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Lessons in Transgression: #BlackGirlsMatter and the Feminist Classroom

Abstract

This coauthored article examines the ways in which teaching Black feminism in both high school and undergraduate contexts can inspire Black feminist activism in young Black women and girls. Using the work of bell hooks as a foundation for designing and implementing feminist pedagogies and practices, the authors trace the trajectory of two young women of color in their classrooms who, as a result of reading hooks, employ a range of literacies—including blogging, public speaking, and campus activism—to participate in movement building within intersectional feminism in general, and #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName in particular. The article ultimately demonstrates the importance of women of color feminisms both in and outside of the classroom, as content and as practice, to promote critical self-awareness and burgeoning political consciousness. The transformative impact of intersectional feminist pedagogies on girls and women of color, with an emphasis on Black feminism, is at the heart of this essay—as are practical approaches to the work of bell hooks’s texts for contemporary students.

Introduction: Feminist Women of Color Teaching bell hooks

Dr. bell hooks is every feminist teacher’s feminist teacher. Through her scholarship on community building and cultural critique within personal and political dimensions of Black feminism, hooks has been

Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism 15, no. 1 (2016): 7–39.
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teaching feminist educators and scholars how to question systems of power since the publication of *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (hooks 2015a). As queer women of color who are also secondary- and college-level educators at a small progressive and private high school and a large public research university, respectively, hooks's work inspires our feminist pedagogies and curriculum design. As feminist educators, our intellectual and emotional labor with and for young people has been informed by hooks's radical vision of releasing schools from the grip of "imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy" as we guide our students into self-actualization and transformation (hooks 2000, 5). As we teach to transgress, we also infuse our practices—both in and out of the classroom—with self-care and self-love, modeling for our students that the only way to teach and to learn to transgress is to love each other and ourselves (hooks 2000).

As teachers within high school and university settings, we believe that there is value in sharing how teaching hooks's work in both contexts can model for other feminist teachers and scholars an exciting continuum of creating spaces where education as feminist liberation is as relevant and powerful for teens in high school as it is for young adults in college. We want to model that this kind of work can and should begin in a young person's earliest school years through high school and continue into their higher education. In writing this paper together, we also want to disrupt the notion that the teaching of women's and gender studies happens only in academia, and instead make visible the fact that intersectional feminist education does exist in K–12 schools. We ultimately believe that feminist education should be the norm in every young person's trajectory in school. If educators truly are committed to answering hooks's call to create a "mass-based educational movement to teach everyone about feminism," then we must begin by partnering with each other across secondary and higher education as teachers and scholars (hooks 2000, 24).

We have both noted time and again that hooks's work has galvanized and transformed young people, whether they are in high school or in college. In this paper, we are interested in capturing these exciting moments when our students realize the relevance of Black feminism in their lives upon studying hooks's work. Whether we engage students with *hooksonian* texts or videos or they write about her either in print or online, we consistently

witness our students awaken politically (hooks, 2000). As such, our approach in teaching her work reflects the ways in which we are creating intentionally intersectional feminist spaces within high school and college level classrooms.

Our pedagogical practices allow for inquiry-based learning, small- and large-group discussion and debate, public speaking and presentations, and also online blogging that propels our students' work into a larger feminist discourse. Even as we both use numerous intersectional feminist texts and materials in our courses, the inclusion and centrality of hooks's work in our curriculum design is a mainstay. Indeed, situating other women of color writers, theorists, and activists alongside hooks's oeuvre allows our students to understand where she falls within a larger Black feminist genealogy. This kind of teaching to transgress ultimately informs our students' own origin stories as they develop as young feminists, experience transformative education, and begin to enact and establish their own activist-oriented agendas and practices.

Our own origin story is a template for how we imagine other feminist teachers and scholars meeting and forging meaningful, collaborative alliances. Introduced to each other by a colleague at the 2010 National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) conference held in Denver, we formed an immediate connection to each other, as Stephanie was also once a feminist high school teacher and Ileana has been teaching high school for two decades. It was Ileana's first time at the conference, and as the only high school teacher there that year, the two of us created an important intellectual and political bond with each other on the emerging feminism-in-schools movement that Ileana was and is still leading with other teachers, activists, and scholars nationally and globally. Since then, we have presented together at NWSA in subsequent years as well as at other conferences. In 2013, Ileana also invited Stephanie to speak in St. Louis at the American Association of University Women's Gender Studies Symposium for feminist K-12 educators, which helped to mobilize teachers and scholars from across the country to join the movement. The feminism-in-schools movement has been made even more visible with Ileana's creation of the hashtags #HSfeminism and #K12feminism via her Twitter handle @feministteacher, and her website *Feminist Teacher*, feministteacher.com.

Joined by our shared commitment to the social justice potential of joining feminisms and schooling, we write this paper with certain principles in mind when we think of the feminist pedagogies we use when designing and implementing our courses across secondary and higher education:

- We acknowledge that our commitment to education is fed by a deep ethic of love and care for our students, keeping at the forefront of this love their learning, their agency, and their freedom.
- We claim intersectional, women of color feminisms as our standpoint.
- We center marginal voices and knowledges in our work because doing so is politically important in the development of student agency.
- As women of color who work with girls and women of color, we see #BlackLivesMatter as an inclusive movement that includes Black girls and women, Black queer and transgender people and all Black people along the gender spectrum, poor Blacks, Blacks who are incarcerated, Black people with disabilities, Black undocumented people and all those belonging to the Black diaspora.
- We infuse our work—teaching, activism, and writing—with ideas, concepts, and references to bell hooks’s oeuvre, both in print and in media, because it remains relevant and revolutionary both for ourselves and for our students.
- Finally, as the title of her book asserts, we believe that *feminism is for everybody* (2000).

