guy, looked at me with like he saw a ghost, like he had never saw anything like this, and again I wasn't in any pain, I wasn't concerned, I didn't see any urgency, I didn't feel like there was any emergency. But long story short, um, I can't tell you what caused that. I had just recently had a baby, I knew that, um ...

I can't tell you the procedure that they did to stop that and that's because I didn't push for answers, they did explain to me what happened but I still wasn't clear. I didn't want to seem like I was ignorant-ignorant or I was a dumb black woman who didn't understand or I was an angry woman pushing to get more answers. So I just remained quiet and I say that because even though I didn't feel the hospital or the staff was being racist toward me, experiencing racism with microaggression or just sometimes forward aggression has shaped the way that I operate. You know if I'm in a restaurant or I'm at a store and I feel like I'm being challenged or I'm a victim of racism, I'm less likely to push because I don't want to appear to be that angry black woman, how other cultures see us. I don't want to appear to be that ignorant black person that's going off and can't self-regulate and be calm. So I have internalized and being the representative of black excellence.

Sometimes when I go places and I fall short I'm not—I'm far from perfect but I try to make other races see me in a way that stops me from advocating for myself if that makes sense. Um, just trying to not be a stereotype is a heavy burden to carry day in and day out. Um I'm always like ... is that racist? Are they doing that to me because I'm black? And just having to navigate between your brain like, is that just a normal response or have I just been a victim of racism? Just carrying that day in and day out whether I'm in a restaurant and a family of three comes in like my family and three that came in after us and they get seated first. Did they get priority because they're white because we were here first or is it that they called ahead? Just that internal struggle and being a representative for my kids because I don't want my kids to feel that way, oh that's because I'm black or that's because I'm black. So just the burden that racism has caused as a black woman trying to navigate this world has been heavy.

And so, um, now I can see that as a success story because, um, because of life experiences, it has equipped me to have a job where I help other women advocate for themselves. So because I recognize in my story how I didn't stand up for myself and I didn't advocate for myself, or I had an internal struggle of ignoring things instead of addressing things. I can now take my personal story and self-assess and now go forward and help other women to do the same thing. So, I would say that this would be my success story of how I overcame a form of racism that was an internal struggle with myself by helping others, using my story and my experiences to help others, um, advocate for their self. Whether it's at a doctor's visit, um, and they want more answers about what's going on with them whether they want more testing or whether it's at through policy and politics and trying to advocate for change that they would like to see. I am a way, um, to be a community connector to help other people push for change.

Part II

Introduction to the Narrative Analyses of the Women's Stories

Although narrative theorists embrace the goal of developing theories that collectively have the explanatory power to account for all kinds of narratives, Jack Turman's invitation to Jim Phelan to form a team of narrative experts whose analyses could effectively augment African American women's stories about everyday racism presented some challenging issues for the team. Three of us (Phelan, Robyn Warhol, and Lisa Zunshine) had previously worked primarily on literary narrative, while the fourth (Simone Drake) had worked on both literary and nonliterary narratives without making direct reference to narratology. Would our theory-driven readings be able to illuminate rather than distort or appropriate the fifteen oral narratives of the eight African American women? Was it right for Phelan, a white man, to head up a team working on African American women's personal stories? Was it appropriate for two white women (Warhol and Zunshine) and just one African American woman (Drake) to constitute the rest of that team? Could such a team effectively accomplish the project's purpose of amplifying Black women's voices toward ending structural and institutional racism? The answers to these questions were not self-evident, but as we thought through them, we agreed on one point: it would be wrong to say "no," to allow academic anxieties to get in the way of an opportunity to support anti-racist activism. And, we thought, our awareness of the challenges could productively influence how we approached the work. Consequently, Phelan, Warhol, and Zunshine entered the project in the spirit of both collaborating with and deferring to Drake, given her expertise in Black gender and cultural studies, and to the eight storytellers. In this way, we sought to emulate Turman's stance of respectful listening in the presence of African American women who are telling the truth about their lives¹. All four team members collaborated on refining the contours of the project with Turman and the women (see Turman's Introduction for details). Each of us gave our best effort to doing the women's stories justice.

Once the team had heard and analyzed the fifteen stories, we agreed that they collectively offered powerful testimony about systemic racism. The women's stories constitute compelling evidence that African Americans in general and African American women in particular experience racism as an inescapable part of their day-to-day experience—and sometimes as a force

that changes the direction of their lives. Each story provides first-hand demonstrations of how pervasive systemic racism is in the U.S. today, how often it intersects with sexism, and how consistently it perpetuates power differentials that are baked into such institutions as education, law enforcement, the health-care system, business, and the family. In vivid, often distressing detail, the women present the ordinariness of white people's implicit and explicit racial and gender biases in their everyday interactions with African American women. The stories contain countless signs of the stress and trauma that accompany and follow from these "ordinary" encounters. At the same time, the stories reveal evidence of the eight women's resilience as well as their unending need for it, as they continue to feel the negative effects of these encounters, whether they occurred recently or many years ago.

The four approaches to narrative represented in our individual essays are typical but by no means exhaustive of the available methodologies for analyzing how stories work. For that reason, we do not claim that our analyses should be taken as the last word on these stories, even as we hope that our theoretical perspectives offer distinctive and worthwhile insights into them. To refer to just two other methodologies, scholars who have worked on oral storytelling (see Labov, Shuman, Modan among others) and those who have worked on narrative and trauma (see Caruth, Gilmore, Hirsch, Pederson among others) would bring insights that our approaches do not. But we are confident that their analyses would complement rather than run counter to ours, just as we see complementarity rather than contradiction across our four essays.

Our analyses proceed from narrative theory's core interests in narrative structures and narrative elements (characters, narrators, perspective, events, time, space, and so on) and in how storytellers, situated in specific historical and cultural contexts, adapt these structures and elements in fashioning their particular stories. Yet, each of us, grounded in our different theoretical orientations, highlights different structures and elements.

Simone Drake situates the stories in traditions of Black women's storytelling that are manifest across Black culture, from folklore to literary fiction. She also draws on Black women academics' attention to documenting and studying genealogies of Black women's intellectual and cultural productions. Drake's analysis is framed by two Black vernacular traditions: testifying and signifying. Analyzing the stories through the lenses of genealogies and vernacular traditions, Drake applies her own act of signifying when she places the women's stories in conversation with Black popular music that simultaneously speaks to their experiences and to what they might resist saying directly.

Like Drake's cultural studies approach, Robyn Warhol's feminist narratology emphasizes the historical conditions that influence the production and reception of any given narrative. For a feminist narratologist, the question is never simply "How does this story work?" but also "On whose behalf is this story working, and to what end?" Warhol's analysis touches on stories from all eight of the women, identifying repeated narrative structures in order to learn the storytellers' shared strategies for intervening in systemic racism.

Noting that some of the women paired a story of defeat with a story that comes to a more satisfactory ending, Warhol picks out a consistent trope that runs through all the stories: variations on the statement, "No one listened to what I said." Whether in a doctor's office, a home, a place of business, a school, or an encounter with police, the woman who speaks without being heard gets hurt, predictably and repeatedly. Warhol surmises that paying serious attention to the stories in this collection might alter the mindset that thoughtlessly perpetuates casual racism.

As a narratologist working with cognitive science ("cognitive narratology"), Lisa Zunshine focuses on intentionality and embodiment in oral storytelling. Specifically, she draws on research in conversational metacognition, which suggests that speakers' ongoing monitoring of their performance expresses itself through such cues as pauses, changes in gaze direction and body posture, filler words, non-speech sounds (such as uh and um), repetitions, and self-interruptions. When these cues are treated as communication, one is bound to think of the speakers' intentions, and, unless the speakers have explicitly stated them, imagining and interpreting those intentions becomes an integral—but also fraught—part of the critical analysis. How might this process be influenced by racial differences between speakers and listeners? To answer this question, Zunshine has shared her early draft with the two African American women whose stories she analyzed, Ronda Henry Anthony and Destiny Faceson, and she incorporated their feedback into her essay. What she has found is that metacognitive monitoring in oral storytelling is fundamentally liable to misinterpretation, that racial differences may increase the likelihood of such misreading, and that, therefore, being ready to be wrong is a crucial prerequisite for a conversation about race, intentionality, and embodiment.

Phelan's approach, too, emphasizes communication, since it conceives of narrative as rhetoric: somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purposes that something happened. Phelan focuses on how tellers use the resources of narrative (structures and elements) to achieve their purposes in relation to their audiences. What he calls his "rhetorical listening" to the stories by Mary Bullock and Scotia Brown pays particular attention to their uses of character, progression, and fictionality as well as to the affective and ethical effects that follow from those uses. Phelan detects an unassuming yet impressive artistry in these stories that makes their indictments of systemic racism all the more powerful.

As the structure of this book suggests, the team of scholars sees the narrative analyses as secondary to the women's stories. While the four analytical chapters try to unpack the complex skill involved in the women's handling of so many elements of their narratives, they also point to the overall value of telling these stories: how they can sometimes be cathartic for the women; how they highlight the importance of cross-race listening—and indeed of misunderstandings—and how, if these stories and others like them were widely disseminated, they would become a force to counteract the structural racism they so graphically expose.

Note

- 1 Our listening practice is guided by Sue J. Kim's definition of "structural empathy": "A concept from social work and social justice education that describes the ability to situate another person's experiences in systems of power, such as racism, patriarchy, white supremacy, neocolonialism, and capitalism" and the definition Kim borrows from Susan Gair for "poststructuralist empathy": "'Attention given to each unique, individual story within the constructed landscape for that particular family, group, or community' (Gair 2012: 136)" (Kim 102).

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9 Testifyin' and Signifyin'

Black Women's Narratives on Navigating Structural Racism in Central Indiana

Simone Drake

Introduction: Where I Enter¹

This essay is an ode to the African American women who thoughtfully and generously shared their personal stories of the triumphs and challenges of navigating their raced and gendered identities in educational, professional, domestic, and civic spaces. I contextualize the individual and collective value of these narratives by drawing on the intellectual lineage of Black² women academics, artists, and writers who shaped the work I do as a Black woman scholar. As a Black woman, it is impossible to disassociate my personal experiences that intersect so frequently with the stories shared by our interlocuters. After listening to the stories, I was in awe of these women's courage, and I was ready to write an essay that honored their experiences. And then I was stuck. When it came time to write, I suddenly did not know where to begin, how to begin creating a compilation of such complex narratives—both their own and where and how my own intersected with theirs. I concluded that one way was to demonstrate how their experiences are like silk threads in a grand web of Black women's lived experiences—some that have been told, but many that dwell in spaces of silence and forgottenness. Coupling these narratives—the personal with the larger historical and social—reveals a narrative grounded in Black vernacular traditions of testifying and signifying. It is through these traditions that I analyze how our interlocuters share their personally selected snapshots of navigating systemic racism in Central Indiana.

I will begin by telling a story about the stories. During my first year at Denison University, I enrolled in "Introduction to Ethnic Literature," not because of my love affair with reading but because Dr. Desmond Hamlet was a professor who I was told I must experience. That semester I read Linda Brent's (a.k.a. Harriet Jacobs) slave narrative in a space absent of Black women faculty during the pinnacle of the emergence of Black Women's Studies and Black Feminist Criticism in academia. It was a period dubbed the "Black Women's Literary Renaissance," because Black women writers were penning stories about Black women's experiences that had not been told and Black women scholars were insisting academia embrace the stories as valuable, insisting their own scholarship on Black women be respected.

The slave narrative, Works Progress Administration (WPA) oral histories, and the historical novels that became popular during the 1980s and 1990s were my entry points for studying Black women's lived experiences. Initially, I was captivated by Brent's account of her experience as a slave, but then I also became intrigued by the role of white abolitionists like Lydia Marie Child, who would authenticate, and often serve as scribe for Black women and men who had been enslaved. During my senior year of college, I discovered walls lined with WPA volumes of oral histories from the formerly enslaved when I participated in a research program at the Newberry Library in Chicago.

Against this backdrop of stories of both oppression and accomplishment, I would read, often on my own, fictionalized stories of Black women's oppression and accomplishments that were pulled from historical archives and family lore—stories that could not have been told by our foremothers. I discovered *Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afro-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance*, a volume about Black women's writing edited by Joanne M. Braxton and Andrea Nicola Laughlin. It became my academic bible, a treasure trove of essays that in the words of Audre Lorde's foreword laid bare, "It's not that we haven't always been here, since there was a here. It is that the letters of our names have been scrambled when they were not totally erased, and our fingerprints upon the handles of history have been called the random brushings of birds (xii)."

The *Wild Women* volume serves as a testament for the public but also something intimately their own as the editors note, "Black women's words are testament that we were there, bridges through one another's realities, tough and tender. Intricate and nourishing. And no matter where we find ourselves to be, we can plot each other's words like roadmaps toward a future." They assert that within their pain is also accomplishment and, "Black women who follow us need to know that other Black women have fought and survived the same Black woman-hatred, and that we wished to share, with passion and with beauty, the questions as well as the strengths that we learned throughout those struggles. And not all our songs are mourning. (xii)" As I enter the conversation about these contemporary African American women's lived experiences in Central Indiana, I want to be mindful of their words as testament—as testament of both triumphs and defeat.

Section I: Testifyin'

His Eye Is on the Sparrow

As I watched and listened to these African American women's stories, I was immediately struck by their preparation for the interview, as well as moments of self-consciousness. All of the women's narratives, generally, flowed chronologically, but some were quite concise and organized with specific details. Mary Bullock, for example, brought various props, including awards

and plaques, to support her detailed yet concise story. These artifacts were perhaps included as proof for any naysayers, but much more than that, the artifacts embodied the pride Mary felt about her accomplishments despite unexpected and unwarranted obstacles. As Mary would reach down and retrieve these items, her face lit up despite the grim revelations she shared about two experiences with employment discrimination. Felicia Hanney did not bring documented proof, but she did bring prepared notes. LaToya Hale-Tahirou arrived with a complete script for her first story that she read aloud, and she requested a re-take of her second story that she recited orally both times.

While most narratives flowed from start to finish, some were interrupted by the interlocuter through questions directed to the videographer, Kyle Minor, and also pauses and silence. Lucrezia Hatfield interrupted her narrative twice, once to ask if she is saying “umm” too frequently, and a second time, at the conclusion, she asks Kyle if he thinks there is anything else she should add. Not long after Destiny Faceson begins to tell a story about a shopping mall over-policing incident when she was a teenager, she pauses for an extended period, looking at the camera but saying nothing. In her second story about a college literature course and a white teacher’s microaggression, again, at the beginning of the story the narration breaks. There are frequent pauses that hang in the air as if she hopes for or expects a response from her only real-time audience: the videographer, Kyle. With each pause, it seemed Destiny was practicing self-reflection while also waiting for the “Amen Corner,” the affirming, “Yes, Lord” and “Tell it, Sista,” and the organ chords scaling two octaves—all responses that would affirm the heavy dose of analysis she offered for her own stories. These women not only wanted to present their best selves; they also were self-conscious of the stakes involved as representatives of African American women’s experiences.

Although testifying in the Black vernacular tradition is typically unscripted and unplanned, these women took seriously the opportunity to give a testimony that would be documented—that would be *heard* in the way Black people hear testimonies in Black churches but also hear them seated around kitchen tables, in pool halls, at juke joints, and on social media. Their narratives offer statements, gestures, and signifying that, if done in those aforementioned Black folk spaces, would have elicited hand claps, teeth sucking, grimaces, smiles, head nods, “gurrll,” “amens,” and various other religious utterances indicating a shared knowledge of wrongs and also, quite importantly, of overcoming and jubilee.

This latter point is critical, as testifying did not solely attend to oppression. From slave spirituals to James Cone’s liberation theology, Black testifying registers what Zora Neale Hurston called “tragically colored.” When Mary Helen Washington describes Hurston’s way of being Black in a society that denigrated blackness, Washington explains, Hurston

saw black lives as psychologically integral—not mutilated half-lives, stunted by the effects of racism and poverty. She simply could not

depict blacks as defeated, humiliated, degraded, or victimized, because she did not experience black people or herself that way. (17)

Refusing to be tragically colored, these interlocuters shared stories about educational and employment discrimination, violence, shame, pain, bias and microaggressions, labor, merit and fairness, agency, reflection, and their own counter-narratives.

Young, Gifted and Black

As one means of maintaining control of enslaved Africans, reading and writing instruction was disallowed. After emancipation, legislation, mob rule, and other tactics were used to restrict or limit Black people's access to formal education. It is no surprise then that numerous women focused explicitly or tangentially on educational experiences. Speaking about their own educational experiences, both Ronda Anthony and Scotia Brown address secondary school experiences with white male guidance counselors who discouraged them from pursuing their college goals. In her second story, Scotia focuses again on education but from the perspective of a parent raising a Black son. Stephanie Caraway provides a harrowing account of a short-lived college experience. Destiny Faceson exposes how a literary text often associated with liberation can be weaponized. And Mary Bullock worries about studying and getting homework done while being the victim of an armed robbery at her job.

During different time periods and in different geographic locations, Ronda and Scotia both experienced a white male guidance counselor insist that they would not be successful at their respective proposed post-secondary pursuits. In Ronda's case, the counselor told her she was not a strong enough student to be admitted to her dream college, the small liberal arts college DePauw University. When she visited a cousin at DePauw, Ronda fell in love with the campus, the atmosphere, and its ability to provide her with access to the future she imagined for herself, even if there was a paucity of students who looked like her attending the university, and despite the school's rural location. Ronda apparently knew best as she ignored the counselor's recommendation to apply to the University of Evansville or Indiana University-Bloomington. Instead, she applied to DePauw, and she was accepted. Moreover, while completing a doctorate in English, she was hired by DePauw and was a professor there for ten years.

Scotia's story constructs a counter-narrative to the counselor's bias. She shares that she grew up in East St. Louis, Illinois, in district 189, referencing Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*, a searing expose on the egregious wealth and funding gaps in public education and particularly how the intersection of race within those gaps creates two distinctively different educational systems. This book was the first-year student text when I started college in 1993, and I still remember descriptions of sewage running through

schools and science labs without equipment in East St. Louis. Scotia had already shared that 99% of the city population was African American when she made a strategic reference to Kozol's work on public education inequalities that further emphasize the stark contrast between her primary education in East St. Louis and her secondary education at a nearly all-white high school in St. Louis County; to be exact, there were only six Black students in the St. Louis County high school. In this space, Scotia became a different type of statistic than Kozol's empirical data charting poverty in urban cities—in St. Louis County, she became a less discussed statistic of Black student achievement gaps in suburban school districts.

In a case study that has become a classic in urban educational studies, *Black Urban Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement* (2003), John U. Ogbu produces empirical evidence that even in Shaker Heights's multiracial and multicultural middle-class school district, African American students do not perform as well as white students, and not even as well as immigrant Black students. He explores the historical, social, economic, and broader systemic conditions that perpetuate academic performance challenges across social class. Despite such realities, Scotia excelled academically, as she notes she “was a good student.” The sociocultural biases embedded within standardized testing, however, coupled with most likely not being coached on how to prepare and take the ACT, resulted in the school counselor declaring her ACT test scores indicated Scotia “was not college material,” and he advised her to go to clerical school. Like Ronda, Scotia ignored the counselor, applied to college, and is now a school counselor and building administrator, as well as a doctoral student.

Stephanie and Destiny's stories focus on experiences during college. For Stephanie, it was the experience of going to college in 1987 and returning home in 1988 with a baby girl. She shares it was an unplanned pregnancy that resulted in her decision to be a single mother, while the child's father continued his college education. For Stephanie, this scenario is less about education and more about generational cycles that made her recall a teacher saying the teenage years would be the most frustrating, emotional, and hardest years of students' lives; for Stephanie, that was true, as she frames it as a time when the experiences her mother had were passed on to her. “You know better, you do better” is the edict she offers to sum up those challenges.