As we show in this paper, through hooks’s ideas and writings—and in particular in the case of her recent series of dialogues at The New School—our students are recognizing and attempting to challenge and resist “imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy” in many important ways (hooks 2000, 5). Part of what we hope to illuminate in our shared feminist pedagogical narrative are the ways in which hooks’s work resonates with the young people we work with as they begin to articulate their burgeoning feminist consciousness and activism via their critical, cultural, and political literacy(ies).

For these reasons, we have chosen to highlight student writing, both in print and online, as a way to model how hooks’s work inspires the emergence of feminist consciousness in girls and women of color across women’s and gender studies classes in both secondary and higher education classrooms.

Divided into two sections, this paper follows first the trajectory of Ileana’s student Jessica, a high school junior, as a young Black feminist blogger and also a public speaker in Ileana’s feminism and activism class at a progressive and private coed high school in downtown Manhattan. Jessica’s study of bell hooks included reading sections of *Feminism Is for Everybody* combined with attending a dialogue led by hooks and *The New York Times* Op-Ed columnist Charles Blow at The New School as part of hooks’s residency there in October 2015. Both of these interactions with hooks informed Jessica’s understanding of not only her personal Black feminist identity as a young Black girl but also her public position within the #BlackLivesMatter movement as a writer and activist. We then follow one of Stephanie’s Black female students, Marielle, a former preservice teacher candidate and now a graduate student in sociology, who studied hooks’s work within the context of two different courses with Stephanie—an introductory-level education class and a gender and women’s studies class on Black feminism at a public, predominantly white institution in an isolated part of North Carolina.

For both of our sections, the first narrated by Ileana and the second narrated by Stephanie, we will highlight student engagement with hooks both inside and outside of the classroom. As we share our work across our respective contexts, we wish to provide a meaningful portrait of how Black feminist consciousness develops via reading and writing bell hooks in high school— and college-aged women of color. In tracing the development of how each of our students became young Black feminists, we at times refer to our classes as a whole and make reference to other students. In telling our stories, we highlight student work and explain the surrounding context while also moving into anecdotal observations, thematic analysis, connections, and summary. At the same time, it is our desire that their stories will speak for themselves as these young Black women move feminist theory “from margin to center” in their lives (hooks 2015a).

High School Feminism: Black Girls Blog bell hooks (Ileana Jiménez)

For many Black girls in my high school feminism elective for juniors and seniors, bell hooks provides a critical entrance into Black feminism. As

Melissa Harris-Perry once noted in a 2013 talk with hooks at The New School, “None of us come through black feminism except through you” (hooks and Harris-Perry 2013). This could not be more true for my high school students. Whether they wind up agreeing or disagreeing with hooks, the girls of color in my class look to her as a potentially influential source for defining their emerging feminist identities. Indeed, since the inception of her New School series of dialogues in 2013, the students in my #HSfeminism classes have attended these talks in downtown Manhattan with great enthusiasm, lining up for hours beforehand.

The New School’s annual, weeklong series of talks features bell hooks as a Scholar-in-Residence. This series allows for the general public, as well as students and scholars, to have a real-time, interactive experience with hooks while she engages in conversation with leading public intellectuals, artists, writers, and activists on everything from Beyoncé to #BlackLivesMatter. For many of my students, if not all, it is the first time they have heard a leading feminist speak, let alone a major feminist of color who has indelibly shaped the field. It is also an unusual experience to have in high school, as our school’s location is just blocks away from The New School in Greenwich Village.

Throughout the years of the series, my students have had the rare opportunity to hear hooks in conversation with the likes of Marci Blackman, Charles Blow, Darnell Moore, Melissa Harris-Perry, and Gloria Steinem. The range of girls of color who take my classes—whether they are African American, Dominican, Nigerian, Palestinian, Puerto Rican, Trinidadian, mixed race, or any number of other ethnicities or cultural backgrounds—have had an equally impressive range of responses to these talks. Their emotions register from utter awe and inspiration to mild resistance and skepticism. Upon their return to class, they immediately want to talk and blog about how hooks has exploded their initial notions of self-care, Black sexuality, Black masculinity, white privilege, and white supremacy.

In this section, I am interested in exploring how young Black girls navigate the convergence of both reading and hearing hooks in my coed high school feminism class and how that experience informs how they generate a feminist narrative about themselves. I want to know how Black girls respond to hooks when they hear her speak, particularly in

conversation with others. What new ideas emerge that did not occur to them when reading her work? How does hearing hooks in person deepen and confirm as well as explode and contradict what they have read and assumed about her beforehand? Ultimately, how does hooks allow Black girls to realize that they matter too?

I want to posit that reading hooks in class coupled with hearing hooks in person provides Black girls with an unusual and powerful platform for feminist consciousness and feminist education—exactly as hooks calls for in the texts they are most familiar with, such as *Feminism Is for Everybody* (2000) and *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1981). The girls take it one step further by using our feminist class blog, *F to the Third Power*,¹ to process and reflect on what they have heard hooks say in conversation with other thinkers at The New School. Upon hearing her, blogging about hooks allows Black girls the opportunity to begin testing out their newly emerging ideas on Black girl politics on race, class, gender, sexuality, and religion in their own unique voices. Bringing together their personal and critical responses to hooks and her New School guests, the girls' blog posts become a hybrid mash-up of writing as a form of activism and coming to feminist consciousness. They quite literally move from theory to action within their digital space of young feminist critique of hooks and company.