In the shorter of Destiny's two stories, her college experience story focuses on classroom instruction and curriculum. In what she calls a “humanities class,” with emphasis on *humanities*, Destiny shares she was the only Black person in the class but it did not bother her. As a sidebar, she acknowledges she had called herself a “kid” and notes she really is not a kid. Then, she shares the class was discussing Black culture, which she “didn't mind at all.” When the discussion shifted to Harriet Beecher Stowe's nineteenth-century abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Destiny indicates the instruction becomes problematic when the teacher “single-handedly targets” Destiny—the only Black student in the class—and asks if anyone has ever

called her an Uncle Tom. It is not clear how much knowledge Destiny has about the text itself or its afterlife, but the irony of the teacher's racist behavior is entangled with the irony of an abolitionist novel perpetuating racism in the very breadth which it denounced slavery (and would be critiqued for it by African American writers like Richard Wright and James Baldwin). Destiny polices herself and simply responds, "no" because she wants to avoid the "angryblackwoman" caricature.

As the trained educator in the group, it is not surprising that Scotia's second story also focuses on education. It is a story that stands out because it is one of two stories that focus on someone else's direct experience with structural racism (the other being Ronda's story about her father's new truck and being harassed by military police). Scotia's story focuses on her oldest son Charles's second grade experience in a lab school at Indiana State University. The story conjures the Black communal practice of "it takes a village" as well as the African American proverb "each one teach one." Scotia describes her beauty supply store and salon as the "heart of the [Black] community" in Terre Haute, Indiana. As she sets up her story, it is like a checklist for the politics of respectability that were, and sometimes continue to be, a critical blueprint for Black social uplift: her son tested above average in first grade and was ready for second grade; she liked to dress him up for school; and his father dropped him off at school. But, alas, embracing middle-class values has never been a guaranteed means of shirking the hyphenated duality W.E.B. Du Bois declared would be the problem of the twentieth century. A community woman, who happened to be the teacher aid at Charles's school, stopped by the shop one day and told Scotia she needed to go to the school and check on Charles. That is all she said. No explanation about what or why. Scotia goes to the school and discovers that Charles's desk has been located away from the rest of the students and positioned to have his back to the teacher. When asked about the desk arrangement, the teacher said Charles had a problem focusing on instruction. Similarly, when Scotia observes Charles only has a few words on the word rings used for the whole language approach to reading, the teacher, again, attributes the disparate treatment and outcomes Charles experienced to a focus problem rather than her own racism problem. Scotia holds no punches when she shares her own conclusion that as the only Black boy in the classroom the teacher had projected her own biases about Black boys onto Charles. While Scotia defied her guidance counselor's vision of her future, Charles, too, embodies his own counter-narrative as he became a physician and defied popular sentiments about the intellectual aptitude of Black boys.

Gotta Work

The history of coerced, uncompensated labor and various forms of legislation that continue to fail to assure there is actual substance to equality result in labor and employment remaining a vexed space of discrimination for

African Americans. It is no surprise then that when thinking about instances of structural racism that workplace issues would, like educational spaces, be a common narrative topic. A particular theme emerged within this topic: silence when Black women are wronged. Numerous women shared emotional stories not just about gendered racism but stories where they interject their own observation during the retelling that others witnessed the various acts of discrimination, and no one spoke up. When it comes to work, then, the interlocuters were not just testifying about bad experiences, they were also bearing witness to a moral failure on the part of their colleagues, or what in implicit bias training is called “bystander intervention.”

Lucrezia Hatfield and Felicia Hanney share stories about specific issues at work. For Lucrezia, it is a problem that defies the more typical forms of structural racism such as hiring, promotion, and wages. Her problem also, to some extent, defies the reductive inter-racial logic of racism being a white vs. “other” matter. For reasons she either did not know or did not think to add, Lucrezia was hired at a warehouse facility as a “picker”—someone who checks boxes after robots pick the products. She originally applied for a forklift position, but the picker position was salaried and full-time, so she was excited. Her enthusiasm was short-lived when a group of Black women who were her “mom’s age” learned she was “hired off the street without having to move up,” and they began treating her with hostility that manifested as physical bumps and calling her out of her name. This intra-racial dynamic is not one that is typically addressed in studies and reports on race and employment discrimination because it is between people of the same race. Lucrezia reported the incidents, but she notes all the supervisors and HR staff were white—she adds, “of course”—and they did not care; instead of addressing the bullying she was experiencing, she was labeled as “a difficult employee.” Sharing this story took courage because it could be classified as “airing dirty laundry,” by talking to white people about Black matters. Within that dirty laundry, however, is also the dirt of white supremacy that can perpetuate the internalization of racism and produce *intra*-racial conflicts. In the end, Lucrezia had no support system and quit a job she had been so excited about starting.

For Felicia, it is an age-old problem of “black people all looking the same [to white people].” This, too, is not one of the most familiar complaints about the intersection of race and gender in workplace discrimination complaints. It is nonetheless an experience many Black people have had or, at the least, have heard about other Black people experiencing. Felicia describes a situation where an office support person mistakes one of the 3–4 other Black women on the team of 17–20 employees for Felicia. Felicia begins by conceding that some people have doppelgangers, but this was not the case—she did not look like her Black colleague despite the staff person retorting, “well, you both look alike.” Felicia believed the situation made for a good opportunity for HR to educate the staff person (and perhaps others, too) on implicit bias and microaggressions; yet when she tells her manager, the manager responds:

“Don’t mind her, she didn’t mean anything by it.” Like Lucrezia, the job that Felicia originally loved became a space of harm where she felt unprotected and disrespected. She had to grapple with the reality that her *feelings* did not matter—feelings seem to be something Black women are not supposed to have, as Zora Neale Hurston’s Janie Crawford casually remarked Black women are “the mules of the world.”

Mary and Stephanie’s workplace experiences fall under the more familiar experiences of employment discrimination, and they are both intersectional cases in which gender is bound to race inextricably. In what becomes a common refrain in these narratives as a whole, Mary was very happy to have the jobs she discusses. In Mary’s case, a continuum of wage/salary discrimination emerges as she chronicles her work experience from a teenager through retirement. She first discussed her first job working in a fast-food restaurant. The pay was not as high as the job she was offered at the library, but unlike the library that limited the number of hours she could work, the restaurant paid less but allowed her to work as much as she liked. With an industrious spirit, Mary worked at that job until she learned that the two white boys who worked there and attended high school with her were being paid \$1.60/hour which was \$0.60/hour more than her. To add insult to injury, when she responded in surprise, one boy pointed out they were making the minimum wage. She was too embarrassed to tell them she was making less. When she talked to the manager about it, he matter-of-factly shared that they are paid higher because they need money to buy a car. When she disclosed that she needs money too and that her family has to buy second-hand clothes so her father can keep his church running, her boss told her she can get a different job but the job at his restaurant only pays her \$1.00/hour. Mary identifies this as a life-changing experience that set her on the path to college despite not knowing anyone who had attended college.

Mary defied her parents’ wishes that she marry a boy from church and “have a good life” when she applied to Indiana University and was accepted on a full ride scholarship. Although Mary hoped that her response to the restaurant experience would enable her to have a better life and not be discriminated against again that would not be the case. Her second story also focuses on employment. This time, she has her “dream job” as a program director at a large job placement center. There were three centers total, and she ran the largest of the three and had the most staff (17). This is one of the moments when Mary shares evidence of her success and holds up a wooden plaque that features articles about her achievements; she even reads an excerpt about her job placement prowess. The two smaller centers are run by a white man and white woman. Mary is concerned when the president of the organization says the white man will be promoted to senior director, and she is even more perplexed when she asks and learns that the position was never posted. The president freely shared that because the white man wanted to be president of an organization that the promotion gives him experience to achieve that goal. The president was unresponsive when she said she, too, wanted the same opportunity.

Mary processed this act of blatant bias by writing a “parable”: A student, B student, and F student. The F student doesn’t do his work but is appointed to be the teacher. She left the parable on the president’s desk, which resulted in him saying he must see her immediately. He told her he would pretend he did not see her note and explained that the white man was also getting the job and more money so that his pregnant wife would not have to work [and their household can maintain the *Leave It to Beaver* family dynamic]. When Mary shared that she was divorced and a single mother, the president said it is a white man’s world and the sooner she learned that the better off she would be. Mary asked for him to repeat that, and he walked over to her and placed his hand on her shoulder and said he is doing her a favor by telling her this.

At the time of her video recording, Mary was retired. Perhaps some would dismiss the egregiousness of the president’s actions—both promoting the lesser qualified white man and placing his hand on Mary’s shoulder—as something that happened decades ago but not now. There are reasons why in 2022 Black women make \$0.58 for every dollar white, non-Hispanic men make. This wage gap calculates to “the median annual pay for a Black woman in the United States is \$31,843, while the median annual pay for a white, non-Hispanic man is \$54,917—a difference of \$23,074 per year” (Fact Sheet, 2). The infographic below shows the spending ability Black women would have if the annual wage gap was eliminated.

Mary’s experience, and particularly the president’s rationale, remind me of an employment law exercise my Jurisprudence professor assigned to class in 2012. I was the only non-white student in the class. The exercise included a job description and the candidate profiles for two white men and one black woman; we were supposed to determine who should be offered the position, assumedly based upon the job description and candidate qualifications. As I read the scenario, my heart sank: the Black woman was the most objectively qualified; her work experience checked off all the job advertisement boxes. The younger white man had impressive post-secondary and post-graduate education but lacked relevant experience. The older white man had some experience but could not check off all boxes, but his family needs were included in his profile. I was the only student who raised a hand for selecting the Black

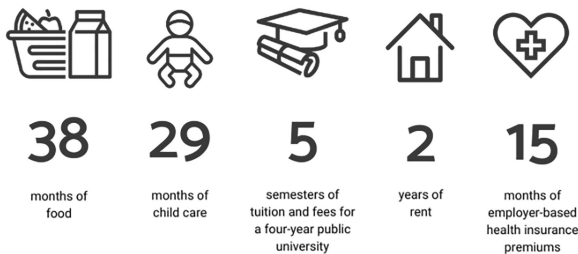


Figure 9.1 National Partnership for Women and Families³

woman, and when doing so imagined my classmates, who all had the wrong answer, likely imagined I just picked the Black woman because she was Black like me. My poor professor—an older Jewish man—looked so befuddled by my classmates’ failure. From Mary’s generation to my generation to the generation of my fellow students, who were much younger than me, it would seem little has changed. It *makes me wanna holler*.⁴

Section II: Signifyin’

Who’s Zoomin’ Who?

In a 1988 *New York Times* book review of Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s *Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*, John Wideman asserts: “If you look up ‘signifying’ in a dictionary, you’ll find a set of definitions. If you hear the word used by a black person, chances are you’ll need something more than a dictionary to understand what the speaker means.”⁵ When I write about signifying in this essay, I am most definitely referring to the Black vernacular tradition and particularly the way in which African Americans have adapted the West African tradition to be their own. Consistent with his moments of critique of Gates’s exercise in theorizing signifying, Wideman, I think, offers one of the most concise and accessible definitions of the Black vernacular term:

Signifying is verbal play - serious play that serves as instruction, entertainment, mental exercise, preparation for interacting with friend and foe in the social arena. In black vernacular, Signifying is a sign that words cannot be trusted, that even the most literal utterance allows room for interpretation, that language is both carnival and minefield.

While I find Wideman’s definition of signifying to be one of the clearest, it is focused on a particular form of signifying that is more linked to playing the dozen and other word play associated with social activities. That form of signifying does not appear in these narratives, and I attribute that to the gendered approach many scholars have taken to defining and representing signifying.

Although testifying is never in jest or seeking to entertain, the act of testifying can most certainly incorporate signifying. Moreover, particularly when practiced by Black women, signifying can be less about word play and instead utilize indirect techniques. Signifying is then part of these women’s lived experiences navigating structural racism (a racism that is often compounded by sexism), as well as a tool they invoke when telling their stories. Moreover, I would imagine that if the audience—videographer, faculty collaborators other than me, and project sponsorship—had also been African American the signifying would be less subtle, as the encoding of language and gesture would flow organically and spontaneously as it does in exclusively Black social spaces. Black spaces and most Black audiences would have allowed for colloquial phrases like “You know how *they* are,” “Quiet as it’s kept,” and

“Reclaiming my time” to be said in place of carefully crafted articulations that sounded “professional” and “formal.” One example of Black women’s signifyin’ that differs from Wideman and Gate’s more familiar male-gendered definitions is the popular quip from Representative Maxine Waters that she was “reclaiming my time” during the House Financial Services Committee hearing on July 27, 2017 when Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin persistently evaded her direct question about his office’s failure to respond to a Congressional request related to alleged financial ties between Donald Trump and Russia. Each time Mnuchin failed to answer the question, Representative Waters dismissed his response by stating, “reclaiming my time.” She eventually has had enough and informs Mnuchin: “Reclaiming my time. What he failed to tell you was when you’re on my time, I can reclaim it. He left that out so I’m reclaiming my time.” In this instance, and in its later appropriation by Black and Brown women on various social media platforms, Waters was signifyin’ in a classic Black woman fashion, as are Black and Brown women when that one sentence—*Reclaiming my time*—functions as a way to say you aren’t going to run all over me and I am in control here. The phrase also became a way of interrogating the ways in which Black women’s service to various professional industries has been under-valued and under-compensated. The use of reclamation in this context becomes testament, too.⁶

Deployment of these two Black vernacular forms can be particularly useful strategies when you are speaking about things many people do not want to hear. As Mary and Felicia shared, their bosses did not want to hear their concerns. They were invited to participate in this project and share their stories, but there is no guarantee of how their stories will be received. A crystal ball is not needed to know this to be true. Fannie Lou Hamer registered to vote—to use her voice at the ballot box; her and her husband were fired from their jobs, and Fannie was later arrested and severely beaten for her efforts to register other African Americans to vote and “become first-class citizens.”⁷ Clarence Thomas’s recent seething opinion on *Dobbs v. Jackson* (2022) is a troubling reminder that so many people did not want to hear Anita Hill’s testimony over 30 years ago. Or, more recently, the health care providers who did not want to hear Serena Williams say she knew she needed a CT scan and heparin drip when she could tell she was experiencing a pulmonary embolism after the birth of her daughter. These weren’t signifyin’ acts. These agentic acts were spoken in plain and direct English, but to retell them to audiences who also might not want to hear about it can result in retellings that incorporate signifyin’ as a means of making the story more palatable for those who might find it uncomfortable.

The stories our interlocuters shared are frequently laced with various forms of violence. Ronda Anthony bears witness to the violence inflicted upon her father when military police stop her family and detain her father for several hours. She reflects on no one in the family dealing with the impact of this incident that degraded her big and strong father who changed truck tires. Lucrezia Hatfield also experiences the pain of the emotional violence in her

toxic workspace that pits older African American women against a young African American woman they ought to be invested in protecting. Stephanie Caraway experiences multiple incidents of physical violence, which is perhaps why her narrative is one continuous story that is delivered more like a biographical chronicle of her life challenges. She begins with the violence of a random stranger hitting her in her face and without further details abruptly shifts to her mother's boyfriend who verbally and physically abuses her mother. And then, very nonchalantly, she shares she was shot when the convenience store her stepfather owned was robbed.

The nonchalant account of what is presented as everyday violence in Stephanie's narrative is a contrast with Destiny Faceson's account of what she considered police harassment of a large group of Black teenagers in an Indianapolis shopping mall. While Stephanie told her story with shifts and fades in both narrative structure and voice, Destiny told hers with deliberateness and pauses. The pauses both felt as if she wanted to be certain the gravity of situation was sinking in for the audience but also wanted the "Amen Corner"—in this case, only Kyle—to participate and turn her account of the situation into a dialogue rather than a monologue. At one point, she poses a rhetorical question about why the teens could not stop at the food court and another time she asks Kyle to edit into her recording an example of a civil rights protest when people are peaceful and are attacked when they speak up for themselves.

Our interlocuters shared accounts of many wrongs committed against them. Some of these wrongs they feel they were able to triumph over, but even in their articulation of triumph the residual effects remain, hovering in the corners and sometimes the center of their minds or popping up like a *rememory* in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*. And other times the wrongs are defeating and without triumph. In those instances, the actions and memory of them is more like a Langston Hughes "dream deferred" that dries up, festers, stinks, crusts over, and sags. But what is testifying without signifying? Regardless of success or defeat, the women's narratives incorporate rhetorical strategies and a uniformity rooted in a Black vernacular tradition of truth telling. What emerges is a collective effort to assure that their stories leave a mark on their audiences. They invite a dialogue with the audience through an urge to confront wrong doers, deconstruct the meaning of resilience, and reach their audience through didacticism.

Supa Dupa Fly

Both Scotia Brown and Ronda Anthony clearly articulate that they triumphed over the racism of their high school counselors, and they both also express a desire to confront those men years later and present their accomplishments as evidence of wrongs. Ronda says she was always tempted to return to her high school and tell the counselor he was wrong. Scotia wants to do a bit more than tell the counselor he was wrong—she always wanted to go back

and ask him what it was about her that made him reach a conclusion like that about her. She says she worries about how many lives were “thwarted” due to his advice. In Scotia’s second story, she also mentions a different opportunity to “go back.” She says she never had the opportunity to go back and have a conversation with the woman who told Scotia she needed to check on Charles. She expresses her gratitude that the woman had the courage to speak up.

It's Not Right but It's Okay

There is a tendency to identify Black girls and women as resilient, as innately possessing an inner strength that despite being Hurston’s *mules of da world* enables them to “still rise,” as quoted on everything from t-shirt to notebook; a slogan borrowed from Maya Angelou and scripted on the property and bodies of Black women and girls. But when reading between the lines and hearing the encoded double text of these interlocutors there is a heavy dose of self-assurance that frames the so-called resilience. In fact, resilience becomes something else—it is displaced by a concept of “being okay,” of accepting negative outcomes as “okay” or “for the best.” Mary uses the word “recover” to describe both of her stories. For Mary, the “advice” of the president that she must accept it is a white man’s world was something she could not get over. She recognized that no matter how much education or how much experience she had, she would not be promoted in that organization. When the organization lost a bid, she was not kept on and neither was her staff. The other two center directors were kept and their staff were offered other positions in the organization. Mary acquiesces, “it probably was for the best.” She leaves that position and starts her own business called Indiana Fair Chance, LLC, hires two of her former employees, and is successful at not only receiving a large grant but in beating the less qualified white man who was promoted over her at her former job. She slips into her narrative, “vengeance is mine sayeth the Lord,” and signifies with a bit more bite when she points out his team was disqualified for submitting their grant 30 minutes late, which she notes “anyone who knows about how to apply for grants knows you must follow the rules.” She was okay in that moment, but years later she decided to look up the white man who was advanced over her. He was then an executive director in another state. He was making \$279,000 *more* than she was when she retired. She thought about what a difference that salary difference would have made in her life if their employer had groomed and invested in her. But she was “okay.”

For Stephanie, an assault becomes “not important,” because a little taste of freedom was the tradeoff. After a stranger hits her when she was walking to a friend’s house, Stephanie concludes she cannot tell her mother, or she would not be permitted to leave the house again. The narrative then makes an abrupt shift to Stephanie’s abusive stepfather. Going back in time to that moment, Stephanie ruminates,

She has enough to worry about with *him* (her eyes dart quickly to look up into the camera and then back down quickly). Hope he's not there when I get home, 'cuz I know if he is, she'll act differently. And, again, it will all be my fault.

The idea of wrongs toward her being unimportant or her own actions being at fault when things went wrong during her youth seem to have carried over into adulthood. Like Mary, Stephanie also experienced a lower achieving man being given opportunities for advancement that were not warranted. She explains that she was in an interim supervisory role and applied for a permanent position. Her male colleague also applied. Stephanie tested well. He did not test well, and she was shocked when she learned they were not appointing her to the position and were instead going to let her male colleague retest later, so he could try for a better score. At this point, she pauses for an extended period and works to hold back tears. She says she thought she had gotten over it. At the conclusion of her narrative, she returns to not getting the promotion, and says "it was for the best."

Even when what is clearly wrong is "okay" or "for the best," it was clear that every participant wanted their stories to help change how society views and treats African American women. Whether through imploring or imperative commands, there is a significant element of didacticism in the narratives. The inclusion of this tactic suggests the interlocutors do not imagine their audience to be Black women or Black people more generally. LaToya Hale-Tahirou tells a rather abbreviated story about heavy postpartum bleeding. She admits that she does not know what caused the problem or how it was remedied, because she was afraid to ask questions or advocate for herself. She explains—as have several other interlocutors—that she did not want her fear or insecurities to be interpreted as an angry or difficult Black woman. She, therefore, felt it was her duty to prove to other races that all Black women are not that way. Now, personally and professionally she advocates for women and for policy change.

LaToya also references social systems and the role they play in racism. This instructional approach, or "schooling" in the Black vernacular tradition, is heavy in Destiny Faceson's narrative. From her sports analogies of the police playing offense and the teenagers being compelled to play defense, to her conclusion that the shopping mall incident was the equivalent of a "modern day civil rights movement," Destiny, whose details in her narrative suggest she is one of the younger interlocutors (along with Lucrezia Hatfield), is not inclined to be "okay" with wrongs not being addressed. She is not pleased that her lawyer "intentionally let it go" when she wanted to sue for the police assaulting her. It was traumatizing for her, which is why she did not let it go and why she does what she does today.

An additional instructional moment for Destiny is couched in her second story. When her professor singled her out to ask if she had ever been called "an Uncle Tom," Destiny notes that two white male peers sitting adjacent to her said, "did you hear what she just asked her?", but no one in the class

actually spoke up for her and told the teacher she was wrong. Felicia does not mention her colleagues not speaking up when she was called by another Black woman's name, but she does stress the importance of educating people about racism, implicit biases, and why it is wrong to "clump" people together. Felicia ended her first story with a similar instructional tone with the imperative that women speak up and be vocal. She mentions her cesarean scar is a constant reminder to advocate for herself: "You have to stand firm even if people don't believe you—make sure your voice is heard."

To a greater extent than anyone else, Stephanie is the most didactic. At the conclusion of her video, she shifts from recounting the numerous story segments of the comprehensive whole narrative and begins to sound like a sermon in a Black liberation theology fashion. She discusses overcoming situations and obstacles that arise in the lives of women of color. In a stream of consciousness style, she brings up living wage laws and asks, how do you "overcome" \$14/hour jobs. She delivers a call to action: "empower young people to know they are worth so much more." And another: "Overcome mental health stigma—find those things that help you get through in life." These appeals and overtures were not the assignment. The fact that numerous women chose to incorporate them is both testifying and signifyin'.

On the Sorrow Songs: A Conclusion

Consistent with the Black vernacular tradition within in which I have chosen to situate my analysis of these narratives, I chose to use Black popular music lyrics and song titles as subheadings throughout my essay. This is not an original act on my part; rather, it is signifyin' on W.E.B. DuBois's organization of *The Souls of Black Folk* framed by lines from slave spirituals, what he calls Sorrow Songs. Sorrow Songs were double-voiced texts through which DuBois asserts "the slave spoke to the world. Such a message is naturally veiled and half articulate." These women told double-voiced narratives, so I thought it appropriate to pair their narratives with music that simultaneously speaks to their experiences while also speaks to what they might resist saying directly, as DuBois notes of the Sorrow Songs, "Over the inner thoughts of the slaves and their relations one with another the shadow of fear ever hung, so that we get but glimpses here and there, and also with them, eloquent omissions and silences" (186). Thus, while I have been granted the permission of analyzing these women's narratives as a Black woman who has experienced all the same experiences with structural inequalities and especially systemic gendered racism, I add to my analysis a popular connection. An important reason I do this is because so often popular culture has functioned as one of the only spaces where Black women's experiences have been made legible.

The gospel-themed "His Eye Is on the Sparrow," although written by a white Canadian-American lyricist Civilla D. Martin, has been covered by many well-known Black gospel and R&B singers, including Mahalia Jackson, Ethel Waters, Marvin Gaye, Diana Ross, Deniece Williams, Lauryn Hill,

and Whitney Houston. What a great song for a section discussing testifying and testimonies, for if a god can care about a being as small as a sparrow, then surely human lives matter and are worthy of protection. Mahalia Jackson recorded her 1951 cover in a post-WWII period of a “Golden Age” for white America that would soon experience the full force of a long-planned civil rights movement. Whitney Houston’s cover was released one month after her untimely passing in 2012. Although Jackson’s version offers a tone and tempo that resonates with the civil rights movement, Houston’s riffs and runs strike me as analogous to Black women’s signifying where often times more is said than what is packed into a sentence, and sometimes even more is said by silence.

“Young, Gifted and Black” is one of Nina Simone’s many songs produced during her shift to activist-oriented music. She dedicated the song to her friend the playwright Lorraine Hansberry who died in 1965 from cancer at age 34. The song title is based on when Hansberry met with a group of students who won an essay contest. Hansberry told them, “I wanted to be able to come here and speak with you on this occasion because you are young, gifted and black.”⁸ To this day, the racist projections of “unintelligent” and “uneducable” thrust upon Black children and young adults plagues educational experiences and outcomes. Far too many educators continue to embrace Thomas Jefferson’s pseudo-scientific sentiment that,

Comparing them [Negros] by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous (Notes on the State of Virginia).⁹

The frequent attention to education and educational experiences that emerges in the narratives resonates with Simone’s lyrics that celebrate Black youth’s intelligence.

With its fast tempo and Go-Go percussion Amerie’s “Gotta Work” lyrically expresses persistence, setbacks, and success. The workplace can be such a vexed space for Black women to navigate. Beyond the raced gender wage gap, presumptions of incompetence abound. In spite of the labor of enslaved people building the foundation of this nation, post-emancipation Black people were often depicted and described as lazy and inferior and, in most instances, concerted efforts were made to restrict the type of employment opportunities available to them. “Gotta work,” then is also a metaphor for navigating structural systems that make success at work for Black women about more than just skills, intelligence and ambition.

Like the subsection it is assigned to, Aretha Franklin’s “Who’s Zoomin’ Who” is one of many Black popular music songs whose lyrics fit Wideman’s definition of signifying as, “If you hear the word used by a black person,

chances are you'll need something more than a dictionary to understand what the speaker means." The use of "zoomin'" is slang, or wordplay, to describe two people checking one another out.

Statements beginning with "Black women..." so often are completed with a pejorative. The recent resignation of Claudine Gay, the first Black president of Harvard University, has produced a media maelstrom of largely Black women pundits declaring Black women are the most hated and abused demographic in the world.¹⁰ That is why an Old School throwback like Missy Elliott's "The Rain" (Supa Dupa Fly) strikes me as an apropos way to head a [very slim] section about Black women wanting to make sure white folks know their sentiments about them were dead wrong. One adjective is not enough to describe Missy, hence both "supa" and "dupa" are needed to describe her self-adulation. In a society that does not see greatness in a brown-skinned, short-haired, full-figured Black woman liked Missy, "The Rain" is a fitting theme song for Black women who are rarely celebrated.

There are a number of tragic black songstresses, but Whitney Houston is perhaps the most tragic for my generation. The toll that fame and fortune had on her life was on constant media display. "It's not right but it's okay" becomes a kind of mantra for how Black women keep moving on when the cards are stacked against their success, and, importantly, when no one seems to have a problem with that reality other than Black women. What more can you do but try to convince yourself you will be okay?

I am sure everyone involved with this project hopes giving these women a platform for their voices to be heard will make a change. The opportunity to share their stories certainly seemed cathartic, or at the very least to provide an opportunity to pause and reflect. Ronda begins her narrative with a self-reflective tone and shares that she had packed the incidents away, not reflecting upon them until she was invited to participate in this project. She acknowledges having kept white people at a distance. Ronda concludes her narrative with the hope that telling her story will be cathartic because she gets upset just thinking about it. Maybe, she says, she will write about it one day. Scotia reflects on how low expectations can shatter dreams and self-esteem, while Mary admonishes companies "to invest in everybody." Felicia wants to be better equipped in the future if she encounters a microaggression again, and LaToya places things in God's hands. I think society's hands, too, should be invested in social change and equitable outcomes.

Notes

- 1 Here, I allude to Anna Julia Cooper's often-quoted passage about Black womanhood in *A Voice from the South* (1892).
- 2 I use African American as a racial descriptor for the women who participated in this project, because the grant funding the project uses that terminology. When I write more generally, I use "Black," for both the politics it signifies and the global black inclusivity it signifies.

- 3 <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/fair-pay/quantifying-americas-gender-wage-gap.pdf>
- 4 The phrase “makes me wanna holler” is the popular title of soul singer Marvin Gaye’s “Inner City Blues” song on his *What’s Going On* (1971) album. It is also the title of journalist Nathan McCall’s popular memoir *Makes Me Wanna Holler: A Young Black Man in America* (1995).
- 5 <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/08/14/books/playing-not-joking-with-language.html>.
- 6 An additional popular way in which Black women’s signifying practices can break from most heterosexual, cis-gender Black men is through bodily gestures like eyerolling, neck rolling, and lip twisting.
- 7 <https://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/sayitplain/flhamer.html>.
- 8 <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/08/683021559/nina-simone-to-be-young-gifted-and-black-american-anthem>.
- 9 Perhaps the enslaved had the last laugh as many times the character traits Jefferson “documents” were feigned forms of a more passive yet deliberate resistance to slavery.
- 10 After severe backlash from responses about campus speech activities related to the Israel-Hamas War, and then subsequent right-wing allegations of plagiarism in her dissertation and published work that news media reported as minor citation errors, Claudine Gay resigned on January 2, 2024. The resignation was first reported in the *Harvard Crimson*. <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2024/1/3/claudine-gay-resign-harvard/>

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10 She Was Not Heard

Personal Narratives that Tackle Structural Racism

Robyn Warhol

Introduction

Although they differ in circumstances and details, all the anecdotes told by the eight African American women who participated in this study are stories about not being heard.

Sometimes, the women were not heard because they silenced themselves, as Destiny Faceson did when a white college teacher directed a racist question to her in an all-white classroom (“Hey, Destiny! Has anyone ever called you an ‘Uncle Tom?’”). Not wanting to be the “Angry Black Woman,” Destiny spoke just one word—a disgusted “No”—and didn’t say what she thought about the malice behind that question. She was not heard. In the same spirit, LaToya Hale-Tahirou silenced herself in the examination room where she had not received a clear explanation for the hemorrhaging blood clots that brought her to the hospital. Because she “will not push in a hospital so as not to look like an angry Black woman, a difficult Black woman,” LaToya never got a clear explanation of what might have been a life-threatening condition. She was not heard. At 14 years old, Stephany Caraway couldn’t tell anyone that a male stranger had crossed the street to punch her, hard, in the nose. She figured the police wouldn’t believe her, and her mother—who almost never let her go out alone—would put the blame on her. She was not heard.

Sometimes, the women spoke up loud and clear, but if anyone heard them, no one listened. As a child, LaToya struggled with whether or not to tell her white relatives how much their exclusion of her white grandmother, biracial mother and herself hurt. The first time she met some of her grandmother’s siblings, she spoke up, but “as I stood there in the living room pouring out my heart, I knew it would not change a thing.” She was not heard. Felicia Hanney had a similar experience when she repeatedly asked for pain medication to address a tear in her Caesarean incision and her white doctor assumed she was a drug-seeking addict. Not responding to the fact of Felicia’s torn incision, the doctor kept explaining over and over that “usually” the prescription Felicia had received was enough, so Felicia could not have the medication she needed for pain that was making her cry, right there in the doctor’s office. She was not heard. Destiny experienced it when police officers rounded

up her group of friends for stopping in a food court on a Saturday night at the mall. Destiny and the other outraged teenagers loudly declared their civil rights in an increasingly tense scene that ended with an officer slamming Destiny's head against the side of a police van. She was not heard. Ronda Henry Anthony experienced the same thing when police arbitrarily pulled her family's new pickup truck over, threw her father to the ground, and held his face down in the mud when he stepped out of the car to reach for his drivers' license. Ronda was screaming, pleading, "Don't hurt my father!" but the officer with his knee on her father's neck paid no attention. She was not heard.

These episodes add up to that feeling so common in nightmares, of being in danger and opening your mouth to scream, yet not being able to make a sound. When I say "your" in this context, I am making a universalizing gesture, expressing my assumption that most people sometimes have this nightmare and therefore know this feeling. But in each of these stories, the nightmare of not being able to make oneself heard is real and it arises specifically because the woman is Black. The white teacher singled Destiny out as the only African American in her class. LaToya held back her questions in the doctor's office because she was shielding herself from assumptions based on stereotypes of "unintelligent" or "angry" Black women. Fourteen-year-old Stephanie was probably right that the police would not take her accusation against an unknown man seriously, and she knew her mother's belief that being alone in public was too dangerous for a young Black girl would just get stronger if she told her story, resulting in even more restrictions on her independence. The doctor treating Felicia jumped to the conclusion that she was an opioid addict because Felicia was an African American woman crying in desperation as she asked for more pills. Destiny and her friends were harassed and then arrested for being a group of young Black people in public—as Destiny points out, when the white 4-H kids come in large groups to the mall, no police are around. The abuse to which Ronda saw her father subjected at the hands of the police was just one of countless precursors to the highly racialized scene of George Floyd's murder. To hear the stories one after another is to see the structural similarities not just among the narratives but among all these highly stressful experiences of racism, as well.

I take our assignment in this project to be listening to the eight women's stories, carefully hearing what they say and what they mean. In the mid-1990s, at the peak of academia's "identity politics" era, the feminist literary theorist Barbara Johnson came to lecture on Zora Neale Hurston at a nearly all-white university in an even whiter New England state. After the lecture, one of the few African Americans in the audience rose and asked Johnson how she, as a white woman, was authorized to speak to the writing and experience of Black women. Respectfully, Johnson paused. In her quiet way, she then said something like, "I can never speak for Black women. But I can listen. To write about Black women's writing I have to hear what they are saying before I can say anything at all." Deconstructionists like Johnson infused feminist theory with the concept of replacing *either/or*-thinking with

bothland. A critic is not *either* a white person and therefore not qualified to write about Black stories *or* an African American person and therefore able to do so. As a white critic, Johnson acknowledged that she was *both* inadequate to the task of fully comprehending Black experience *and* committed to listening, to subordinating her own perspective to the testimony of African American women's stories. I approach this assignment in that same spirit, doing my best to hear the stories our collaborators told about their first-hand experiences of racism before I move into narrative analysis of those stories.

The next two sections of this chapter will address the "structures of everyday racism" in two senses. First, I will focus on narrative structure, pointing out patterns in the ways the eight women tell their stories about racist experiences. These patterns include (1) typological pairing of stories about individual women's gaining increased agency in the face of racism; (2) shifts in verb tense from past to present at the climax of the story; and (3) variations on narrative closure. The final section will focus on some of the underlying structures of institutional racism that these stories reveal. Looking carefully at the stories—really *listening* to them—you can see through the surface of each narrative, to perceive the layering of institutional racisms beneath the overt violence and disrespect. The two emphases—one on narrative structure and the other on structural racism—represent two possible approaches to answering some of the questions that motivate our larger project: What do these African American women's stories tell us about racism that non-African Americans don't know anything about, but need to hear? What can storytelling reveal about the structures of everyday racism that statistics can't express? How might stories of racism point the way toward dismantling those structures? As an intellectual exercise, narrative analysis can't bring about material changes in the world. It can, however, produce insights that could motivate action.

Narrative Patterns in Stories of Everyday Racism

Our team of narrative analysts asked each of the eight women participants to tell two stories about their experience with racism, one where they felt that had been defeated by racism and one where they had prevailed. Not every participant told two stories, and for those who did, the story of triumphing over racism is not always easily distinguishable from the story of defeat. Two of the participants, however, told stories I see as structurally paired. Both Scotia Brown and Mary Bullock told a first story about a situation where racism frustrated their goals and a second story paralleling the first in situation and sequence of events but ending with a success.

The relationship between the paired stories is reminiscent of the typological relationship many Christians have perceived between pairs of stories in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. A typological reading of the story of Abraham and Isaac, for instance, sees Abraham's willingness to follow his God's command to sacrifice his son Isaac as a prefiguration of the New

Testament God's sacrifice of his own son on the cross. The lamb provided to Abraham as a substitute renders Abraham's story of sacrificing his son incomplete, while the death of the "Lamb of God" brings the story to fulfillment. According to typological thinking, the meaning of Abraham's story is only made clear by its typological relationship to its second iteration. A similar typological dynamic is at work in Scotia's and Mary's paired stories.

In her first story, Scotia tells about a high-school guidance counselor who told her she should not try to go to college. She explains that she was one of six African Americans at her school, which was in "an all-white area." The counselor, who had never spoken to Scotia before or since, called her into his office to tell her she had performed poorly on the ACT. Scotia says he told her "I needed to go to a clerical school because I would never be successful at the college level." That the counselor is white goes without saying. Scotia points out that he knew nothing about her or her background, and that he also obviously knew nothing about the data showing that African Americans typically performed poorly on standardized tests. Scotia describes his action as "sowing a seed" of doubt about her capabilities, and she asks herself, "How many seeds were sown into the lives of African Americans who did not perform well on the standardized test, how many lives were thwarted by that kind of advice?" Twice in her story Scotia says she would have liked to go back and have a conversation with that counselor to ask him "what was it about me other than that score that would have him sow that seed into my life?" Coming from a family where not attending college "was not an option," Scotia, who is now a doctoral student, reports that she became a guidance counselor herself.

I committed myself to never sowing that kind of a seed into the life of a student because it brings burdens—you know, there were times along my path that when I was challenged to do something I questioned whether I had the ability to do it, because that professional who was in the position of guiding students in their chosen career paths said I didn't have the ability to do it.

She has proven that counselor wrong and she has dedicated her own career to preventing the same kind of damage in the lives of students she works with. In this respect, she has overcome this particular aspect of racism, but she still feels "I would have loved to have had that conversation with him" about the damage his assumptions caused.

In Scotia's second story, she continues the theme of low educational expectations for African American children, but this time, she manages to have the conversation she never had in the first story. This second story concerns the education of her son, who is now a successful doctor. Having tested above average in first grade, he entered a second-grade class where he was the only African American child. One day, a woman came into the shop that Scotia's family owned at the time and said, "Scotia, I need you to go to school and

check on Charles.” Puzzled, Scotia went and was troubled to see that her son’s desk had been turned to face the wall, “looking away from the classroom” with his “back to instruction.” Scotia “had a conversation with the teacher,” who said she was “having some issues with Charles, some real concern” because he was “distracted, incapable of focusing.” Over the weekend, Scotia discussed this with her husband and on Monday she went back to talk again to the teacher. She told her to turn the boy’s desk so that he was facing the classroom like everyone else. During this visit, Scotia noticed that the children each had a “word ring” with tags for all the words they had learned, but Charles had fewer words on his ring than the other children had. The teacher attributed this to his inability to focus or to grasp the concepts she was teaching, and Scotia felt “in my gut” that the teacher had low expectations for the only Black child in her class. Scotia had a conversation with the principal as well, expressing her concerns. The upshot of these conversations was that Scotia and her husband decided to move Charles to another school, where he flourished. Scotia explicitly compares Charles’s experience to her own: “How many other children have come under that same low expectation that I experienced as an eleventh grader? And that’s just a story that doesn’t get told a lot.” In her contributions to the project, Scotia has, in effect, told the same story twice, with the second story fulfilling the thwarted desire to “have a conversation,” to speak up about the damage that teachers’ and counselors’ low expectations can do to African American children’s self-esteem. In place of the first story’s subjunctive “I would have liked to have had a conversation,” the second story asserts several times: “I had a conversation.” Those conversations led to action that ensured Charles, who grew up to become a physician, would not be defeated by a second-grade teacher’s racist preconceptions about his potential.