Whether they are having first-time encounters with the notion of their own sexuality as Black girls or notions of decolonization and self-care, blogging about hooks becomes an immediate channel for processing hooksian feminist theory while creating their own theories. Meanwhile, they are aware that other Black girls in the class—as well as white girls and other girls of color—are also blogging about their responses to hooks on *F to the Third Power*, creating a veritable online conversation that reflects not only a collective coming to hooks—but also a collective coming to consciousness in a digital “practice of politics and activism” (Keller 2016, 264). As Jessalynn Keller notes in her study of teen girls and blogging: “Participating in this community then ensures its continuation, functioning as activism by motivating oneself and others to continue the struggle” (2016, 269). Ideally, when students write these blog posts, it should no longer feel like they are completing a school assignment; instead, it should feel like a direct participation in the very feminist struggle against sexist

and racist oppression that hooks urges them to engage in and that they so eagerly agreed to do upon their entrance into the class. It is in this online space where they bring their radical, antiracist, queer, feminist selves into a public sphere, toggling back and forth between reflecting on what they have read and heard and what action they will take next.

Now that I've provided some broader context along with preliminary observations, I want to spend the rest of this section following how Jessica, a high school junior who took my class in the fall of 2015, moved from theory to action in forming her Black feminist consciousness as both a writer and speaker. Specifically, I want to trace how bell hooks became a pivotal force in inspiring Jessica to say her own name.

On the first day of class I always ask students to write about their first thoughts on feminism, including initial definitions and associations, why they think feminism might still be important today, and what they would like to learn in my class. Jessica wrote: "The most I have learned about feminism is from our school talks and tumblr. I define feminism as a power movement . . . it is a way for me to learn and connect with other women and girls who have had similar or totally different experiences than me."

A few weeks after writing this reflection, Jessica attended a New School talk featuring bell hooks and Charles Blow in early October 2015. In her blog post reflecting on this talk, Jessica opened with some thoughts on the compulsory heterosexuality she was implicitly and explicitly expected to follow within her family:

Growing up a black girl in a semi-religious household, the conversation on sexuality was never brought up, unless it had to do with the man I was going to marry or the family I would have. My family is not ignorant to the existence of sexual orientations beyond heterosexual, however, they have always been dismissive of the conversation on sexuality, choosing to stay silent if I ever inquired about how they would feel if they found out I was a lesbian (simply as a hypothetical). After a while, this standoffish way of answering my questions led me to believe that sexuality was not an important part of my life. (J. S. 2015)

Jessica's opening refuses to "stay silent" on the topic of sexuality. Listening to hooks and Blow seems to have given her permission to break this code

of silence. As the post continues, Jessica declares that hooks and Blow have exploded her original, narrow notions of Black sexuality specifically because a Black man and a Black woman were in conversation with each other about sex in public; for her, this resisted the “standoffish way” she had been raised to think about sexuality. Their dialogue provided her with a new paradigm for thinking about sexuality beyond the physical. Listening to them made Jessica realize that the spiritual and intellectual aspects of sexuality are as important as the physical aspects:

But after attending a talk facilitated by bell hooks and Charles Blow at the New School called “Radical Sexuality: Body Geography,” my entire world flipped upside down. This was the first time in my 16 years of being a young black girl that I had ever heard a black woman and a black man speak so freely on the subject of sexuality. And not sexuality in the context of that awkward talk on the birds and the bees, but in a larger sense of how one creates a relationship with their mind, body, and spirit. (J. S. 2015)

Hearing hooks and Blow “speak so freely” about sex gave Jessica the opportunity to begin analyzing the spectrum of sexuality that she and other Black girls have been denied access to throughout their lives. Indeed, just listening to them speak led her to declare that she now knows that she and other Black girls do not have to “limit our sexuality to a single box.” Instead, what she learned from hooks is that sexuality is a “movement and practice” that has fluidity on all kinds of levels throughout one’s life. In response to this, Jessica wrote:

This notion of sexuality as, in bell hooks’ words, “movement and practice,” is not something that everyone may be able to wrap their head around, however, I think it is important especially for myself and possibly other young black girls to realize that we do not have to limit our sexuality to a single box. (J. S. 2015)

Jessica also realized that this conversation about sex and sexuality allowed her to think even further about the racist and sexist scripts she had been given to think about her body and the bodies of other Black women and girls (Stokes 2007). In her talk, hooks provided Jessica with the language to explore the possibility that having a connection to one’s body does not have

to happen in a “perverse place” but instead as an “endless negotiation with ourselves and the world.” Indeed, hooks’s ruminations on Black women’s sexuality inspired Jessica to write the following powerful passage and query:

I specifically remember hooks emphasizing the importance of having a relationship with one’s own body. For women, and specifically black women, it is important to learn that understanding one’s body should not occur in, as hooks says, “a perverse place.” She also goes further to say, “life is an endless negotiation with ourselves and the world . . .” It made me wonder, “How can such a task of creating a relationship with one’s body be achieved in the world I live in today?” (J. S. 2015)

In the next section of her post, Jessica attempted to answer her own important question about creating a relationship with her own body. Starting with mass media depictions of Black women and girls, (e.g., having a “big booty,” being a “baby mama,” and acting “ratchet”), she offered a rethinking of common tropes and scripts:

I started my research by revisiting mainstream media with a feminist lens. The examples I found of current day portrayals of black women mainly consisted of long straight hair (weave), the over-sexualization of the “big booty” and being able to “shake it” and the “baby mama” or “ratchet” archetypes. I looked at Taylor Swift’s “Shake it Off,” Miley Cyrus’s “We Can’t Stop,” Nicki Minaj’s “Anaconda,” and A\$AP Rocky’s “F**kin’ Problems” as some of the most well-known depictions of black girls and women, especially when featured in mainstream white media and mainstream black hip-hop. (J. S. 2015)

Jessica then went on to cite research on depictions of Black women in the media:

In 2013, *Essence* published an article on a study they conducted with 1,200 women on the portrayal of black women in the media. They found that: “Younger women—ages 18–29—were more likely than older women to be aware of negative typologies [e.g., Baby Mamas, Angry Black Women, and Unhealthy Black Women] and were also more likely to find them compelling. This may be because younger generations consume more media overall, especially digital media, where many

of the negative types run rampant.” In the same study, *Essence* found that “non-Hispanic White women cited negative typologies as most representative of Black women they’ve encountered in real life—namely, Baby Mamas, Angry Black Women, Unhealthy Black Women and Uneducated Sisters.” (J. S. 2015)

Given just this initial research, Jessica concluded that “it is not far-off to say it is not an easy task for young Black girls and women to explore their sexuality in this day [and] age.” She knows that the “one-dimensional manner” in which the media portrays Black women makes them believe that they actually “belong in such a narrow box.” Linking both the research she found and her own personal experiences at school, she confessed: “I mean, some of my closest friends are still surprised, and seemingly disappointed, when they discover that I am a black girl who cannot twerk.”

In her next two paragraphs, Jessica linked hooks and Blow’s conversation about Black sexuality and her initial question regarding whether it is possible to live in a world where Black girls could fully explore their sexuality without the trappings of being seen as an “oversexualized object.” In a brilliant analysis, Jessica realized that the paradox of the oversexualization of Black girls is not an isolated phenomenon but is instead part of how racist media contributes to the hypersexualized mythology that both surrounds and erases Black girls and women. It is exactly this volatile mix of hypersexualization and invisibility that, in Jessica’s words, makes it “even more difficult for young black girls to find their own sexual self-worth.” She stated:

Taking it back to the bells hooks and Charles Blow talk, it becomes even more difficult for young black girls to find their own sexual self-worth when living in a world where mainstream media always finds a way to make the black female body an “oversexualized object.” This hypersexualization of young black girls and women ties strongly to the invisibility of black girls in America. (J. S. 2015)

Not content to let the invisibility of Black girls go unnoticed, a week after she attended the talk by hooks and Blow, Jessica was inspired to increase her own visibility as a young Black feminist within the context of our school assemblies, and specifically made herself visible within the

#BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName movement. The #SayHerName hashtag, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (2015), has made visible the names of women and girls of color—both cisgender and transgender—who have been assaulted and killed at the hands of state violence. #SayHerName ultimately reminds us that Black men and boys are not the only ones targeted by police brutality. Inspired by the Black feminist activism of #SayHerName, Jessica decided that the best platform to share the work of this movement was in our feminism class's annual International Day of the Girl assembly. It was at this assembly that Jessica brought together the emerging threads of her young Black feminist analysis of hooks, #BlackLivesMatter, and Black girls and women, ultimately creating her own #BlackGirlsMatter declaration.

In December 2011, the United Nations declared October 11 of every year International Day of the Girl to highlight the pressing concerns that girls around the world face daily, such as lack of protection from violence and discrimination as well as lack of access to education, healthcare, legal rights, and nutrition. The students in my high school feminism class have hosted an assembly for their peers every year since the first International Day of the Girl in 2012. Not limited to global girls' issues, our assembly is probably executed a bit differently from most International Day of the Girl assemblies at other schools, if they are done at all in other schools. Ours is designed to be an antiracist, queer, feminist intervention on the dangerous trope that places girls in the global North in the position of playing savior to girls in the global South. Our assembly provides as much an exploration of girls' issues in the United States as girls' issues globally. For example, we explore violence against girls and women of color in the United States as an issue that needs as much critical attention as violence against girls and women around the world.

During our October 2015 International Day of the Girl assembly, both Jessica and a white classmate, Lauren, said out loud the names of Black women who have been killed by police brutality that #SayHerName has made visible both through the hashtag and through the AAPF report, *Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality against Black Women* (Crenshaw and Ritchie 2015). Both girls also provided background on how the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag and movement were founded by Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors, and called out the invisibility of violence against women

and girls of color as a national tragedy of racist misogyny. Here is a portion of their script:

Jessica: There is a lack of visibility of young black girls in America. So how do we reframe #BlackLivesMatter to start looking at how this movement involves girls and women of color just as much as it involves boys and men of color?

Lauren: Let's start off by looking at the origins of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors. These three queer black women began the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag right after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the Trayvon Martin trial. According to Alicia Garza, "Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks' contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression."

Jessica: This movement has been stolen and reshaped by white mainstream media so much that the story of how it came about has been swept under the rug. Many people do not even know that three women started the hashtag and that it is often black women who are leading the protests that are happening across the country, including those that happened over the summer, such as the protests that happened at Netroots Nation.