Like Scotia, Mary tells two stories that are structured typologically. In Mary’s case, the second story’s fulfillment of the possibilities raised by the first turns out to be more ambiguous than in Scotia’s case. Mary tells two stories about discrimination in workplaces where both racism and sexism blocked her ability to achieve. First, she tells about a job she got in high school to supplement her family’s income because much of what her father, a pastor, earned went back to his church. She had been offered a job in a library with higher pay (\$1.60 an hour, which was minimum wage) but fewer hours. The fast-food store owner told her the job paid only \$1.00 an hour but she could work as many hours as she liked. Deciding the fast-food job would yield more, Mary took it, working alongside a black manager and two white boys she knew from school. One night, the store was robbed at gunpoint. After the police came, Mary overheard one of her white classmates say to the other, “Man, we’re risking our life for \$1.60 an hour? This is not worth it!” According to Mary,

So I looked at them and I said, ‘You guys make \$1.60 an hour?’ And they were like, ‘Yeah, that’s minimum wage, Mary!’. So I was too embarrassed to tell them that I was only making a dollar an hour. I was too embarrassed.

After going home and feeling sad (rather than angry), Mary approached the owner the next day and said, “The two guys that go to high school with me, they said they’re making \$1.60 an hour. And I’m only making a dollar.” The owner responded, “Mary, they want to buy a car and they need more money so that’s why they get \$1.60 and you only get \$1.00.” Mary replied, “Well, I need money too, because I’m using my money to supplement—you know, we have to buy clothing from second-hand stores because my dad needs money for the church.” The owner’s response: “Mary, I feel bad for you— but it only pays a dollar an hour and if you want to get another job you can, but that’s what it pays.” Mary does not comment on the blatant discrimination behind this weak logic, but declares that the incident, though “traumatic and bad,” changed her life. It inspired her to plan for college (against her family’s inclinations) and ultimately to graduate from Indiana University on a full-ride scholarship “so that no one could discriminate against me again.”

Despite her youthful optimism, Mary’s education did not prevent future discrimination. Mary’s second story, set at a later period in life and in a more sophisticated work situation, is in essence identical to the first. Now a licensed social worker, Mary directed one of three divisions in a large organization placing people in jobs. Her boss announced one day that one of the other directors, a white man, would be promoted to Senior Director over Mary and the third director, a white woman. As she had done at the fast-food store, Mary spoke privately to the boss to question this. The boss explained that the white man had ambitions to move up in the organization and would receive job training through this promotion. Also, his wife was pregnant and wanted to stay home with their child. Mary pointed out that she was a single mother and that she, too, would have been interested in the opportunity to move up in the organization. She asked him if the position had been posted. He said “No,” then put his hand on her shoulder and told her: “This is a white man’s world. The sooner you learn that, the better off you will be because it is a white man’s world.” Just like the fast-food owner, this boss first gave specious reasons for the male employees’ needing more money, then responded to Mary’s own expressed need by asserting that this is just the way it is. Placing his hand on her shoulder exactly parallels the fast-food owner’s saying “I feel bad for you, Mary,” as both are empty gestures of sympathy for a situation these men could rectify but won’t. Mary continues in the job but gets laid off in a reorganization that retains her two white colleagues. She says that she never again sought a managerial or supervisory position, but instead started her own business and eventually became a therapist. Her successful career provides the typological fulfillment of the frustration she describes in her first story. She says that this work has made her happy because she is “helping people, making a difference.” Still, when she retired after 20 years as a therapist, Mary looked up the job title and salary of the man who had been promoted over her, learning that he was now making \$270,000

above what she earned each year. Wondering how different her life would be if that organization had made her Senior Director instead of him, she now tells businesses to invest in everybody, “not just the obvious people.”

Typology challenges conventional notions of temporality, as the typological fulfillment of a previously told story seems to place both narratives in the same moment together, outside of time. What happened before happens again, with a difference. But that difference doesn't always mean unqualified progress, as the conclusion of Mary's story shows. The continual repetition of parallel discriminatory events in Scotia's and Mary's stories suggest that racism occurs outside of the forward march of personal or national history, stubbornly staying the same even as outward conditions are changing.

This sense of racism's persistent presence comes across vividly in six of the storytellers' shifts from past-tense to present-tense verbs at the climactic moments of their narratives.¹ In fiction, narratorial shifts from past tense to present signify a rhetorical technique for engaging the reader more fully by making a narrated situation seem to come alive. In the women's oral narratives of their own experience, however, the shifts to present tense appear to be spontaneous rather than being calculated for an effect. The speakers' switch to present-tense narration may, of course, simply be a sign that they are following internalized conventions of storytelling as they narrate.² Listening to the stories one after another, though, led me to wonder whether the usual explanation of present-tense narration as a rhetorical choice might be too narrow to account for how these speakers use it.

The two women who read the bulk of their stories from written drafts, LaToya and Stephanie, stay consistently in the past tense, in keeping with correct academic writing style. Each of the others uses the past tense in telling the story extemporaneously but will break momentarily into the present when emotions in the narrative moment run high. Scotia does it only once, exclaiming “I was eleventh grade when that happened to me; *he's second grade!*” After Mary's discovery that her coworkers made 60% more than her dollar per hour, she says, “I went home and *I start feeling*, I don't know, I felt sad in a way, but I felt cheated.” Felicia's unspoken answer to the white coworker who conflates her with another Black female colleague shifts into the present: “*This is not right! I don't appreciate you just making an assumption that we all look alike!*” Lucrezia reflects on her manager's dismissal of her complaint against her coworkers as if it were happening now: “So apparently because *I'm being bullied* and harassed and physically assaulted, that, you know, *I'm the difficult employee.*” The more violent the incident, the more consistently present-tense verbs intrude. Ronda weeps as she says,

They have my father on the ground, there's five or six of them ... I'm looking at them do this to my father, we're trying to figure out, 'Why are you-all doing this? Why did you stop us in the first place?'

After Destiny has announced “*Here comes the police,*” her story uses present tense in an extended address to them, as in

Now we’re ‘harassing’ [she makes the scare-quote gesture] the police. But you’re offending us, you’re putting [our friend] in a position where she’s about to drop her child and we’re on an escalator! And you’re putting all of us twenty or thirty teenagers out, so the escalator is packed!

In terms of narrative structure, these shifts to the present tense at moments of high intensity have the effect of bringing the past alive not just in the narrative present but in the reader’s or listener’s present as well, suggesting that the audience can witness the speaker’s imaginative reliving of the events. Thinking of the women not as literary narrators but as people, I see these shifts into the present as a sign that the outrage, the frustration, the exasperation, the fear sparked by the episodes is an ongoing condition, a feeling that won’t stay relegated to the past, but lives on in each individual person. This suggests the impact of racism is not just continual, as incidents like these happen to African Americans every day, but continuous, too: a never-fading presence animating the women’s daily experience.³

A similar pattern emerges in the way the women end their stories. All narratives typically end with varying degrees of closure, that is, the sense that the story has reached completion because the central complications have been resolved. A story with closure ultimately achieves stasis; one without closure feels open-ended. The women’s stories of overcoming racism all reach some degree of closure, as does just one story about being thwarted by racism. All the rest of the stories—instances where the women felt they could not overcome the effects of racist encounters—don’t achieve that “sense of an ending.” Like the present-tense verbs, the open-ended conclusions suggest that not only the story, but the experience itself is still in some sense ongoing.

The storytellers themselves can be explicit about that lack of resolution. About her father’s abuse at the hands of traffic police, Ronda says,

I don’t know that I’ve ever really processed it. I would love to write a story about it at some point, and just do a cathartic thing. I’m hoping that in some ways this is cathartic, because I still get emotionally upset, just thinking about it.

Destiny’s story of police brutality against her and her friends ends very similarly to Ronda’s: “It didn’t get fought. We essentially let it go. Traumatizing for me, so I didn’t in a sense let it go. That’s why I’m here today doing what I’m doing.” For Destiny, being “here today doing what I’m doing” might well mean telling these stories in the cause of anti-racism; it might also mean taking part in other activist work for social justice. While both Destiny and Ronda speak to the lack of closure and to their hope that the telling itself

will bring a kind of resolution, in other instances the narrators simply stop in what feels like the middle of a story. Destiny leaves her narrative about the racism she encounters at college entirely open. Having explained that she had left school for a month after the “Uncle Tom” incident, she says,

My view: this school is not where I want to be. I just about don't even feel safe here in a sense, if you can be as bold as to say that. I eventually came back. I eventually went back. And I'll just leave it at that. I still go to that school. Yeah.

The tone of Destiny's voice indicates this is the sarcastic “yeah” of the phrase, “yeah right,” defined by the Urban Dictionary as an ironic expression of agreement that really means disagreement or dismissal (see ‘whatever’).⁴ Suspended in the irony of non-affirmative affirmation, the end of Destiny's story does not close. That same non-affirmative “yeah” ends Lucrezia's account of being bullied at her workplace:

So I end up just quitting the job and finding some place where I'm not going to be just a lawsuit statistic or where I'm going to be heard because they don't think that because I am a certain age or whatever that it's ok for me to be bullied. So yeah. That's the story.⁵

Felicia, whose story about racism in the workplace parallels Lucrezia's in that her complaint to a manager yields no results, is speaking far enough away from the moment to see it as a learning experience. The lack of resolution of the problem, though, carries over into a lack of closure in the story, which ends:

It was a lesson learned, an a-ha! moment for me, to be educating myself and making sure (hopefully that does not happen in the future but if it does), I can be better equipped to address it in the moment. Because I'm not sure if I make a complaint, how far it will go. And in that case, it didn't go far at all, because it just went to the manager and my manager dismissed it, as if it was not a big deal. So those are my two stories.

Each of these unresolved stories is “to be continued,” either in the emotional experience of the speaker, the social circumstances of racism, or both.

When the stories do get to closure, they reflect the storytellers' own resolve to use their experiences to try to smooth the way for those who come up after them. Both Mary and Stephanie conclude their workplace stories by explaining that they moved out of institutions that favored white men and subsequently became self-employed. Both refer to “being of service” or “helping people” as compensation for stepping away from their earlier ambitions. LaToya adds a layer of certitude to a similar conclusion by attributing her experience of racism to providence: “The path that God has me on has

shown that everything I have gone through aligns with his will for me to do the work that I'm doing now" in a "job where I help other women to advocate for themselves." LaToya concludes that this is her success story, "of how I overcame a form of racism that was an internal struggle with myself, to help others," to become "a community connector to help other people push for change." Scotia carries the memory of the discouraging high-school counselor into her work with African American students who have internalized low expectations for success. "I ... reflect on that and it causes me to work that much harder as I interact with young people," she explains. Felicia ends her story with advice to Black women, born of her experience in the doctor's office:

This is something I will never forget because I have a scar on my body to remind me, and looking at the place where that scar had torn is a reminder that, you know what? You have to advocate for yourself, you have to stand firm on what you're saying, even if people don't believe you, you have to make sure that your voice is heard.

Closure in these stories represents the speaker's commitment to activism on behalf of women who face the same racist challenges that they have—to some degree—overcome. This is not to say that the storytellers take on personal responsibility for the racism that structures all the institutions where their stories take place: the schools and universities, the businesses and non-profits, the doctors' practices and hospitals, the family and the police. Whether or not their stories come to closure, each of the women emphasizes her awareness that racism is not so much personal as it is structural.

Structures of Institutional Racism

In all but one of the stories, the racism motivating the white antagonist—that is, the suspicious doctor, the discouraging counselor, the dismissive manager, the violent policeman—is right out there on the surface. The link between the speaker's blackness and the behavior of the white person(s) is easy—if painful—to perceive, even when the person who discriminates is not as forthright about it as the supervisor who told Mary, "It's a white man's world." The setting of each story provides what Destiny calls an "institutional frame" that ought to protect against racist incidents but actually enables them. In Destiny's classroom story, for example, she says she left the university not just because her teacher asked if she had been called an 'Uncle Tom,' but because all but two of her classmates behaved as though they had been wondering the same thing. The two white male students who registered surprise at the question did not speak up to criticize it. "For me it was an institution of carelessness towards race, racism. I sat in a classroom where, but two people, said nothing did nothing—it was just normal." Destiny herself did not protest because "I didn't want to show my butt. I wanted to act as

professionally as I could among my peers. I swallowed that.” The institution defines professional behavior among women as complaisance; the hierarchy of the classroom prevents any student, even a white male student, from criticizing a teacher’s question to her face. Destiny might not have been the only person in the room who was appalled by the question, but institutional norms guaranteed that she would never find that out. Her alienation from the university is ensured by the structures enabling public acts of overt racism to go unremarked.

The women’s stories reveal that private racism, though perhaps less obviously, relies equally on intractable structures. LaToya, who self-identifies as bi-racial, tells of the anguish caused by her white relatives’ reluctance to engage with her, her white grandmother, and her bi-racial mother. Her grandmother’s having married an African American man cut her off from all her siblings but one, LaToya’s Great Aunt Millie, who once took 13-year-old LaToya shopping for school clothes. LaToya says, “I asked Aunt Millie if I could live with her. I was growing up in chaos and uncertainty at the time. Something told me that if I lived with her, I would be safe, happy, and would have stability.” Aunt Millie “looked at me and said, ‘I’d love to have you, but you wouldn’t be happy living where I live. There are mean people there.’” LaToya’s voice breaks as she explains that her great aunt “was trying to tell me in the kindest way that ‘You would not be welcome in Newcastle, Indiana.’” LaToya says, “It still felt like a stab in the heart.” LaToya attributes the “anxiety and stress” she carries “to this day” to the early awareness of racism that “plagued [her] self-esteem, choices, behaviors.” To understand LaToya’s story in terms of her white relatives’ personal prejudice would be to overlook the foundations of that prejudice. The racism that marred LaToya’s childhood is underwritten by a history of American laws prohibiting miscegenation and permitting the red-lining of neighborhoods that resulted in all-white enclaves like Newcastle, Indiana. Home and family—which LaToya along with most Americans assumed are supposed to make children feel safe, happy, and stable—are not immune from being structured on racist principles, just like any American institution.

The briefest of the stories, Lucrezia’s account of being bullied by black female coworkers on a warehouse job, is the least obvious instance of overt racism. This is not a story of an African American woman being passed over or discriminated against in favor of white men, nor is it a story with exclusively white antagonists. Like all the others, it is a story of not being heard, but the racist implications of what happened to Lucrezia are complex. Some of what happens is clearly attributable to the behavior of her individual male managers (“all white, of course”) toward Lucrezia, but the coworkers who directly harassed her were not white. Certified to drive a forklift, Lucrezia applied for a warehouse job requiring the skill she had mastered but was hired to do a menial task for which she was overqualified. She was made a “picker,” someone who checks the fulfillment of on-line orders as the packages are pulled off the warehouse shelves by robots.

Six of her fellow pickers were African American women “my mom’s age,” as Lucrezia puts it, and one was a new hire like herself. Lucrezia learns that the six coworkers had previously held part-time, hourly jobs in the company and had worked their way up to the full-time, salaried position she was hired directly into.

Once they learned that I didn’t come from another department, that I was an off-the-street hire, they started not being so kind to me. I was being called out of my name, being bumped into, basically, like, harassed by these employees. And they made it even more hurtful because they were Black women.

Not wanting to fight at work, Lucrezia complained “up the chain of command,” going first to “the supervisor, then the team lead, then to his supervisor, until finally I just went to HR.” Nothing improved. Workstations were moved around, but “these women would still find themselves at my station, talking crazy to me.” Whenever she reported the harassment to a manager, she was dismissed as being overly sensitive. They would tell her, “Hey, no one wants a difficult employee.” Distraught, Lucrezia follows her mother’s advice to do some research on the company, only to learn that they had been sued for millions of dollars over their previous hiring practices. “Part of the settlement was that they hired so many African Americans and women. So I fit into both, so I was kind of like a two for one,” she says, laughing a little. Lucrezia concludes that this discovery

made me feel like, that’s why they didn’t care that I was being bullied and harassed or shoved or anything because I was never considered an asset to begin with, to their company. [Hiring me] was something legally they had to do.

Being Black and female, she realized, made her a statistic at that company rather than a person. But the Black women hired before her had faced a more straightforward kind of discrimination, having been given even lower-paying, part-time jobs when they clearly were qualified at least to be full-time pickers. The company’s settlement of the lawsuit is an admission of the unfair hiring practices that had resulted in the six women’s being underemployed in the first place. The “off-the-street” hires were a reminder to the older workers of how the company had mistreated themselves. Lucrezia felt that the company did not care about her, but the company’s history shows they had never cared about the women who were harassing her, either. The structural racism underlying the older workers’ discontent expressed itself through their hostility to their younger coworker. The company’s structural racism defeated the affirmative hiring agreement when Lucrezia, no longer able to stand the disrespect, finally quit her job.

Conclusion

What we asked the eight women participants in this study to do was more difficult than we had intended for it to be. One prefaced her contribution by speaking of a reluctance to dwell on negative experiences; others said they felt they had not yet processed or worked through the emotions the stories brought up for them. Bravely and generously, they shared disturbing memories. Calling those emotions back into consciousness, several of them cried as they addressed the camera; I could not watch and listen without crying, too.

Our assignment to apply narrative analysis to their stories so we could derive strategies for combating racism also proved to be difficult. The women's clear-eyed accounts of how racism affects their everyday lives deserve more concrete conclusions than narrative analysis usually attempts to produce.

What do stories tell us about racism that statistics cannot? What do African American women know about racism that non-African Americans don't know anything about, but should? Narrative analysis of these stories shows that the effects upon a person of racist incidents are ongoing. When racist treatment results in thwarted hopes, the individual's story of that treatment will not reach closure. A person does not "get over" the feelings that racism arouses. The outrage, the frustration, the self-doubt, the anger, the fear do not go away, but are continually re-lived in an eternal "now."

Narrative analysis shows that African American women who have reflected on their experiences of racism believe they and their counterparts must speak up in the moment, advocate for themselves when they encounter racist behavior. But narrative analysis also shows that at the core of racism is a refusal to listen, to hear and to acknowledge what a Black girl or woman means when she is speaking. As narrative analysis helps to demonstrate, that refusal to hear Black women's speech is underwritten by layers of institutional practice. If every health care worker, every teacher, every counselor, every manager, every HR official, every law enforcement officer and even every beloved Auntie could be taught to pause in everyday situations before answering, to hear what an African American is saying and to understand what that person means within the historical context of racially discriminatory institutions, racism would begin to lose its power to harm.

Notes

- 1 Katharine Young notes, "In telling stories in conversation, narrators fairly commonly shift from the past tense to the present tense at the climax of their stories (Goffman 1974, 508), as if they become engaged in its events as a present reality." (202)
- 2 Monika Fludernik describes the convention of "intermittent" present-tense narration as "brief shifts from the past tense into the present tense to performatively highlight major junctures of the tale in conversational narrative... and to mark episode beginnings or climaxes in written texts." In a reading of Margaret Atwood drawing similar conclusions to my argument here, Katherine Snyder associates

moments of present-tense narration with a focal character's post-traumatic stress disorder (477).

- 3 This observation is supported by the recent work of public health researchers who have demonstrated empirically that the ongoing stress of ordinary social encounters is disproportionately severe for people of color and other disadvantaged groups. See, for example, Geronimus.
- 4 <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=yeah%20right&page=2>
- 5 Contributors to the Urban Dictionary facetiously assert that "So yeah" is what someone says at the end of a presentation if they "can't think of a good enough ending." In Lucrezia's story, however, "So yeah" means that the story has no ending. <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=so%20yeah>

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11 Metacognition and Miscommunication

Interpreting Metacognitive Monitoring in African-American Women's Storytelling

Lisa Zunshine

In 2021, eight African-American women were invited to tell two stories each about everyday racism: one “focused on a situation in which she felt discriminated against but was able to overcome, and another, focused on a discriminatory situation that she felt she was not able to overcome.”¹ The stories were recorded and uploaded on YouTube. Then, four professors of English, who had been earlier asked to suggest some prompts for the speakers (for instance, “Telling this story now makes me think ... ”), were asked to comment on these recordings, using theoretical approaches from their respective fields of research. These approaches included critical race and gender studies, narrative theory, feminist theory, and cognitive-literary studies.