From the start, Jessica clearly called out the movement's erasure of violence against Black women and girls and asked why it has not received as much attention as that of the brutality against men and boys of color. Moments later, she also called out white mainstream media for stealing and reshaping the movement itself and how its origins have been "swept under the rug" by the media's master narrative. Later in the assembly, she brought an intersectional lens to her analysis as a whole, amplifying the larger message of the assembly:

Jessica: It is also important to realize that many young girls of color are targeted not only because of their race but also because of their gender identity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class status. As we stated earlier in the assembly, all of these identities, and thus all of the oppressions intersect, especially for girls and women of color.

Jessica closed her section of the assembly by saying bell hooks's name out loud and reiterating the words she had heard hooks say only a week earlier at The New School. Using hooks as her framework, Jessica reminded her audience of peers about the ways in which white patriarchal structures want communities of color to be so colonized by institutional racism that they leave girls and women of color feeling that they have no personal and collective power to make transformative personal or social change:

Jessica: How do we give power to Black girls? In bell hooks's words, "a culture of domination always wants us to think of power as outside of ourselves." How can we help Black girls around the country harness the pain of oppression and turn it into a source of power? "We cannot move from pain to power in isolation," hooks says. We need to work together to make sure that black girls matter.

In this declaration to our school assembly, we can see that just within the course of a few weeks, Jessica was able to thread together a Black feminist genealogy in both her public speaking life and her online digital presence. Brilliantly merging her understanding of hooks's theory on domination and decolonization with the AAPF's #SayHerName and school pushout reports, while also taking into consideration the *Essence* report on the representation of Black women in the media, Jessica came to her own conclusion about the marginalized position of Black girls today. Jessica highlighted the invisibility of Black girls and women in #BlackLivesMatter and "within our overall societal structures" by pointing out that this very invisibility is inextricably linked to the ways in which Black girls and women are hypersexualized in the media, pushed out of schools, and ultimately killed at the hands of police. Not missing a beat, Jessica included both straight and queer Black girls in her dazzling equation of hyper-visibility, invisibility, and erasure. She blogged:

In the same month I attended the bell hooks talk, my high school feminism class led an International Day of the Girl assembly where we presented and spoke on topics that greatly affect girls nationally and globally. My talk focused on the invisibility of black girls in the fight for #BlackLivesMatter and within our overall societal structures such as education. Many young black girls who identify as straight and as LGBT+ have no accurate representation in our media. Our society does not

recognize or acknowledge that black girls face some of the same forms of discrimination that young black boys and men face on a regular basis. (J. S. 2015)

In just one blog post, Jessica single-handedly toggled back and forth between her observations on the invisibility of straight and queer Black girls, the expulsion of Black girls from schools, and the killing of Black women and girls on the street by the police and otherwise to remind readers that until “society stops feeding into the oversexualized and dehumanizing stereotypes mainstream media has about us, young black girls will always be forgotten.”

In a powerful moment of public visibility on stage that she later documented in her blog post, Jessica called attention to the full force of violence against Black girls and women and demanded that we, her readership and audience, take action. In this final passage from Jessica’s post, she clearly and powerfully stated her solution to the issues facing Black girls and women of color:

Many do not know of these harmful statistics because the problems that face young black girls in America are seen as insignificant or even nonexistent. Until that moment society stops feeding into the oversexualized and dehumanizing stereotypes mainstream media has about us, young black girls will always be forgotten. We need to change this conversation immediately. After hearing hooks and Blow and looking into mass media, it’s obvious that young women of color need to be the only voices heard in the conversation on our own bodies. (J. S. 2015)

Since the writing of this blog post, Jessica has taken her solution to other young women both locally and nationally. In March 2016, Jessica and I presented on teaching and learning intersectional feminism in the classroom via our #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName work at the annual New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCORE) conference and over the summer, we traveled to Washington, D.C. to present to girls gathered at the fifth annual United Nations Girl Up Leadership Summit. Speaking to packed rooms at both conferences, Jessica shared her blog post and her current involvement in #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName. Inspired by hooksian thought and practice, Jessica, now a senior in high school, is not only changing the conversation on Black girl autonomy and politics but

also building a transgressive Black-feminist informed movement with other girls in fierce solidarity.

College Feminism: Danger! Educated Black Girl Journals Her Engagement with the Work of bell hooks (Stephanie Troutman)

As Ileana describes above, interactions between students and bell hooks's work manifest in multiple ways—personally, politically, and socially. In sharing examples from my former student Marielle's work across two of my classes, both of which draw on and examine different works by hooks, I am interested in exploring how hooks's interdisciplinary positionality as a public scholar and as a leading intellectual and Black feminist within an academic context—through her critiques both of pop culture and of U.S. schooling and education—has helped Marielle make sense of her own academic and activist journey on personal and professional levels. I want to chart the ways in which Marielle uses language and ideas from hooks to understand, frame, and affirm her own experiences, interests, and desires. Ultimately, I want to show how hooks helped shape Marielle's responses to injustices faced by Black girls and women, while also revealing the emergence of an activist identity rooted in Black feminism that inspired Marielle to connect to the #BlackLivesMatter movement on her campus and within the her local community.

In this section, the examples drawn from Marielle's work demonstrate how her accumulation of feminist funds of knowledge vis-à-vis her engagement with hooks's New School dialogue with Melissa Harris-Perry in 2013—as well as with specific hooks texts studied in my courses (*Teaching Critical Thinking* [2010], *Feminism Is for Everybody* [2000], and *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* [2015b])—informed Marielle's practices in relation to her self-identification and her understanding of power dynamics both on campus and in communities regarding the politics of race, gender, sexuality, and activism. I've also attempted to note and highlight, anecdotally, how Marielle incorporated feminist leadership values and models into both her campus job as a residence hall advisor and as a student leader and #BlackLivesMatter campus activist.

I met Marielle during her sophomore year, when she was a student in my course for preservice teachers and early education majors on the social foundations of education. She was in the process of deciding whether or not to continue as an education major, though she was very clear that whatever she ended up doing would be “connected somehow to the Black community on some level: maybe schooling . . . or nonprofit work . . . or something in the field of mental health.” Like Jessica, Marielle came into the course with some knowledge of feminism via social media such as tumblr, Twitter, and blogs such as *The Feminist Wire* and *For Harriet*, but she had more questions than answers and a real thirst for feminist knowledge(s) and information. She was surprised that we would be reading work by hooks such as *Feminism Is for Everybody* and *Teaching Critical Thinking* in an education class.

In fact, the course begins with students reading hooks’s *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (2010). As the professor of the course, I share parts of my own educational narrative in order to model hooks’s ideas of “telling a story to illustrate critical points” as a means of “providing a common entry point” for the teaching of feminist theory (hooks 2010, 50–51). I use this storytelling technique both as a method of instruction and as an integral part of my pedagogical practice. By creating course questions and assignments that require students to think critically about their own school experiences via personal narratives, students can begin to consider the potential role of feminist theory in their lives.

In my own storytelling and experiential sharing, I discuss high and low points of my education in public schools, colleges, and universities. I start by giving context in time and place and by owning my subjectivity(ies) and the role that they play in producing affect, perception, behavior, and interpretation of one’s—in this case, my own—personal circumstances. In many ways this exercise is a recovery project, a conduit for the remembering, naming, claiming, and celebration of who we were, are, and are becoming within the context(s) of our educational experiences in schools. Along the way and as part of the sharing/modeling process, I use feminist analysis to show students ways to read and understand what happens in schools as a microcosm for and reflection of larger social issues and dynamics around race, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. Highly self-reflexive and

interpretive by design, this work allows students to engage meaningfully with self and peers. Students are required to write their own stories by following my example, and then share them with the class. Depending on class size, these presentations are time-consuming but valuable and rich in terms of building a powerful learning community in the classroom. Toward the end of the semester, students incorporate ideas from course texts and materials into a project in which they analyze the experiences they shared at the start of the course in their original narratives about school and schooling.

Marielle was one of the first students to share her narrative. One of the more significant parts of her late childhood experience was the incarceration of her father, an issue she felt ashamed of and silenced about in school. In addition to her father's incarceration, Marielle's narrative revealed that she'd grown up in urban North Carolina and that she was currently a member and leader in a prominent Black sorority. Ultimately, Marielle's narrative traced her excitement about learning and school, which was interrupted and fractured by her father's incarceration, then went on to discuss peer relationships with other Black girls and women (along with her home community outside of school) as paradoxically oppressive and helpful in reshaping her student identity and her journey back to the path of academic success. She intimated that Black girl peers and Black women in her life encouraged her to focus on her studies and "think about college" once she approached middle and high school but that these same women, in some cases, discouraged her from becoming a "certain kind of Black girl," or one that might be considered "hood or ratchet." Marielle was unsure of why she couldn't be both: hood/ratchet and go to college. She was looking for a way out of the either/or trap, but the Black women in her life—elders, family (and conservative peers)—were unable to support and affirm her in non-binary ways. Marielle was clearly struggling to resolve these contradictions.

The class progressed and students continued to read, dialogue, and journal about critical issues in education and schooling, often making new connections to their own as well as their classmates' initial schooling narratives. During and after reading *Teaching Critical Thinking* by hooks (and other Black feminist texts, such as Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* [2007]), Marielle used her journaling to engage with parts of

her narrative, which then culminated into one of her final presentations. This final presentation is designed as an opportunity for students to analyze the most salient moments from their schooling histories. In revisiting her narrative, Marielle employed feminist and critical concepts to articulate the shame and silence surrounding her family circumstance as dictated by her school's hidden curriculum and shored up by Black communal respectability politics. To summarize, Marielle "knew" from cues in the unspoken school environment and from elders in her (home) community that she wasn't supposed to speak openly about her father's imprisonment, even while it weighed heavily on her and impacted her concentration—and, thereby, her academic performance. Drawing on Audre Lorde's powerful essay in *Sister Outsider*, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," Marielle discussed her feelings of shame and withholding.

In the midst of this storytelling, Marielle also used the occasion of her final presentation to explore further her intimate connection to other Black women in both her sorority and her home community, stating that she found the "respectability demands [of both] questionable at best and hella problematic at worst." Marielle was aware of racism and sexism, broadly defined, but after engaging Black feminist work, her use of the language "respectability demands" demonstrates how she began to reevaluate these issues as instances of internalized sexism emanating from larger cultural scripts that permeate Black community relations, even within the confines of her sorority, an all-female space. By the end of the course, it was apparent that Marielle was not as interested in becoming a classroom teacher as she was in becoming a Black feminist, a development that was heavily influenced by hooks. In this vein, in one of her final journal entries, she wrote:

Reading TCT [*Teaching Critical Thinking*] really put a lot [of] things in perspective for me. Before this class I did not really think critically at all about race, gender and school—together. . . . bell hooks talks about how feminism in the classroom promotes critical thinking and links education and social justice. I believe this is possible, and if I continue to be an Education major, a feminist classroom is what I will strive to create for my students. If I don't—I will still consider myself a Black womanist or feminist, no matter what career path I take.