This essay represents a cognitive-literary perspective, which usually means using insights from cognitive science to develop a close reading of a literary text.² Such a reading would often end up not only telling us something new about the text in question but also alerting us to patterns of cognition put to unusual (e.g., exaggerated³) use by literature. A typical essay of this kind may thus explore how cognitive, cultural, and literary-historical (genre-related) aspects shape each other in the process of production and reception of a particular work, e.g., a novel, a personal essay, or a play.

Except that this project did not lend itself easily to a typical cognitive-literary exploration. First of all, these were oral narratives, which meant that the body language of each speaker was integral to her story. Second, instead of safely contained tales of fictional characters, these were open-ended painful histories of real people. Third, as a white person invited to “analyze” personal experiences of African-American storytellers, I felt both humble and extremely nervous about my undertaking, especially when it came to my interpretations of their feelings. The interplay of these three factors meant that, when it came to embodiment, I could not simply draw on the research of my colleagues in cognitive-literary studies who work with theater and thus have plenty to say about dramatic characters’ body language. Neither could I do what *all* literary critics, including cognitive-literary critics, do in the process of close reading: I could not freely speculate about the speakers’ mental states the way we usually speculate about fictional characters’ thoughts, feelings, and intentions, especially when their stated intentions

seem to belie those that we perspicaciously uncover.⁴ Instead, I had to rely on what the women themselves reported about their mental states in the videos, and on short written reflections about what participation in this project had meant for them.

Yet, some speculation was unavoidable, given the original goal of my essay. I had wanted to highlight metacognitive monitoring present in oral storytelling, which is to say, to explore the role of cues which signal the speakers' ongoing assessment of their performance, including verbal comments, pause, and changes in gaze direction and body posture. When such cues are treated as communication, one is bound to think of the speakers' intentions, and unless the speakers have explicitly stated them, imagining and interpreting those intentions becomes an integral—but also fraught—part of the critical analysis. In this case, I was fortunate because I had a chance to share an early version of this essay with the two women whose stories I analyzed, Ronda Henry Anthony and Destiny Faceson, and they gave me feedback on my interpretation of their metacognitive monitoring. What I learned from their feedback made me adjust the focus of my study. Specifically, in addition to highlighting the role of metacognitive monitoring in oral storytelling, I now also suggest that this monitoring may be fundamentally liable to misinterpretation, and that we would benefit from articulating at least some of the factors (including but not limited to cognitive biases) which inform such misinterpretations.

Initial Assessment of Intentions

I approached the eight videos uploaded on YouTube with the assumption that we need to be aware of the intentions behind the speakers' choice of stories and their ways of telling them, because, *combined*, these intentions may have created a very particular kind of pressure on their performances. Specifically, by unearthing and reliving experiences of everyday racism that they had buried in order to be able to go on with their lives, the project's participants were hoping to process those experiences, achieving some sort of catharsis and healing. At the same time, they felt responsible for promoting change by educating their audiences. This ranged from impressing upon their listeners the ubiquity of systemic racism and the lasting trauma associated with it, to making them aware of the daily burden carried by black women and the "continuous chronic stress" created by that burden. Here are Ronda Henry Anthony and LaToya Hale-Tahirou reflecting, separately, on these two kinds of goals/intentions:

These experiences happened when I was about seventeen years old or a senior in high school ... I have for the most part suppressed and kind of put these things aside and not really dealt emotionally or mentally with what they said about things [...] I don't know that I've ever really

processed it. I would love to write a story about it at some point and just do a cathartic thing. I am hoping that in some ways *this* is cathartic because I still get emotionally upset just thinking about it.

(Ronda Henry Anthony, 0:34; 18:40)

One of the challenges was identifying an experience to share. I have experienced racism in so many ways throughout my life. I believe that I have buried them so deep to push forward that I really struggled with identifying one to share. Once the process of remembering the details of the experience I chose to share began, all of the negative feelings and incidents began to come racing back to my mind. Another struggle for me was sharing my experience in a way that others could truly feel where I was coming from. When we are given an opportunity to share our voices to promote change, I take that opportunity very seriously and it becomes hard to articulate what it is that I am truly trying to say ... I felt immense pressure to make sure I told it in a way that would allow a person to walk in my shoes. Because it was so emotional and stressful, I do not feel I did my best to convey the message of how these two experiences affected my life. I wanted those who heard it to better understand the weight that we carry as black women; the continuous chronic stress we carry around doing normal things that others do.

(LaToya Hale-Tahirou, "Reflection")

What does it mean to talk about a traumatic emotional experience with the dual intention of self-healing *and* educating others? What it means is that, in the middle of reexperiencing the pain associated with the memory of the racist incident, the speaker may also engage in several types of self-monitoring. First, she is watching her present emotions as she is contemplating her past emotions, which is to say, those that she experienced at the time of the incident. Second, she is evaluating her performance as a representative of black women, educating her audience about what it feels like to carry around the "continuous chronic stress."

One can't help noticing the terrible irony implied by the latter, for, in the words of Hale-Tahirou, one of the daily stressors of living in a racist society has to do with always "trying to show the world that black women" are "not the negative stereotypes." But even if we bracket the emotional burden created by this familiar call to *represent*, the pressure arising from a combination of several different kinds of self-monitoring involved in this project is a real phenomenon. In her post-recording reflection, Hale-Tahirou offers us a glimpse of what it feels like to engage in this dual self-monitoring:

I felt immense pressure to make sure I told it in a way that would allow a person to walk in my shoes. Because it was so emotional and stressful,

I do not feel I did my best to convey the message of how these two experiences affected my life.

For this speaker, paying attention to her emotions felt like not being able to give as much attention to the project of educating her viewers as she would have liked to.

Of course, viewers may disagree with the storyteller in their assessments of the effectiveness of her message, having experienced that message as extremely powerful. But I do not bring up Hale-Tahirou's comment here in order to disagree with it. Instead, I want you to think of it as testimony of the speaker's intentions and of her commitment to monitoring her performance in the light of her stated intentions. When I first approached the recordings, Tahirou's observation was an important starting point for me. It alerted me to the fact that the self-monitoring cues—verbal, embodied, as well as a combination of the two—can contribute to the rhetorical effectiveness of the message,⁵ even though different members of the audience may interpret the affective meaning of those cues differently and misinterpret them.

Just how they can misinterpret them, I was still to discover. But before I tell you what I learned when comparing my inferences about the speakers' intentions with what they would later tell me, let us review the research in cognitive science that provides a theoretical basis for thinking about the role of metacognitive monitoring in daily communication.

Metacognition

Broadly defined, metacognition is thinking about thinking, or “the ability to reflect on and report one's own mental states” (Filevich *et al.*, 1082). More precise definitions invoke particular practices of self-assessment. Metacognition can be thus described as evaluating and predicting “the cognitive adequacy of one's performance in processing information,” in the light of specific goals which range from learning to communicating with others. Some “ordinary examples of metacognitive evaluation” include thinking, or asking out loud, “Who was at the meeting? I'd like to know.” “I don't understand this argument.” “Was my prayer fervent enough?” (Proust and Fortier, 1). These examples begin to demonstrate a point central to this essay (I will say more of this below), which is that evidence of self-assessment does not have to appear in one's discourse, but when it does, it may acquire a communicative function along with a self-monitoring one.

On the whole, as Joëlle Proust and Martin Fortier explain, metacognition

refers to a set of processes that contextually control one's own ongoing cognitive activity on the basis of such evaluations (e.g., perceiving, remembering, learning, problem-solving, or paying attention). Control is

achieved by monitoring the feasibility of a cognitive operation, predicting or evaluating its likely success.

(Proust and Fortier, 1)

Metacognition is culturally diverse, which is to say, it is always shaped by culture-specific practices of self-monitoring. At the same time, all cultures use “techniques, procedures, communicative processes, and linguistic resources ... whose aim is to express one’s own uncertainty, report one’s knowledge sources, and adjust to others’ informational needs.” In fact, recent work across several fields in cognitive science emphasizes the role of metacognition in the formation of a culture. Metacognition, in this view, is

a cognitive skill that monitors and selects what to attend to and learn. As such it is essentially involved in the selection, transmission, use, and expansion of information and knowledge relevant to a group (for short: cultural transmission and cultural evolution).

(Proust and Fortier, 2)

Let us return to the communicative function of metacognition. To do so, we will use the concept of “conversational metacognition,” pioneered by the philosopher of mind Joëlle Proust. As she explains, embodied communication—which includes “intonation, facial expressions, posture change, and various gestures for recruiting more or less attention”—“crucially involves metacognitive interventions. Was my speech clear, coherent, was my gesture appropriate—did my pointing identify its intended referent?” While most of this self-regulation may remain internal, some makes it to the level of discourse and opens the speaker to feedback from the audience. The term conversational metacognition thus describes “the set of abilities that allow an embodied speaker to make available to others and to receive from them specific markers concerning his/her ‘conversing adequacy’” (Proust, 286, 266).

Consider gestures and utterances that allow a speaker to keep track of

how she has been doing, or how well she can hope to do, in the course of a given conversation in a given context. Examples of such metacognitive markers are offered by ‘Uhs’ that allow a speaker to convey that she will shortly be able to complete her utterance, by gazes and beats that indicate focused attention and motivation, and by various deictic gestures referring the audience back to a prior understanding that is now being taken as a common ground on which to elaborate further.

(Proust, 269)

To an important degree, these metacognitive markers are intentional. They communicate to the audience that the speaker engages in an ongoing self-assessment of her words and gestures, comparing those that she actually

produces with those that she intends to produce and with the “standards of production,” which is to say with the words and gestures that, based on “the social feedback gained in former conversational exchanges” and on familiar communal practices, are deemed to be most successful for communicating given information (Proust, 277).⁶

At the same time, we should not assume that “metacognitive transparency [is] a norm for conversation.” Accurately informing other people about “one’s epistemic adequacy for a given turn” makes one vulnerable to “exploitation and control.” As Proust puts it,

Why would someone *want to* make publicly available highly sensitive data, such as one’s current self-doubts and evaluations of (in)competence? Why would one intend to share one’s uncertainty about one’s knowledge states, and thus become predictable, and thereby manipulable, by others?

(Proust, 287)

Herein lies the distinction of conversational metacognition. While, in general, metacognition monitors mental actions, conversational metacognition monitors communication. This makes it more receiver-oriented, which is to say, more public.

Its function is close to folk logic’s: it is to prove to others the value of one’s contribution to conversation, the degree of one’s conviction or of one’s commitment. Such proof is not offered through arguments, but through somatic gestures supposed to display genuine epistemic feelings.

(Proust, 283)

And because the display of genuine epistemic feelings is a potentially costly behavior, the speaker has to decide if a given context warrants incurring that cost. To show how “metacognitive expressivity might be adjusted to context,” Proust offers the following example:

Take a population of researchers, and observe how they make one and the same PowerPoint presentation of their latest work in two types of contexts. In context 1, they present their work to their collaborators and students. In context 2, they present it to their competitors at a professional meeting. Let us bet that the two presentations will differ for the quantity of metacognitive gestures expressing self-doubt, self-confidence, and so on.

(Proust, 289)

What it all adds up to is that publicly reflecting on one’s knowledge states, which includes (but is not limited to) sharing uncertainty about one’s knowledge states, is an important communicative act in its own right. It tells us

something about the relationship between the speaker and her audience, and it also, inevitably, opens up the possibility for miscommunication. Specifically, the “fundamental ontological instability” inherent to our practices of inferring people’s invisible mental states from their observable behavior⁷ (or of “mindreading”⁸); personal histories of audience members and their ways of selecting contexts for constructing the speakers’ intentions; as well as cognitive biases underlying social meaning-making, all impinge on interpretations of the speakers’ “metacognitive expressivity.”

Keeping in mind this fraught aspect of conversational metacognition, let us now look at the metacognitive markers used by Ronda Henry Anthony and Destiny Faceson as they reflect on their experiences of daily racism. What may these markers communicate about the relationship between the speakers and their intended audiences? And, if the audience’s interpretation of those markers is then turned out not to have been intended by the speakers, what may underlie such misinterpretation?

Metacognitive Markers: Ronda Henry Anthony

The two stories narrated by Ronda Henry Anthony took place when she was a seventeen-year-old high school student. They involved, respectively, her experience with a school guidance counselor, who had said that she had no chance of being admitted to the university of her choice; and her witnessing the police brutalize her father for driving a new Ford truck. Whereas the racist assumption of her guidance counselor was something that Henry Anthony was able to overcome (in fact, she ended up as a professor at the very same university that he had thought would not accept her as a student), the trauma of seeing her father humiliated and physically assaulted by police has remained with her for years.

While, for my analysis, I focus mainly on the second story, here is an excerpt from Henry Anthony’s introductory remarks, which I transcribed from her YouTube recording verbatim, that is, preserving features typical for spontaneous/informal conversation, such as filler words, non-speech sounds, including uh and um, repetitions, self-interruptions, etc.⁹ Note, in particular, the prominence of metacognitive reflections, that is, thinking out loud about one’s thinking, both here and in the excerpts that will follow.

So, right now, as I am thinking of the stories I am going to tell, uh, I feel of two minds, because I have ... Both of these experiences happened when I was around seventeen years old or a senior in high school. And I didn’t realize until I wrote them up ... I feel of two minds. I have for the most part suppressed and kind of put these things aside and not really dealt emotionally or mentally with what they said about things, but, certainly, my mind-heart-and-spirit has absorbed it and sort of adjusted, in terms of how I live my life. And so, as I talked about previously, I think I am in two spaces: there is previous to these kinds of

events and how I felt as a young person in that space of innocence, and there is the person that I am now and who I got to be after a certain point, where I keep most white people at a distance, I don't let them really affect me in the way that these two incidents kind of affected me, or I'll say the second incident that I'll talk about. (1:19)

The second incident took place when Ronda was 17 and living in Lawrence, Indiana. Her mother would usually pick her up from high school and drive her to her afternoon job, at the Finance Center at Fort Benjamin Harrison. One day, Ronda's father, who owned a trucking company, came along, in his new Ford 250 truck. As they were driving past Fort Benjamin Harrison, they heard sirens and were pulled over by military police. An officer aggressively demanded that Ronda's father hand him his driver's license and registration, while remaining in the truck. This was physically impossible, because Ronda, her father, and her mother were all in the front seat of the truck, pressed close together, so to get his wallet from his back pocket, Ronda's father *had to* step out of the truck. When Ronda's father repeatedly asked if he could get out of the truck, so that he could reach his wallet, one officer angrily insisted that he should remain inside, while the other drew his weapon and radioed for backup. The excerpt below starts right after that backup, i.e., five or six military police, arrived on the scene:

So, we get out. Somehow, I don't remember all the details, they end up with my father at the front of the hood, and they are telling him to put his hands on the hood, spread his legs. I can remember [one of the MPs] standing behind him kick ... sort of roughly kicking out his legs almost to the point where my father was off-balance and was going to fall, and then, the next instance, I don't know what happened, what was said. I know my father was saying something like, uh, man, don't kick my legs so far, [I am going to fall]. The next instance, we look around, because we are just standing there, and there is, like, an MP over, next to us, as well, kind of trying to keep us back to make sure we are not going to do anything we are not supposed to do. Uh, they have my father on the ground in the mud, there is five or six of him on, five or six of them on him. I don't know what they're all doing, I ... you know, it looked like they may have been like, there was some on his back, with their knee on his back and on his neck, he was saying, you know, he was trying to turn his head in the mud, uhm, and saying he couldn't breathe, get off of him, you know those kinds of things, and, uh, I must have been, I've, I don't know what I was saying or doing, but I must have been hollering or screaming because the MP next to us kept saying to me, it's ok, it's ok, it's gonna be all right. But I am looking at them do this to my father, and we're trying to figure out, why you all are doing this, why did you stop us in the first place, what have we done, and so, uh, my father is covered with mud, they finally pull him up, they put him in their car.

...

In some ways, I, I think that I put that whole incident aside, I've never really, uh, dealt with it. And I can't really describe the feelings, except to say that you know, here is my big, physically strong ... my father, he is not tall, but he is big and he was strong [...] and to see my father, uh, degraded, yelled at, treated in that way, and then thrown down into the mud was really traumatizing for me. I am not sure how the rest of that day went; I know my mother came and picked me up at the end, I know I said something to the people at [my job] when I went in, but I don't remember them, uhm, saying anything one way or the other, and it's hard to remember because it was an emotionally charged time. I do know that they kept my father for a few hours and then released him and then my parents had to get a lawyer and go back to court, but they ended up dropping the charges, because they really didn't stop us for anything, we weren't speeding, we weren't doing anything. I think they basically stopped us because we were black and because my father had a new truck. I really think that that's what it was. Nothing ever came out of it, except for the trauma of it.

(13:30-17:22)

Note that my transcript of this part of Henry Anthony's story does not include description of her body language. I omitted it for reasons of space. Below you find another part of the transcript, which does include body language, to show how integral it is to the story. (Of course, neither of my transcripts does full justice to any of the recorded talks; they should be viewed in their entirety on YouTube.) What Henry Anthony is describing here is taking place after her father was told to hand over his driver's license.

So, my father is, like, man, here is my hands [she leans forward extending her arms and showing her empty hands, speaking in a calm, measured voice], I'm getting out of the truck, so I can get my wallet and give you [interrupting in a loud, abrasive voice, blinking rapidly] Stay in the truck! So [she leans back, signaling that she is now observing the situation from some distance], at this point [pause] they start drawing the weapons. [She looks directly at the camera.] And [she looks up and to the right, reaches her hand to her chin, and slows down, signaling that she is trying to reconstruct the scene as accurately as possible] the guy steps back [she closes her eyes, opens them and looks into the middle distance: at the picture in her mind], draws his weapon. The guy on the other side is drawing his, on my side. He is standing back a little bit [she is looking up to the right, then up to the left, signaling remembering], so I can see him, uh, I think, probably, in the rear-view mirror.

(11:00—11:26)

Let us look at the range of metacognitive evaluations represented by the last two passages. First, we have Henry Anthony's verbal assessments of her ability to accurately recall what took place, of what she felt back then, and of what she is thinking and feeling now, as she is recounting the past experience. Those verbal self-reports include, "Somehow," "I don't remember all the details," "I can remember," "I don't know what happened, what was said," "I know my father was saying something like," "I don't know what they're all doing," "it looked like they may have been like," "you know," "I must have been," "I don't know what I was saying," "I can't really describe the feelings," "I am not sure how the rest of that day went," "I know," "I don't remember," "it's hard to remember because it was an emotionally charged time," "I do know, "I think," "I really think," "I believe," and "probably." There are also such markers as "uh" and "um," which allow Henry Anthony (to quote Proust again) "to convey that she will shortly be able to complete her utterance." Finally, she also refers to specific landmarks and spatial locations, which signals her intention to facilitate recall,¹⁰ for instance, when talking about the store at which she had worked before she switched to the Finance Center ("I had at first thought that I was going into retail, so I was trying to work at, like, uh, what was the store called? Harry Levinson, back in the day" [7:34]), or when describing the moment when the police stopped their truck.

Well, we all knew, back in the day, that when you got past, like, 56 and Franklin Road, and you entered Fort Benjamin Harrison, um, the military, uh, installation, whatever you wanna call it, you had to slow down. They had a different speed limit than the city of Indianapolis on 56th street [9:43].

When it comes to body language, Henry Anthony pauses and slows down; moves closer to the camera or further away from the camera to indicate the change in perspective (i.e., from the position of participant to the position of observer), accompanied by the direct eye contact, which invites the audience to follow that change in perspective; closes eyes, squints, looks up and to the left, up and to the right, and to the middle distance, all of which indicate a commitment to focusing on something that is hard to see (e.g., past events and memories); and uses direct eye contact with the camera, alternated with rapid blinking and with a pointed lack of eye contact, which also indicate a change of perspective from the present to the past, and from one person to another.

Often, body language indicative of Henry Anthony's commitment to monitoring her process of remembering is combined with verbal markers signaling different degrees of certainty. For instance, when she describes the policeman who is drawing his weapon on the passenger's side of the truck, she is simultaneously reflecting on what would have allowed her to see him,

because he seemed to have been standing behind her while she was seated in the truck: “He is standing back a little bit [she is looking up to the right, then up to the left, signaling remembering], so I can see him, uh, I think, probably, in the rear-view mirror” (11:26). “Uh” and “probably” work together with looking up and to the side (i.e., focusing on the past event) to convey the speaker’s metacognitive awareness.