As made explicit in this excerpt, the semester ended with Marielle being uncertain of her choice to major in education, and yet she was quite sure she was ready to commit to feminist praxis. Based on other comments and remarks Marielle made in class and elsewhere in some of her later written work, I was not surprised by her formal departure from an education major. Throughout the term, her work became more focused on Black feminism's ability to challenge structures of power aimed at the bodies—both literal and figurative—of Black women and girls, from the policing of sexuality and appearance to emotional, physical, and sexual violence. Marielle also expressed that she felt “a feminist calling on her life” to inform others about feminist activism intended to combat oppressive, respectability politics on campus and in Black communities.

Marielle's initial exposure to a critical study of bell hooks's work in my education course led her back to my classroom to study Black feminisms three semesters later as a sociology major. One of the first texts we read in this course was hooks's *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (2015b). I paired this text with the 2013 New School–sponsored dialogue between hooks and Melissa Harris-Perry, which my students watched online. In one of her reader-response journal entries, Marielle connected Black feminist theory and struggle with current issues on campus and in relation to gender roles and sexual politics within the larger Black community. This is the contextual frame for two of her reader-response journal entries.

“It is the experience of shared struggle that led black women to reject the anti-male stance of some feminist activists. This does not mean that black women were not willing to acknowledge the reality of black male sexism. It does mean that many of us do not believe we will combat sexism and woman-hating by attacking black men or responding to them in kind” (*Margin to Center*, p. 69). Yes, honey. This quote made me get my entire life! A lot of the frat boy and Greek Life culture (and sexual assault) are serious problems here. But feminism can help. None of the programs aimed at addressing these issues on campus are feminist in orientation, and I believe that is a problem. On a personal note: I want to delve more deeply into “the reality of black male sexism” because that is a real barrier in black community building. I also think it plays into us [black women] being portrayed in certain ways around sex and sexuality. I'm not here for the policing of my sexuality.

From this journal entry it is clear that Marielle is thinking both about and through the theoretical dispositions hooks offers for considering race and gender. Furthermore, she applied Black feminist theory to material conditions on campus and to larger notions of Black community. Here we can also observe how Marielle's reading and thinking extended beyond the classroom and into her leadership roles (resident hall advisor, sorority officer, and admissions student ambassador) in the larger campus structure, as she disappointedly called out that "none of the programs aimed at addressing these issues on campus are feminist in orientation."

This increase in Black feminist consciousness and in the ability to connect it across multiple locations led Marielle to see herself as a "tool" of the university's administration. For example, in another journal entry, she wrote about the ways in which the institution does not take seriously student concerns about diversity, particularly Black lives. She also began to understand that power on campus is defined in institutional terms and that it is only conferred to those who play by the master's rules.

I'm their cool, smart, token Black girl. When bell hooks talks about women "gaining as much power and privilege as they can within the existing social structure" (p. 87) I snap [my fingers] three times in the air. And then I get pissed. First of all: white women CAN play that game, but black women can't. And we shouldn't want to either. It's like bell hooks and Melissa Harris-Perry talking about white women on the plantation in *Django* and *12 Years A Slave* in terms of white women also enforcing our [Black women's] obedience and subservience. But I'm not a slave: I pay tuition to live on *this* plantation! I realize now that I only thought I had power here [institutional name withheld]. I see now that I'm just a tool. A token Black girl with no real power, because this school just continues to do what it always has—not care about the lives of Black students. And I have helped them perpetuate the false work of "institutional diversity." I've recruited, I've volunteered, I've agreed to let them use my words and my picture. And that's all they really want—me on website pictures and brochures—in my letters . . . until I open my mouth. Diversity my ass. And this most recent thing with the [Confederate] flag. Um, no. You got me fucked up if you think I'm trying to handle that. Senior, baby. I done enough for you—what have you done for me lately?!

Here, Marielle develops a sophisticated analysis of her institutional role using hooksian Black feminist theory. She understands that she has been tokenized and exploited (“I’ve recruited, I’ve volunteered, I’ve agreed to let them use my words and my picture”), and that the power she once thought she possessed was nothing more than a symbolic gesture conferred by the institution to bolster its own claims about working to achieve so-called “diversity.” Marielle volunteered to share the journal referenced above with the class, and to provide context on the Confederate flag incident that happened on campus that term. To summarize, a window located on one of the dorm floors that was under Marielle’s supervision as a residence hall advisor was reported for displaying a Confederate flag. Notably, this incident occurred the day after a highly publicized and well-attended #BlackLivesMatter campus demonstration in which Marielle was both a vocal and visible leader.

Marielle expressed her frustration and acknowledged that she found herself increasingly unwilling—resistant and transgressive—to respond to administrative requests for her to fulfill her residence hall advisor role by “handling the flag situation.” In fact, though she was the resident hall advisor for that particular dorm room, she flat-out refused to confront the perpetrator, advocating instead for intervention by a white resident hall advisor or administrative staff member. In her refusal, she also unapologetically expressed her need to invoke what hooks, Lorde, and other women of color feminists refer to as an ethic of radical self-care, placing her own embodied and emotional well-being ahead of the institution’s desires for her to “just do her job.” Taking further Black feminist action, she turned the racist flag incident back on the institution for their role in “failing to create a safe environment [free of hate] for all students,” when her supervisor suggested that she could be written up and disciplined for failing to respond to the racist symbol as part of her job’s assigned duties.