Metacognitive monitoring thus constitutes an integral part of Henry Anthony’s storytelling. At the same time, highlighting this aspect of her narrative and treating it as an intentional act of communication open up possibilities for miscommunication. Below I give you an example of how such a miscommunication may develop. Note that the reason that I was compelled to reconstruct this process was the feedback that I received from Henry Anthony after sharing with her my interpretation of her metacognitive monitoring. This means that the self-awareness that I display in the first couple of paragraphs of the next section was not there initially. It is a product of coming back and attempting to articulate one’s motivations post-factum.

Metacognitive Markers: Interpretation and Misinterpretation

In interpreting the possible “message” of Henry Anthony’s metacognitive monitoring, I was influenced by several considerations. First, I kept returning to Joëlle Proust’s earlier example of a PowerPoint talk which, when presented to a group of collaborators and students, would feature more “metacognitive gestures expressing self-doubt, self-confidence, and so on,” than would the same talk when presented to “competitors at a professional meeting.” Trusting one’s audience, experiencing them as partners rather than as critics or competitors, would translate into more active and frequent use of metacognitive gestures. Based on this background reading, the issue of trust thus assumed particular salience for me.

Second, my range of interpretations was constrained by the fact that I was talking about an actual person and not a fictional character, which means that I could not engage in a typical literary-critical endeavor of coming up with unexpected and elaborate close readings of their intentions. As a crucial correlative to this, I felt that as a white person I had to be particularly careful about any such flights of critical fancy, because of the long cultural history of whites claiming to know what blacks think and feel. I thus tried to stay as close as possible to what Henry Anthony herself said about her feelings, thinking in particular about her observation that one effect of her encounters with systemic racism was her determination to protect herself against such future traumas: “I keep most white people at a distance, I don’t let them really affect me in the way that these two incidents kind of affected me” (1:15).

With these two considerations in mind, it seemed to me that a message communicated by Henry Anthony’s metacognitive monitoring was her willingness to trust her listeners. Given that her intended audience would include white people, sharing with them her metacognitive uncertainty as she

reconstructed the circumstances of her trauma and let herself be affected by the experience of reliving that trauma, seemed to have signaled her commitment to a renewal of lost trust.

Such was my interpretation of Henry Anthony's metacognitive monitoring. Several readers with whom I shared my essay-in-progress thought that it was moving and plausible. For a while, I remained quite pleased with this case of real-life close reading, which was respectful of personal boundaries, by staying within the emotional compass that the author herself seemed to have provided. But, then, because it *was* a real-life close reading, I wanted to share it with the author to see if it would ring true to her. And what I learned, after hearing back from Henry Anthony, is that one's interpretation can be moving, plausible, respectful, and wrong.

For, on the one hand, as a literary scholar herself, Henry Anthony observed that "the author's intentions do not limit the meaning that can be made either from written or oral expressions. And in fact, just as JL Austin points out, (mis)communication is built into communication itself." On the other hand, she disagreed with my take on her intentions:

Your interpretation of my sharing as potential trust in my white audience is not exactly where I'm coming from. I can see why you might take it that way; however, what it is from my perspective is my acquisition over time of a certain confidence in myself and who I am. A solidness, if you will, in understanding what it means to exist at the intersections of black *and* woman to truly receive and understand how I am and will be perceived in this world. And from that space of confidence and assurance in my own value and worth, I no longer care or feel particularly vulnerable in sharing my experiences of racism when I feel to. I still only let white people in to a certain extent but not beyond a predetermined point so that I can no longer be traumatized in this same way by the microaggressions or subtle social/cultural rejections that happen every day just as I say in the video. But this doesn't come from any interest in trusting white people more or a willingness to trust them with my vulnerability. Again, it comes from a confidence in myself and my value that no longer trusts or looks to white people for approval, acceptance, or determination of my worth and abilities as a black woman. (Email communication).

Here is something I was struck by while reading Henry Anthony's response. Vulnerability and confidence can, in principle, be viewed as two sides of the same mental stance. That is, one can decide to be vulnerable precisely because they feel confident. But there is a particular nuance that pulls the two apart. One big difference between the two interpretations is that mine positions Henry Anthony's audience (including myself) as important to her emotional wellbeing. In contrast, her own interpretation reverses this power dynamic. In this view, the audience is irrelevant, because Henry Anthony "no

longer trusts or looks to white people for approval, acceptance, or determination of [her] worth and abilities as a black woman.” To put it differently, the metacognitive monitoring that she engages in is something that helps *her* with remembering and processing—which is to say that it is determined by *her* personal agenda—rather than helping *us* to feel better about race relations and thus being determined by our agenda.

One possible reason that I came up with an interpretation which centered on the audience is that, when engaged in complex social interactions that involve attribution of mental states to other people, we don’t reach first for interpretations of their intentions that do not involve us. Thinking of ourselves as irrelevant involves an extra cognitive effort, which is not our default mental stance on such occasions. Cognitive psychologists have a name for this kind of built-in self-centeredness; they call it egocentric bias, or “the tendency to see [us] as both cause and target of [other people’s] behavior” (Zuckerman *et al.*, 621).¹¹ In this particular case, thinking of Henry Anthony’s audience as the “cause and target” of her metacognitive monitoring may have felt especially right, given the concurrent narrowing of my emotional horizons, which is to say by my need to attend to the painful emotions that the video aroused in *me*.

On the whole, I found reconstructing my former thought processes both enlightening and humbling. I also went back and forth about how much of this I wanted to share with my audience (how metacognitively vulnerable, as it were, I, myself would be willing to be). Henry Anthony’s own position was that I could “receive, reject, or use [her feedback] in whatever way [I] would like.”¹² I ultimately decided to be maximally open about the process because it would allow me to make an important point, specifically from my position as a cognitive-literary scholar. Being wrong is intrinsic to social cognition. There is no such thing as finally getting it—which is to say, finally learning to read other people’s intentions just right—even in such high-stakes contexts as race relations, when one is really motivated to get it right. One should certainly be careful when inferring other people’s intentions. And one should certainly solicit—whenever possible—feedback from people whose intentions one is inferring. Yet one will still fail. The cognitive process of “mindreading” that we use to navigate our social environment—that is, the process of inferring people’s thoughts and feelings (including our own) based on observable behavior—is fundamentally a process of mind-misreading. It works relatively well in simple social situations (i.e., when someone reaches for a glass of water, we can safely assume that they want to drink), but when a situation is complex, we are bound to be wrong about other people’s intentions and motivations and blind about our own, in ways that are always situation-specific and thus hard to predict. To say this is not to disown responsibility for one’s actions, but to suggest that our best hope may not be figuring out how to read each other’s minds correctly but how to keep the conversation going.

Metacognitive Markers: Destiny Faceson

I received Destiny Faceson's feedback shortly after hearing from Henry Anthony. What I learned from Faceson's response was that in her case, too, I had overestimated the extent to which her metacognitive monitoring was oriented toward her audience. For instance, on several occasions, I had interpreted her pausing and looking away from the camera as signaling her intention not to be distracted by its presence as she was trying to reconstruct the events as accurately as possible, an interpretation which also can be said to have positioned her audience as the "cause and target" of her behavior. As Faceson told me, however, what her body language actually meant was that she was not striving to recall the exact circumstances for the benefit of the audience, but instead reexperiencing the trauma:

Remembering trauma is to relive trauma; retraumatizing yourself with every playback ... A lot of [what you call] the 'signal remembering' ... is a signal of discomfort in sharing what I already remember. We all remember the situations we went through. It's just that we trained ourselves to bury the thoughts every time we think about it; so we take pauses, fight back tears, calm the storm of emotions before they manifest, etc. Remembering is easy, burying a thing is hard. (Email communication)

Here again, then, I was faced with the question of whether and how I would want to share my initial interpretation with my audience. Ultimately, I decided to do it in two different ways. First, in my transcript of Faceson's story, I followed her correction and replaced the phrase "to signal remembering" with "to signal discomfort in sharing what she remembers," but I also italicized this replacement because it allowed me to preserve the trace of my former misinterpretation. Second, I still kept my original discussion of the effects of Faceson's metacognitive monitoring—because it accurately reflected the way in which I, personally, made sense of her narrative—but I also made it clear that she herself would not necessarily view it that way (even though she did not explicitly contradict it in her feedback).

I highlighted those instances of actual and possible miscommunication on the assumption that doing so—that is, acknowledging the likelihood of miscommunication in conversational metacognition—may be integral to the analysis of oral narratives. And, specifically, when it comes to conversations about race, approaching them with an expectation of failure and self-correction—or what cognitive-literary theorist Ellen Spolsky calls an active entanglement with failure¹³—may be more productive than approaching them with a paralyzing mix of hope and fear, that is, the hope of getting it right and the fear of getting it wrong.

The first of the two stories told by Destiny Faceson involves her being brutalized by the police when she was about 15 years old. Back then, many

of Indianapolis's black teenagers used to go downtown on Saturday nights, to hang out with their friends at the Circle Centre Mall. On one particular Saturday, when Destiny and her friends stopped by the food court, because her friend had to change her baby's diaper, the police started harassing them. This continued (i.e., harassing, antagonizing) until the teenagers started speaking up for themselves, at which point the police told them to leave the mall and escorted them out with physical hostility. While going down the crowded escalator, the mother of the baby was pushed down by the police, and, after her friends tried to defend her, the police started arresting them. Already in handcuffs, Destiny continued speaking up for her and her friends' rights, a Civil-Rights-movement scene that replays itself every day in America. Two policemen then took her to the parking garage, slammed her head against a police van, and told her that if she would not shut up, they would put her in the hospital. Afterwards, the media represented this event as black teenagers not knowing how to behave in public places. Destiny's family wanted to sue the city, but they were told that it was hopeless.

That is the gist of the story. Below, I include a short excerpt from my transcript of the YouTube video, which includes a description of Faceson's body language that I consider an important part of her metacognitive monitoring. I want you to note, as you are reading my interpretation of the effects of this metacognitive monitoring, that this interpretation is certainly more audience-centered than speaker-centered. For instance, in the comment cited above, Faceson explains that taking pauses helped her to "calm the storm of emotions before they manifest[ed]." In contrast, I read those pauses, along with her other metacognitive markers, as shaping the audience's perception of the events that she narrated. The gap between Faceson's intention and my interpretation is real, but just as real was my experience of the rhetorical and political significance of her body language. The tension between these two is central to the analysis of conversational metacognition, an analysis that is precariously balanced between reaching out for a meaning most relevant to the listener and remaining aware of the fallibility of ascribed meaning.

The way I describe Faceson's body language is that it generates a stable metacognitive framing around her story by constantly creating an external perspective on what she is saying. This framing is maintained by ongoing changes in gaze direction; by shifts in body orientation (e.g., leaning forward or back; tilting one's head to the right or to the left); by alternating hand gestures (e.g., making a gesture with one hand, and then making a similar gesture with the other); and by changes in voice volume (e.g., using a quieter voice to talk *about* the situation and using a louder voice to talk about being *in it*); as well as by long pauses that re-focus the audience's attention on the speaker's and on their own thought processes.

Let us begin at the moment when the police antagonized the teenagers to the point when they started speaking up for themselves, after which they were hostilely escorted out of the mall and the police started arresting them,

and see how Faceson uses body language to keep her audience abreast of her thinking, which, in this case, means following her as she shifts from one perspective to another. Those perspectives include her own, as she was as a 15-year-old teenager; hers as she is now, looking back at the situation; that of the police officers angered by her speaking up; that of her intended audience; that of the audience of the original radio report, which perpetuated racist stereotypes; and that of her lawyer, who could not see any way around those stereotypes.

And by the end of it all, as we all [looks up and to the right, *to signal discomfort in sharing what she remembers*], I believe [pauses], about the majority of us [looks directly into the camera], that night, who came together [looks up] got locked up at night. [Pauses, looks to the right.] As they were taking us down [tilts her head to the left shoulder], to the garage [tilts her head to the right, establishes eye contact with the camera] of the Circle Centre Mall, to put us in the paddy wagon [leans forward], we all continued to speak up for ourselves, even in handcuffs [tilts her head back, to consider the situation, from above, looks up and in the middle distance, *to signal discomfort in sharing what she remembers*]. (8:21-8:47)

Well, the officers, two officers, specifically [emphatically nods her head], specifically, did not [tilts her head back, smiles] agree with what I was saying, were getting very upset [tilts her head to the right, pauses, looks into the middle distance *to signal discomfort in sharing what she remembers*], picked me up, took me to the garage, where [shakes her head from left to right] no one else was [pauses, tilts her head back, to look at the situation from above], and slammed my head up against the paddy wagon [pauses]. Two white police officers, I am [looking up and to the left] fourteen or sixteen years old [throwing her head back, closing her eyes]. I am already in handcuffs, and you're grabbing my hair. You see this ponytail? [Touches her hair, grabs her ponytail, and moves her hand back and forth to shake her head by the ponytail, looking at the camera.] Just imagine grabbing that whole thing and then slamming your head against [momentarily closing her eyes] a paddy wagon. [Long pause.] (8:48-9:30)

You know what they said to me? [Smiles slightly, juts out her chin slightly to indicate police officers speaking.] If you don't shut the f up, we'll send you to the hospital. [Very long pause, looks at the camera, smiles, looks up *to signal discomfort in sharing what she remembers*.] Now at the time I'm just in my head [looks up and to the right, *to signal discomfort in sharing what she remembers*], I can't believe this is even happening because I'm already in handcuffs [looks up and to the left, slowly moving her head to the right, still looking up, *to signal discomfort in sharing what she remembers*]. You sat us all on the ground

[looks down and to the left, to signal considering the scene in her mind from a variety of different angles], but you single-handedly picked me up, both of you, picked me up and took me to the garage [pause] to threaten me [pause], to tell me to shut up [shifts body weight to the right, then looks directly at the camera], to shut the F up [pauses, closes her eyes, pauses]. [9:31-10:08]

And then media [tilts her head to the left and up, to look at the scene from that perspective], they didn't do any better [shakes her head, long pause]. They twisted the whole story. Teenagers! [She moves her head from side to side to indicate different observers looking at the scene with opprobrium, speaks slowly.] Downtown mall. [Closes her eyes *to signal discomfort in sharing what she remembers.*] Brawl with police officers! [Shakes her head from side to side.] Oh, the radio lit us up. [Shifts her body weight back and forth to indicate the shift to the response of the community]. People don't know how to take care of their kids. [Shakes her head from side to side to indicate different people speaking with opprobrium.] People need to stop having kids go down there if they don't know how to act [looks at the camera, then tilts her head to the right and shifts her body to indicate a change in perspective, smiles, and looks up at the camera, to indicate yet another change in perspective], and it's just like [pauses] no one even knows the real story [smiles incredulously at the camera], if you knew what happened, you would, you would [pauses, smiles] understand. [Pauses, looks up and to the right, to indicate a change in perspective] It's a modern-day civil rights movement. [Shakes her head, a long pause] (10:09-10:53)

We ended up asking my lawyer [looks up and to the right, *to signal discomfort in sharing what she remembers*] if he could, if we could, sue the city for what they did. The answer was no. [Pause. She tilts her head back and to the left, creating yet another perspective, and is speaking down from that perspective]. It's better just [pauses] to leave it alone. It's a losing fight. [Pause. She tilts her head to the right, contemplating the scene from that perspective, then speaking directly to the camera] But you are my *lawyer*. [Pause] I am a minor. [Pause] You understand: two police officers [looks to the left, to create yet another perspective], with witnesses, *with witnesses* [looking straight at the camera. Pause. Tilts her head to the left, creating yet another change in perspective]. Yeah, but they, too, are just minors [spoken in the condescending tone of those who would dismiss minors as witnesses], as if we're some subordinate [tilts her head to the left, speaks directly to the camera: another change of perspective; shakes her head from side to side in disbelief]. It didn't get fought [looks up and away, to indicate reliving that experience; pause]. We essentially [looks up *to signal discomfort in sharing what she remembers*] let it go. [Pauses, looks at the camera, shrugs shoulders]. Traumatizing for me, so I didn't [pauses]

in a sense, let it go. [Shifts to the left, semi-closes her eyes, pauses, looks down.] That's why I am here today, doing what I am doing. [10:54-11:51]

Here is what, I believe, Faceson achieves by maintaining an external frame for her story, that is, by constantly reminding us that what we see is someone's view of what happened. The event that she describes has already been lodged in the public consciousness as a fact, without any source-tags attached (i.e., this is what happened, as opposed to, this is what *someone says* happened). Faceson reattaches the source-tags. She dislodges the representation by exposing the mechanism through which it got solidified into fact, which is to say, by exposing racist stereotypes guiding the behavior of a wide range of people with different roles within the community, from police officers and journalists to lawyers. Thus we get a closeup of police officers isolating and beating up a 15-year-old girl; of a lawyer refusing to fight for her rights; and of journalists lazily hiding behind racist clichés, instead of investigating what really happened. Faceson's embodiment of their perspectives lets us inhabit them, while her long pauses give us enough space and time to think of their role in "creating the narrative" that allows "powers that be to keep their power."¹⁴ Again, as we know from Faceson's later comments, those pauses were not necessarily intended to give *us* a space to think—they were there "to calm the storm of [*her*] emotions before they manifest"—yet their communicative effects on the audience may go beyond, at least to some extent, their original intent.

Let us also touch briefly on Faceson's verbal metacognitive markers. Those include her estimates of her degree of certainty, as in, "I am not too sure what year it was" (0:02), or "I could be totally wrong, I am butchering it" (4:10, trying to recall the affiliations of other large groups of teenagers, such as farm scholarship students, who also came to the Circle Centre Mall but were not policed at all, because they were white); her use of "uhs" (0:55, 3:53, 3:56) to indicate her intention to shortly complete her thought; as well as her evocation of landmarks to facilitate recall, as in, "this was around the time, also, where ... McDonalds used to be at the hotel basement adjacent from the Circle Centre Mall" (1:02).

One way to think about possible cumulative effects of Faceson's metacognitive monitoring, both verbal and conveyed by her body language, is to recognize that she wants to uproot the narrative that exists in public memory, about how a group of black teenagers caused a disturbance in downtown Indianapolis, and to place that event in the context of the history of the struggle for Civil Rights. This said, Faceson also wants to come to terms with her personal trauma. Thus, like other participants of this project, she is engaged in a dual-track self-monitoring. She is evaluating her progress toward educating her audience about the true meaning of the event—in effect, asking herself, to paraphrase Hale-Tahirou, "did I do my best to convey the message?"—and she is *also* evaluating her progress toward processing her trauma. What this

means is that her assessment of her private healing may directly depend on her assessment of her success in revising public perception of what happened in the Circle Centre Mall.

This dynamic may be particularly pronounced in the case of Faceson, because the event, actively misrepresented by various media, was so conspicuous in the public eye. But the same dynamic is also present, albeit perhaps less prominently, in the stories told by all the women participating in the project. Ronda Henry Anthony, Scotia Brown, Mary Bullock, Stephanie Caraway, Felicia Hanney, Lucrezia Hatfield, and LaToya Hale-Tahirou all have had experiences of coming up against implicit or explicit racist narratives underlying the behavior of police officers, school teachers, job supervisors, company managers, customers, and medical doctors. Their hope of finally coming to terms with their personal traumas cannot be separated from their hope of uprooting those narratives. A further study of specific metacognitive markers used by each woman, and of their rhetorical effects, will have to factor in this possible interdependence between the private and public vectors of their intentionality.

To conclude, this essay posits metacognitive monitoring present in oral storytelling as an important source of information about a speaker's intentions, as opposed to just noise. (By noise I mean that it is quite easy for us to dismiss such interjections as "uh," "you know," and "I'm not sure," as well as pauses, shrugs, and shifts in body posture, as incidental and even mildly disruptive, something to ignore as we listen and to edit out as we transcribe.) It also highlights problems that arise once we start interpreting mental states behind such markers, including cognitive biases that focus such interpretations on the role and emotions of the audience. I can imagine someone saying that, perhaps, given those problems, ignoring markers of metacognitive monitoring is a safer bet, after all, particularly when the oral narratives in question deal with such difficult topics as racism. I believe, however, that becoming aware of more areas in which our interpretations of other people's intentions can go wrong—especially when it comes to such a deceptively self-evident source of information as body language—is important. If there is one recommendation that I can offer based on my cognitive-literary analysis of the oral narratives about everyday racism—not a policy recommendation but a personal one—it is this: be ready to fail.

Acknowledgment

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Notes

- 1 This project was spearheaded by Jack E. Turman, professor in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences and in Richard M. Fairbanks School of Public Health Department of Pediatrics, at the School of Medicine at Indiana

- University – Purdue University Indianapolis. The videos were recorded by Kyle Minor, Associate Professor of English and the Director of the GMCHL Documentary Film Project at Indiana University School of Liberal Arts at IUPUI.
- 2 For an introduction to the field, see Zunshine, “Introduction.”
 - 3 For examples of a cognitivist extension of the traditional argument that art exaggerates familiar patterns of reality (e.g., Jakobson, “On Realism,” 26), see Zunshine, *The Secret Life*, 109, 183.
 - 4 For a discussion of attribution of mental states practiced by literary critics, see Mancing, “James Parr’s,” 126–128, 136, and Zunshine, *The Secret Life*, 132–135.
 - 5 In this respect, cognitive literary theory is closely aligned with rhetorical theory of narrative, which views narrative as “a multidimensional purposive communication from a teller to an audience” (Phelan, 5).
 - 6 It remains an open question to what degree such markers are signs of self-assessment as opposed to signs that “the speaker is intuitively following conventions” (Phelan, email communication).
 - 7 See Zunshine, *The Secret Life*, 138.
 - 8 For a review, see Apperly.
 - 9 For a discussion of challenges involved in verbatim transcription of oral records, including the potential for errors and misrepresentation (i.e., an impoverished representation of a context-rich embodied interaction), see Halcomb and Davidson. See also McMullin.
 - 10 For a review of studies that have shown how a spatial location can be used as “a cue to recall,” see Rubin, 282.
 - 11 To describe another aspect of this dynamic, people are subject to “emotional egocentricity”: they tend to “project their own emotions when inferring what other people feel” (Trilla *et al.*, 1005). This bias is often at work in our interpretation of emotions of fictional characters. As Mancing puts it, “as in everyday relationships with other people, we often infer literary characters’ thoughts from ... from what we ourselves might do in a comparable situation” (“Don Quixote’s,” 634).
 - 12 Henry Anthony, email communication.
 - 13 Spolsky, “Ferrante’s Neapolitan Quartet,” 72.
 - 14 Faceson, email communication.

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12 Rhetorical Listening

Character, Progression, and Fictionality in African American Women's Stories of Everyday Racism

James Phelan

I situate my analysis of our corpus of African American women's narratives within a conception of narrative as rhetoric rooted in the following default definition: somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purposes that something happened. This definition seeks to capture the way in which narrative is both a way of knowing and a way of doing. Narrative is a way of knowing because, as the teller seeks to communicate how something happened, they transform an undifferentiated moment-by-moment stream of experiences into an intelligible whole. The teller selects what to include and what to omit, gives greater emphasis to some events than others, and identifies the connections among them (causal or otherwise). In this way, the teller comes to understand those unfolding experiences—and communicates that understanding to their audience. Narrative is a way of doing because the teller shapes their story in order to influence their audience in particular ways. The teller may seek to reinforce or alter its audience's thoughts, beliefs, and feelings, and, in some cases, may try to spur the audience into action.

Conceiving of narrative as rhetoric has multiple consequences for the analysis of narrative texts, but I'll single out two main ones here. (1) Although textual elements such as narration, character, and event appear to be the sources of everything an analyst should say about a narrative, the rhetorical theorist sees these elements as themselves consequences of the rhetorical actions in which they function. In other words, textual elements follow from the nexus of author, audience, occasion, and purposes. In this way, rhetorical theory views the elements of narrative as resources that storytellers can draw on as they see fit in order to accomplish their purposes in relation to their audiences (Phelan, *Somebody Telling*). (2) Rhetorical theory's interest in the agents behind the textual elements puts a premium on the analyst's *listening* skills, on their ability to initially put their own interests on hold as they reconstruct the meaning and significance of what somebody tells somebody else (Phelan, *Narrative Medicine*).

In this essay, then, I will discuss the results of my efforts to listen closely to the stories told by Ronda Henry Anthony, Scotia Brown, Mary Bullock, Stephanie Caraway, Destiny Faceson, Felicia Hanney, Lucrezia Hatfield, and

LaToya Hale-Tahirou. I will first offer some generalizations about what I hear and then do a more detailed unpacking of Mary Bullock's and Scotia Brown's stories. I do not claim that my hearing is perfect, especially because, as a white male, I'm listening across racial and gender lines. But I hope that my practice of rhetorical listening can take us in the direction of understanding these stories and their ways of knowing and doing. I frame my effort with some reflections on the occasion and purposes of this essay itself.

I write in the early summer of 2022, a time when the forces of white supremacy are in the ascendancy in the United States. On May 14, the self-described white supremacist, Payton Gendron, drove more than 200 miles to a busy supermarket in a predominantly Black neighborhood of Buffalo, New York, to carry out a mass shooting in which he would kill as many Black people as possible. He killed ten. Gendron was apparently influenced by Fox News and other right-wing media outlets as they spread false propaganda about the "great replacement," the idea that there is a conspiracy to change the demographics of the United States so that white people become the minority. Meanwhile, school boards across the country mis-label any teaching of history, literature, and even math that they think has the potential to make white students uncomfortable as "critical race theory." The term refers to a movement in legal studies devoted to analyzing systemic racism, but Republicans have successfully redefined it to mean "anti-white racism." In keeping with this re-definition, many school boards are banning books that depict the history of slavery or examine its ongoing legacy. In addition, on June 24, 2022, the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, paving the way for states to outlaw abortion, a policy that will have the greatest negative effect on low-income, non-white women. This list, alas, could go on and on.

Calling attention to the occasion of this essay highlights the difference between summer 2022 and the spring and summer of 2020, when Jack Turman and Kyle Minor developed the plans for this project (see Turman's introduction to his volume for more details about those plans). After the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin on May 25, 2020, the United States seemed to be on the verge of a reckoning with its ongoing systemic racism. Members of all racial groups as well as a wide range of politicians and even corporations acknowledged the pervasiveness of this racism and called for reform. From the perspective of 2022, that initial response to Floyd's murder has provoked a virulent and still growing backlash from those in power who have benefited from white supremacy. It was during this period of backlash, more precisely in Autumn 2021, that the women told their stories.

The occasion of this essay makes its purposes—and those of the larger project it contributes to—more urgent. We aim to show that these personal narratives of everyday racism can contribute to current efforts to counter white supremacy and eventually make anti-racism both a default ideology

and a behavioral norm in the United States. Exemplifying the point that narrative is a way of knowing, these stories offer their listeners the following:

- 1 Powerful testimony about the ways African American women experience racism as an inescapable part of their lives—and sometimes as a force that radically changes their lives.
- 2 Experience-based demonstrations of how systemic racism relies on power differentials that are baked into institutions such as schools, law enforcement, the health care system as well as into the management of businesses.
- 3 Extensive evidence of the prevalence of white people's implicit and explicit biases in their everyday interactions with African American women.
- 4 Countless signs of the women's resilience as well as their unending need for it, as they negotiate, sometimes successfully and sometimes not, their hostile environments, and as they continue to feel the negative effects of experiences that occurred many years ago.

Furthermore, in these women's stories, narrative as a way of knowing spills over into narrative as a way of doing. Individually and collectively, the stories debunk multiple claims advanced during the current white supremacist backlash, especially the following:

- 1 The history of race relations in the United States, starting with more than 200 years of slavery, is unfortunate, but systemic racism no longer exists.
- 2 Although a minority of people continue to be racist, the country is primarily a meritocracy based on fair competition among equals. With hard work and determination, any American can fulfill their dreams.
- 3 Efforts to counter the effects of racism, from teaching accurate American history to the Black Lives Matter movement, are themselves instances of anti-white racism.

The women's stories are not themselves policy proposals, but, in their knowing and their doing, they provide a foundation for such proposals, especially throughout our educational system. In addition, in their knowing and their doing, the stories do lead to a meta-proposal: policy makers need to provide a forum for—and then carefully listen to—stories by people of color about their experiences with racism. I will return to these points in the conclusion.

All the narratives in our corpus are worthy of analysis, but, for reasons of space, I will focus on those told by Mary Bullock and Scotia Brown, paying particular attention to how they use the resources of character, progression, and fictionality (more on these resources below). Analyzing their four stories will add texture to my larger claims about the collective work of the whole corpus, and comparing and contrasting them can further illuminate each. In addition, since I find Mary's second story about the ongoing effects of an early experience with racism arguably the most complex narrative in the

corpus, I do my deepest dive into it. As I try to illuminate all four of Mary's and Scotia's stories, I also try to model rhetorical listening. To provide a clear foundation for my analyses, I begin by summarizing their plots.

Plot Summaries of Mary Bullock's Stories

Mary's first story is one about discrimination by a white employer that greatly influenced her life. In high school, she worked at a fast-food restaurant alongside two white male classmates and learned that they were paid the minimum wage of \$1.60 per hour while she was paid only \$1 per hour. When she pointed out the discrepancy to the white male owner, he explained that "they want to buy a car. They need more money than you." Mary replied that she needed money to contribute to her family's expenses because her father was a minister who continually gave money to church members in difficult financial situations. The owner responded that the pay was \$1 per hour, and Mary could take it or leave it. This experience led Mary to decide to go to college because she believed that getting a college degree would protect her from future discrimination. Mary earned a scholarship to Indiana University, and after graduation went on to become a licensed social worker and to get an M.B.A. She had a long career as a social worker with many successes, including the development of the "Sister Friend Program" that matched pregnant teens with professional women willing to mentor them.

Mary's second story has some structural similarities to her first, but it also covers a much longer time span—more than 20 years—and it focuses on two episodes plus a final event that correspond to the beginning, middle, and end of the plot.

Beginning: A few years after completing her education, Mary had become one of three program directors at an organization that helped veterans and people on welfare get jobs. Mary was the only African American woman director; the others were a white male and a white female. Mary supervised a staff of 17, and the other directors supervised staffs of 11 (the white male) and 7 (the white female). At one of the weekly directors' meetings, the white male Vice President of the organization announced that John Doe (Mary's name for the white male director) was being promoted to Senior Director and would now supervise Mary and the white female director. When Mary asked whether the job had been posted, the Vice President said no but the organization wanted to help John Doe advance in his career. Mary indicated that she would like to have a similar opportunity, but the VP ignored her. Mary then composed a parable about a teacher and three students, an A student, a B student, and an F student. In this parable, the teacher suddenly announced that the F student was going to become the teacher.

After Mary left the parable on the VP's desk, he summoned her to his office. He explained that the organization wanted to give John Doe more money because his wife was pregnant. When Mary pointed out that she also needed more money, because she was a single mother of two teenage

daughters, the VP told her, “Mary, this is a white man’s world and the sooner you realize it the better off you’ll be.” Mary became convinced that, despite her education and her track record at the organization, she would never be promoted. When the organization didn’t get the next grant to continue the job placement work, it reassigned the other two directors and let Mary go.

Middle: Mary then started her own company, whose mission was to help people find jobs. About a year after the company’s launch, she competed for a \$300,000 grant from the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) for organizations that would help people in public housing become gainfully employed. At an informational meeting, Mary learned that two of her former co-workers were also applying, and they planned to get an edge in the competition by offering to add \$300,000 of their own money to the FHA’s grant. When Mary learned that her application was successful and that her former co-workers’ application had been disqualified because they submitted it 30 minutes after the deadline, Mary thought “Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord,” and “I’m even.”

Ending: After that grant ended, Mary took a social work job where she worked for 20 years with considerable satisfaction because she was helping people. One day after she retired, however, she looked into what had happened to John Doe. He had become an Executive Director, making a salary that was \$279,000 more than hers at the time she retired. Mary consoled herself with the knowledge that she had done good in the world, but she also notes that during the last 20 years of her career, she had never again put herself up for a director’s or manager’s position. Summarizing the effects of the experience, Mary remarks that she never recovered financially or emotionally from it. She concludes by recommending that companies invest in all their employees.

Plot Summaries of Scotia Brown’s Stories

In her first story, Scotia follows the prompt to give an account of how she was successfully able to overcome a situation in which she experienced racism, but she also emphasizes the lingering effects of that experience. Her second story works in a similar way even as she shifts her focus to her son Charles’s experience of racism in second grade.

Story one: During her junior year at her predominantly white high school in St. Louis County—Scotia was one of only six African Americans in the school—she had her “one and only conversation” with her guidance counselor. This counselor, a white man, looked at her ACT scores and told her that she was “not college material” and that she should therefore go to a clerical school. Scotia, however, rejected his ill-informed advice, and went to college. Furthermore, she became a school counselor and resolved never to “sow the kind of seed [of doubt] into the life of a student” that her counselor had sown into hers. She notes that the experience left her questioning her ability when she faced later challenges, and she wonders how many other African

American students were negatively affected by the counselor's racism. That last thought leads her to regret that she never returned to the school to have a conversation with the counselor about his treatment of her.

Story two: Acting on a tip from a customer at Scotia's "Beauty and Barber Center," Scotia visited Charles's second grade classroom and discovered that the teacher had decided that Charles was easily distracted and should therefore have his desk moved away from the other children. The teacher placed the desk so that he faced "away from instruction" and toward the wall and the window that looked out into the courtyard. In addition, Scotia discovered that Charles had far fewer words on his word ring than the white students in his class, indicating that he had learned fewer words. Since Charles had scored "above average" on his end-of-first-grade testing, Scotia inferred that the teacher's ill treatment of Charles, the only African American in her class, stemmed from her low expectations of him. Shortly after her visit, Scotia and her husband decided to move Charles to another school. Charles flourished there—and in the rest of his formal education, eventually going to medical school and becoming a doctor. Scotia wonders what would have happened if Charles had remained in that class and internalized the teacher's view of him. She also connects Charles's experience in second grade to hers in eleventh and wonders about how many other African American students have been affected by school environments that threaten and even shatter their self-esteem. At the end of the story, Scotia reveals that the woman who gave her the tip about Charles was the educational assistant in his classroom.

Progression, Character, and Fictionality as Narrative Resources

In rhetorical analysis, progression subsumes plot: while plot refers to the sequence of events and the casual and other connections between them, progression refers to the overall movement of a narrative from beginning through middle to ending. This movement arises from a synthesis of textual dynamics, consisting of plot and narration, and audience dynamics, the trajectory of the audience's responses to the textual dynamics (for more see Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction* and *Narrative Medicine*). As the above summaries indicate, plots follow a pattern of instability-complication-resolution. In other words, plots arise from an initial disruption in a character's situation (e.g., Mary's learning that her co-workers at the restaurant are earning 60 cents more per hour than she is; Scotia's being told by her guidance counselor that she is not college material), and plots evolve as characters respond to that disruption (e.g., Scotia's and Mary's decisions to go to college). Plots continue until they reach a new, at least partially stable, situation (Mary's success with the Sister Friend Program; Scotia becoming a guidance counselor who uses her experience to treat students differently than she was treated). Narration is more variable, as tellers have countless options for handling the order of events, their disclosures of relevant information about those events, and the perspectives from which the events are told. For my purposes, the key narratorial

decisions that Scotia and Mary make are about when to disclose relevant information, when to shift from retrospective telling to constructing scenes of dialogue, and when to shift from their perspectives at the time of the action to their perspectives at the time of the telling.

Audience dynamics are a multi-layered phenomenon, one involving the interaction of cognitive, affective, and ethical responses to textual dynamics. For example, when Mary quotes her boss at the restaurant justifying the pay gap between her and her white male counterparts by saying that they want to buy cars, rhetorical listeners will simultaneously recognize the boss's casual racism and sexism, condemn it, feel appalled by it, and empathize with Mary. Rhetorical listeners will also be shaking their heads over the boss's apparent expectation that Mary will find his rationale persuasive.

Rhetorical theory's focus on progression goes hand in hand with its conception of narrative as both a way of knowing and doing: through the handling of plot and narration, the teller converts the raw material of experience into a comprehensible whole, and through their multi-layered responses, audiences begin to recognize the teller's purposes.

As for character, rhetorical theory understands it as a cover term for three analytically distinct but simultaneously functioning components of the representation of persons: the mimetic, the thematic, and the synthetic (for more, see Phelan, *Reading People* and Clark and Phelan, *Debating*). The mimetic component refers to character as an individual person with specific traits. The thematic component refers to character as a representative of a group, or, in some cases, as the embodiment of an idea, belief, or ideology. The synthetic component refers to character as an artificial construct playing a role in the larger construct of the narrative itself, e.g., protagonist, antagonist, minor character, and so on. Rhetorical theory sees progression and character as mutually influential, since textual dynamics will guide an audience to focus primarily on one or more components of character, and a character's traits will have consequences for developments in the plot. In Mary's and Scotia's narratives, the textual dynamics consistently give prominence to the mimetic and thematic components of their characters, as each storyteller constructs herself as a particular individual and as representing the larger demographic of African American women. Consequently, I will focus primarily on these two components of their characters.

As for fictionality, rhetorical theory understands the universe of discourse as falling into four macro-genres: nonfictionality, fictionality, rhetorical acts that blur the boundaries, and lying. For my purposes here, the relevant macro-genres are the first two. I define nonfictionality as a communicative act that directly engages with and seeks to intervene in some part of the world through its reporting, interpreting, evaluating or other references to actual states of affairs. I define fictionality as a communicative act that indirectly seeks to intervene in some part of the world through its inventions, projections, or other departures from actual states. These macro-genres function as galaxies containing the smaller solar systems of

other genres. Fictionality, for example, contains the novel, the short story, and the fiction film, and nonfictionality contains history, biography, and personal narratives such as the ones in our corpus. Furthermore, and this is the first crucial point for my analysis, a narrative with a global commitment to one macro-genre may contain local instances of discourse belonging to the others. Thus, the novel may contain instances of nonfictionality, as, for example, when the novelist sets its action in a real city. Similarly, nonfictional personal narrative may contain local fictionality, as, for example, when a narrator imagines what could have happened but didn't.¹ The second crucial point is that both fictionality and nonfictionality are ultimately ways of engaging with the actual world: nonfictionality does so directly, whereas fictionality does so indirectly (for more see Walsh, and Nielsen, Phelan, and Walsh). In this view, fictionality is not a way to escape from the world but to engage with it from angles that nonfictionality does not allow. Mary's parable about the teacher who promotes the F student to the role of teacher is an example of local fictionality within her global nonfiction. Mary's and Scotia's speculations about how their lives would have been different, if turning point events had gone differently, are additional examples. I'll discuss how these turns to fictionality function as part of my more detailed analyses.

Similarities between Mary's and Scotia's Stories

Attending to the interaction of character and progression in Mary's and Scotia's stories yields a fresh understanding of how everyday racism works. The global instabilities of Scotia's and Mary's stories arise from the actions of white people *who effectively erase their mimetic individuality* (and in Scotia's second story that of her African American son) *and see them only thematically*, that is, as members of their intersectional identity group, African American women (or in Charles's case, African American boys). What's more, *this vision is informed by a powerful assumption about the inferiority of that identity group*. Scotia emphasizes that her high school guidance counselor does not know her as anything other than an African American female with a low ACT score, yet he finds that limited knowledge sufficient to declare that she is "not college material." Similarly, Mary emphasizes that her employers see her not as an individual worker whose merit and job performance are equal to or better than those of her white male counterparts, but as a member of an identity group that is always already worth less than those counterparts.

For Mary's and Scotia's listeners, however, both their acts of storytelling and their accounts of how they responded to their treatment clearly signal their mimetic individuality as well as their group identity. Each is intelligent, hard-working, ethically sound, and resilient. Each exercises her own agency. Each also carries the psychological scars from their experiences of everyday racism.

Character, Progression, and Fictionality in Mary Bullock's Second Story

Beginning: I start with the global instability that Mary introduces and elaborates on in the beginning, the VP's elevation of John Doe to the position of Senior Director without even considering Mary or the other woman director for that position.

As she introduces the instability, Mary emphasizes its significance in multiple ways.

- 1 She constructs it as a repetition with a difference of what happened with her boss at the fast-food restaurant.
- 2 She gives more time to it (3 minute and 30 seconds in her oral storytelling) than to any other episode across her two stories.
- 3 She mixes narration from her perspective at the time of the action with character-character dialogue, giving the episode a highly dramatic quality.

Mary's narration of her meeting with the VP after he reads her parable especially warrants some close rhetorical listening. The VP commands her to "sit down" and then says, "First of all, I'm going to pretend like you never wrote this letter." Both statements assert his authority over Mary, and the second one severely judges her for daring to express her view of how she has been treated. (I'll comment on it as an instance of fictionality below.) It also shows that he believes he is treating her magnanimously. Both statements reveal that he has not listened to her at all, has not even entertained the idea of considering the situation from her perspective. He calls Mary by her name, but he erases her individuality, treating her as an uppity African American woman who needs to be put in her place, literally ("sit down") and figuratively.

For her part, Mary does not erase the VP's mimetic individuality. Instead, she makes his mimetic component prominent by describing his actions and by quoting him, even as she uses those things to highlight his thematic component: he is a representative white male doing white male racist things. Furthermore, the structural parallel between the restaurant owner and the VP reinforces this similarity in their thematic components.

The VP continues: "Second of all, we're giving him more money, you didn't know this, but his wife is pregnant and this way his wife won't have to work." The VP's explanation loudly echoes that of the restaurant owner about her white male co-workers needing more money to buy their car. In both cases, the puzzling question is why the white men assume that their explanation will justify their unequal treatment of Mary and that she will therefore accept it. (The VP's aside, "you didn't know this" reveals his assumption, since it implies that "once you do, you'll understand.") The best, albeit most horrifying, answer is that these men sincerely believe they are doing the right thing. The answer is horrifying because that belief rests on their deep, unquestioned assumption that white men deserve higher wages—and

by extension, better treatment all around—than African Americans in general and African American women in particular. The VP's statement also implies that Mary will accept patriarchal assumptions about gender roles regarding working outside the home and childrearing. Again, for the VP, Mary is not an individual but a thematic category.

Not surprisingly, Mary does not find the VP's explanation and its multiple implications persuasive. She expresses her mimetic individuality by speaking up for herself and doing so in a way that tries to meet the VP's explanation on its own terms. "Well, I'm a single parent, and I need more money." Again, the echo of the conversation with the restaurant owner about why her co-workers "deserve" a higher wage is loud and clear. In both cases, Mary implicitly makes an appeal to the values of justice and equality. In both cases, the VP rejects Mary's appeal, but this time he is more forthcoming about his reasons, as the ensuing dialogue indicates.

Mary, you know, this is a white man's world, and the sooner you realize it the better off you're going to be, Mary.

What did you just say to me?

No ... Mary, I'm doing you a favor by telling you this. The sooner you realize that this is a white man's world the better off you're going to be, Mary.

The VP rejects Mary's appeal to justice and equality by rejecting its terms—even though they are the ones he has previously been using. Instead, he introduces new terms rooted in the injustices of racism and sexism. "It's a white man's world" admits that the playing field is so tilted in favor of John Doe that Mary cannot even set foot on it. Indeed, the VP's attitude throughout this conversation—his condescension disguised as magnanimity—exemplifies his belief in his point. Mary's "what did you just say to me?" both registers her disbelief that he would say the quiet part out loud and gives him a chance to modify or even retract his statement. Instead, the VP doubles down, putting his hand on her shoulder, repeating the statement, and claiming that he is doing Mary a favor by telling her what he regards as an immutable truth. This white man, who benefits from the tilted playing field, once again thinks that he is being magnanimous. But once again he has no idea of how hurtful everything he has been doing and saying is to Mary. He has no idea because he does not regard her—indeed, seems incapable of regarding her—as an individual with feelings, hopes, and aspirations that are as legitimate as those of John Doe. Furthermore, even as he sees himself acting magnanimously, his doubling down renders any response Mary might make irrelevant. It's no wonder that Mary "just got up and ... left."

My understanding of the audience dynamics has already influenced my analysis of the textual dynamics but let me also say the quiet part out loud. The VP's ethically deficient behavior evokes outrage and anger in rhetorical listeners, while Mary's dignified handling of herself and the situation evokes

admiration. But above all, the scene evokes sadness as it demonstrates the power differential between the VP and Mary. This differential means that he will not be accountable for his racist decision-making and, thus, that her only options are to keep working in this racist environment or resign. In that way, the scene itself—neatly and depressingly—enacts the practical truth in the VP's dictum.

Mary's parable is an instance of embedded fictionality: Mary the storyteller nonfictionally reports that Mary the character invented it. Let's try to put ourselves in her shoes at the time of the action. After the VP's sudden announcement of John Doe's promotion, Mary feels that all her hard work has been "a waste of time." What to do? Quitting would mean losing her income. Directly confronting the VP could well lead to his firing her, because, as she has just been reminded, he has so much power over her. Yet if she were to say nothing, she would be passively accepting her fate, something that would be a denial of who she is. By turning to the indirection of the fictional parable, Mary threads the needle between strongly conveying her sense of the injustice of the process and explicitly calling the VP racist and sexist.

As we have seen, however, although the VP recognizes himself, John Doe, Mary, and the other director in the parable, he reads past its invitation to consider the events from Mary's perspective. Indeed, he counters Mary's fictionality with his own ("I'm going to pretend like you never wrote this letter") and relies on his position as boss to have his fictionality overpower hers. Nevertheless, Mary's turn to fictionality has an unintended positive effect, since it leads the VP to openly, albeit unapologetically, admit that the reason Mary didn't get the job had nothing to do with her performance and everything to do with the company's racism and sexism. In other words, the indirection of Mary's fictionality generates the VP's shocking, direct statement of his and the company's reprehensible ideology.

With its introduction of the global instability, this episode dominates the rest of the progression, and that domination is one way the form of Mary's story mirrors its content. This episode shapes her subsequent construction of the narrative—her choices about what to include and what to emphasize—just as it shapes so much of her life.

Middle: The next major episode (2 minutes and 15 seconds) is Mary's mini-story about winning the \$300,000 grant from the Federal Housing Administration. Its most salient features are Mary's two time-of-the-action responses to her success: "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord" and "I'm even." The psychological logic behind these responses is that Mary sees—at the time of the action and at the time of the telling—the competition as closely connected to her experience with her previous employer. It's not only that two of her former co-workers apply for the grant but also that their offer to match the funding once again tilts the playing field against her. When she wins, she experiences the satisfaction of success and a keen sense of validation for her work and her belief in herself.

There are additional layers to those feelings. Because the application from her former co-workers is disqualified for being late, Mary has the satisfaction of knowing that she outperformed them in the application process itself. Furthermore, their disqualification means that Mary now competes on a level playing field, and her winning justifies her belief that under those conditions she can succeed. Thus, she feels vindicated for speaking up for herself in the first episode, and, because she succeeds where the company that devalued her lost, she can feel “even.”

In these ways, the episode alters the trajectory of both the textual and audience dynamics. Mary has success and validation that offer solace and satisfaction to her rhetorical listeners.

Ending: Mary soon makes it clear that this upward swing is not a full turning point: the grant lasted only a few years and then she worked for the next 20 as a social worker. That the upward swing is a reprieve rather than a turning point becomes even clearer as Mary concludes her story with her anecdote about looking up what happened to John Doe. First, Mary’s curiosity about him is itself evidence that she has never fully moved on from how she was treated by the VP. Second, when she discovers that his annual salary is \$279,000 more than hers at the time she retired, she can quantify the consequences of the discrimination she experienced. While Mary quickly reassures herself that “you did okay,” she also offers one qualitative measure of those consequences: she never again applied to be a director or manager, because “I never wanted to feel that way again.” She then ends by offering her explicit thematizing of her experience: “invest in everybody.”

There are four interrelated aspects of this conclusion that contribute to its powerful testimony about the ongoing effects of the VP’s racist and sexist treatment of her.

- 1 Mary’s withholding the disclosure of the salary gap until this point. Because Mary is telling about events that happened in the past, she could easily have disclosed this discovery earlier. Indeed, if she had included it at the end of her account of her discussion with the VP, it would have rounded that episode off with a bang. But delaying the disclosure is actually more effective because it leads rhetorical listeners to return to the episode with a new understanding of its enormous consequences. Given that Mary worked for more than 20 years after the episode and given that the \$279,000 is a difference in *annual* salary, rhetorical listeners recognize that everyday racism cost Mary *millions of dollars* in income. It’s a credit to her resilience and her ability to take satisfaction in the good work she did for others that Mary is not a deeply embittered woman.
- 2 The turn to fictionality. Where the parable was a case of embedded fictionality, Mary’s considerations of what might have been are a straightforward introduction of the nonactual into her telling about the actual. “Had they invested in me, had they groomed me to be a director like that, what

a difference \$279,000 a year would have made in my life.” Mary does not elaborate what might have been into a full-blown narrative of the non-actual, but even this brief contemplation of it both opens a window onto such a narrative and shows that she is painfully aware of the high cost of the VP’s racist and sexist treatment of her.

- 3 The appeal to equality. Mary’s explicit thematizing of her experience is consistent with her overall mimetic character, especially as revealed in her meetings with both of her bosses. She is both resilient and committed to equality, and so she advises employers: “invest in everybody.” Furthermore, Mary’s thematizing foregrounds the individuality of those to be invested in. They all have their own hopes, dreams, and aspirations.
- 4 The unresolved global instability. Mary’s looking up what happened to John Doe links up with her explicit statements about the effects of the company’s discrimination on the rest of her career to indicate that, though her story ends, the global instability is never resolved. In this sense, Mary’s second story is radically different from her first. The first not only follows the default pattern of instability-complication-resolution but Mary also turns the restaurant owner’s discrimination against her into a spur toward a more positive future. In that way, the discrimination lives on in memory but no longer has an active negative influence on her life. In the second story, by contrast, the effects of the discrimination continually recur. In her 20 years as a social worker, Mary never applied to be a director or a manager because she “did not want to ever have that feeling again.” Mary acknowledges that she “never recovered,” either “financially” or “emotionally” from the VP’s treatment. Even as rhetorical listeners admire Mary’s resilience, they feel a deep sadness that her life was so negatively affected by the everyday racism and sexism summarized so aptly in the VP’s message that “it’s a white man’s world.”

Character, Progression, and Fictionality in Scotia Brown’s Stories

In addition to the similarities between Mary’s and Scotia’s stories noted above, I want to point out several others before turning to some differences.

- 1 Both of their first stories show them encountering racism and sexism as high school students, resolving to counter it through their own agency, and succeeding. Scotia’s second story about her son follows a similar pattern: though Charles is the one who experiences the racism, Scotia is the one who investigates it and brings about a satisfactory resolution. In this way, the stories show that sometimes it is possible for strong African American women to succeed, despite competing on a playing field tilted against them.
- 2 Both women testify to the ongoing effects of their encounters with racism. Scotia’s testimony about these effects may initially seem surprising because in both stories the progression culminates in a positive

resolution. But Scotia's point is that the effects of racist and sexist treatment linger beyond the apparent ends of her stories. Scotia calls attention to what it means to have a "professional" like her guidance counselor question one's worth. One of six African Americans in her school, she has reason to question whether and how she fits in. When the guidance counselor, in effect, tells her that she doesn't, she can't help but wonder whether he is right.

- 3 Both women turn to local fictionality toward the end of their stories to underline the power of everyday racism. Invoking what might have happened sheds light on what actually happened, and the contrasts work either to show what likely positive outcomes have been taken away (as in Mary's second story) or what likely disasters have been averted (as in Scotia's second story).
- 4 Both Mary and Scotia use delayed disclosure to enhance the effect of their endings. In this case, however, the effects in the two stories are quite different. I'll come back to this point after considering another significant difference.

This difference points to another feature of everyday racism and its effects that would not be as visible if we considered Scotia and Mary's stories separately. Why should Scotia, for the most part, be able to successfully negotiate her discriminatory situations, when Mary who shares many of Scotia's traits, is unable to in her second story? The answer involves the relationships among individual agency, power, and the overall situation in which the women act. In both of Mary's stories, her employer had far more power than she did. But Mary didn't need her job in the fast-food restaurant in the same way she needed the later one. Furthermore, as a teenager she had an attractive and viable alternative path open to her: college. By contrast, when she was working as a single mother with two daughters, her ability to exercise her agency was far more constrained. In other words, though being one of three directors in that company would seem to come with more power than being a minimum wage worker in a restaurant, she actually had greater freedom to exercise her agency in that latter position.

In Scotia's first story, she is in a similar position to Mary in her first story. Although the guidance counselor is a professional whose evaluation has the power to wound her, his actual authority over what she does is limited. He cannot prevent her from setting out on the path that she deems the more appropriate one for herself. In Scotia's second story, she again has options. She can use her parental authority in her conversations with the teacher and the school principal to change how Charles gets treated. And she can exercise her agency to find another school where he'll be treated better.

The larger point here is that the women's individual strength of character and their willingness to exercise their agency only goes so far. As I noted earlier, the women's stories collectively debunk the cultural narrative in the United States that anyone can achieve their goals if they just work hard

enough. Mary's and Scotia's stories quietly demonstrate that everyday racism is often more powerful than individual agency.

Scotia's delayed disclosure adds yet another wrinkle to how her story implicitly comments on the interrelations of power, agency, and situation. Scotia's revelation that the woman who gave her the tip to check on Charles was the "educational assistant" in Charles's classroom leads rhetorical listeners to reconfigure the progression. This reconfiguration does not radically alter their overall understanding of the story, but it does add some significant layers to it. First, Scotia's delayed disclosure gives greater prominence to the agency of another African American woman. Although Scotia does not explicitly state her racial identity, rhetorical listeners infer it from the information that the woman gave Scotia the tip at her hair salon, which functioned as a community meeting place. Second, the disclosure invites attention to the importance of solidarity and mutual support among African American women and in the African American community more generally. Scotia's expression of gratitude for the woman's "courage" in stepping out beyond the boundaries of her job and alerting her to Charles's situation drives home this point. Coupled with Scotia's focus on Charles, this dimension of the story conveys Scotia's own awareness that collective agency is more powerful than individual agency. In that respect, her delayed disclosure enables her to infuse a mixture of hope and possibility amidst her concerns about how low expectations can shatter the self-esteem of young African Americans.

Conclusion

I noted earlier that the women's stories are not themselves policy proposals but provide the basis for such proposals. Now, with some help from the Argentinian fiction writer Jorge Luis Borges, I want to say more about why they provide an especially good foundation for making policy and then try to build a little on that foundation.

Borges finds argument to be an ineffective method of persuasion, and I believe that anyone who has been paying attention to political argumentation in the now deeply polarized USA will be likely to nod in agreement:

Remember what Emerson said: arguments convince nobody. They convince nobody because they are presented as arguments. Then we look at them, we weigh them, we turn them over, and we decide against them. (31)

Borges's alternative to argument is "suggestion" because its incompleteness prompts "a kind of hospitality in our imagination" that makes us ready to accept it (31). I suggest (!) substituting "narrative" for Borges's "suggestion" and "narrative's ways of knowing and doing" for "incompleteness." Narrative is less likely to evoke the resistance that argument does because

its ways of knowing and doing engage audiences' cognition, emotions, ethical values, and capacities for judgment. Furthermore, like the audience for a suggestion, the audience for narrative (especially rhetorical listeners) typically need to fill in gaps and, thus, they develop a hospitality of imagination. With that hospitality, rhetorical listeners are open to reconsidering their beliefs and their previous understandings of the world and even to changing their minds. In addition, rhetorical listening can lead audiences into debates about the tellers' rhetorical actions and about what should and shouldn't follow from them.

In practical terms, then, this conception of telling and listening to stories suggests that the women's narratives have the power to cut through the stalemate of "yes, there is"/"no, there isn't" arguments about the existence of systemic racism. Those occupying the "no, there isn't" position currently look at the "yes, there is" arguments, shrug, and decide against them. But could they carefully listen to and then easily dismiss Mary's and Scotia's stories? The whole corpus of stories in this project?

If, as I would like to think, the answer is no, then a few things follow. Schools should devote more time in grades K-12 teaching about how narratives work and what it means to listen to them. I don't mean that middle school students should give their days and nights to the study of narratology, but I do mean that they can be taught to do more than "listen for the theme." In that connection, schools can also teach that, because students are surrounded by stories, developing their listening skills has great practical value, because they can use those skills to navigate the world.

Furthermore, what gets taught also matters. Rather than banning books about slavery, its legacy, and race based on one or two allegedly offensive passages, school boards and concerned parents can themselves carefully listen to them, engage in debates with their defenders, and then decide. The United States is a diverse country with diverse voices. Students need to listen to more than one of those voices.

As with the development of listening skills, choices about which stories circulate have consequences beyond the school walls. This point underlies the meta-policy proposal I sketched earlier. Those responsible for setting policies—school boards, legislators, judges, administrators, and managers of all kinds—should listen to this corpus of stories, or to others like them, at least once a year. If such stories became as familiar and as honored as such widespread beliefs as "the U.S. is the land of opportunity" and "with hard work, anything is possible," this country would take some important steps toward replacing white supremacy with anti-racism.

Note

- 1 Gerald Prince has previously identified narration about what might have happened but didn't as "The Disnarrated." I am taking his important insight and linking it with a rhetorical approach to fictionality.

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Appendix

Storytelling Prompts Provided by the Researchers

These are the guidelines the narrative scholars gave to the storytellers. The scholars and storytellers met together on Zoom to discuss and revise the guidelines before the storytellers prepared to be videotaped.

We are providing two prompts that will guide you as you tell your stories about experiences with discrimination. The stories will focus on racial discrimination, but, if relevant, you should feel free to also consider how other aspects of your identity intersected with your race and impacted the situation (e.g., gender, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and/or religion). Before we ask you to tell your stories in the studio, we would like for you to follow the steps below to begin thinking more deeply about your experience and capturing nuance and details you might not recall or think about “on the spot” when recording your stories. In the studio, you will tell two stories: one focused on a situation in which you felt discriminated against but were able to overcome and a second focused on a discriminatory situation that you felt you were not able to overcome.

Preparing to Tell Your Two Stories

Please begin preparing by following the guided brainstorming and free writing steps below.

Please do some brainstorming by making a few lists. Only you will read these lists, so don't worry about writing style, correctness, or privacy when you are making them. Read each question and—without thinking too much about it before you begin—start writing down a list of everything that comes to mind. Make the lists as long or as short as you like. You can review your lists right before you tell your two stories.

List 1:

- Places where you have experienced everyday racism.
- The feelings you have during those experiences.
- Situations that could be the basis for each of the two stories.

Once you have done some freewriting about these items, choose the two situations you want to talk about and move to the next list.

List 2:

Refresh your memory about the situations by considering the following questions. *Your stories do not have to include answers to all of them.*

- Where are you?
- Is it a place you go to frequently or someplace you haven't been before?
- Who else is present?
- What can you hear?
- What do you see?
- Are other senses importantly involved—smell, touch, taste?
- What words were exchanged?
- How long does the incident take?
- How do you feel, and how do your feelings change as the events unfold?
- How, if at all, does your story point to possible solutions to everyday racism?

Telling the Stories on Camera

Drawing on your refreshed memory, focus on what happened and how you felt about it. You may want to comment on your telling using phrases such as the following:

- "As I am telling you this, I realize ..."
- "When I first started thinking about it, ..."
- "Telling this story now makes me think ..."

You may also want to include whether you have told this story to anyone before, and, if so, something about how they responded.

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