When her peers in our class, many of whom considered her actions risky but courageous, asked her to elaborate on her course of action in relation to the flag situation, Marielle casually replied: “Well, I started by asking myself WWBD—what would bell do?” Like Jessica above, Marielle invoked hooks as a part of her solution to end “imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy,” as it exists on college campuses (hooks 2000).

One of the features of this story that is most important to recognize is the intense, transformative self-work that Marielle began by using a Black feminist lens to calibrate her actions and responses to racism, sexism, and privilege. She literally applied a rhetorical strategy of “what would bell do?” as a particular mode of inquiry into the material conditions of her existence as a young, Black woman on a campus that feigns diversity initiatives while at the same time failing to “guarantee the safety of all [Black] students.” By invoking and understanding the language of both radical self-care and respectability politics, Marielle moved into a thought-space and an increased feminist consciousness that allowed her to claim and deploy her agency as a fierce, educated Black woman. It is worth noting here that Marielle went on to deepen her relationship to Black feminism by undertaking a self-study in hip-hop and queer Black feminisms; she also attended the first Black Lives Matter Conference held at the University of Arizona in Tucson in January 2015 as part of a joint delegation of faculty, students, and staff that was commissioned by her university’s chancellor. Currently, Marielle is pursuing a master’s degree in sociology with an emphasis on the politics of Black female sexuality, embodiment, and representation.

Conclusion: Black Girls Matter in the Classroom . . . and Everywhere

In reading and discussing similarities and differences between Jessica and Marielle, what emerges for us as most salient are their remarkable feminist transformations. At a moment of addressing crisis—whether in relation to violence against women’s bodies with #SayHerName or violence against the Black community at large with #BlackLivesMatter—both young women referred back to bell hooks as their springboard to move from theory to action. In that movement to action, our students came to realize themselves not only as feminist thinkers and writers but also as feminist change agents who see their contribution to Black feminist activism not as a distant, future possibility but in the here and now. In centralizing the intellectual and material work of our Black feminist students, we #SayHerName as well as say our students’ names as they create a Black feminist genealogy that

resists “imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy” both online and on campus. Whether in the form of public writing such as blogging or public speaking in the form of presentations or protests, our students are living out their visions in their immediate communities, whether they are at school or at home.

We are honored to be part of building a powerful feminist women of color legacy through our feminist teaching. We ultimately see this genealogy as a continuum that starts in the earliest years of schooling and runs from elementary to middle to high school through college and graduate school. In writing this article together, we hope we have demonstrated how hooks’s work can impact Black feminist consciousness and action in young people, especially young Black girls and women. We also recognize that feminist education need not be limited by patriarchal notions of classroom instruction as the only mode of learning. We know that women of color feminisms can and have been taught and learned through a long line of Black feminist teachings that are rooted in oral history as well as digital history, originating from yesterday’s feminist griots through today’s hip-hop feminists (Love 2016). Indeed, as we see from our students’ examples, they too are immersed in various communities—blogs, sororities, and families of all kinds—that teach them multiple modalities of how to live and learn as young Black feminists.

Ultimately, we remain interested and hopeful in what our students’ development as young Black feminists continually provides for us in terms of pedagogical reflection as we attempt to grow as queer, feminist, women of color educators committed to social justice and educational transformation in an increasingly diverse and social media–driven culture beset by political struggles and challenges. Our students’ transformations confirm for us the promise that teaching Black feminism in schools yields just as many rich opportunities for resistance and change as it does joy and love.

NOTES

1. *F to the Third Power*, <http://ftothethirdpower.com/>

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

For twenty years, **Ileana Jiménez** has been a leader in feminist and social justice education. In 2009 she launched her blog, *Feminist Teacher*

(feministteacher.com), to share resources on teaching intersectional feminism in K–12 classrooms. Her social media presence as @feministteacher and the hashtags she created, #HSfeminism and #K12feminism, bring visibility to the national and global feminism-in-schools movement. Currently, Jiménez teaches courses on feminism and activism, Latinx literature, queer literature, Toni Morrison, and American literature at the Little Red School House & Elisabeth Irwin High School in New York. In 2010 she was named one of the 30 Women Making History by the Women’s Media Center; later that year, she was also named one of the 40 Feminists Under 40 by the Feminist Press. She is the 2011 recipient of the Distinguished Fulbright Award in Teaching and in 2012 she appeared on the *Melissa Harris-Perry Show* to talk about safe schools and inclusive curricula. She is published in *One Teacher in Ten in the New Millennium: LGBT Educators Speak Out about What’s Gotten Better . . . and What Hasn’t* (Beacon 2015); *SLUT: A Play and Guidebook for Combating Sexism and Sexual Violence* (Feminist Press 2015); and *The Feminist Utopia Project: Fifty-Seven Visions of a Wildly Better Future* (Feminist Press 2015). She received her BA in English Literature at Smith College and an MA in English Literature at Middlebury College.

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Lesson Plan: Lessons in Transgression: Reading bell hooks

Background and Overview

Dr. bell hooks (néé Gloria Watkins) is a leading Black feminist scholar, public intellectual, and academic. Her work is interdisciplinary, spanning many fields of knowledge—including but not limited to gender and women’s studies, feminism, African American studies, literary studies, education and schooling, and popular film. She has written for academic journals and popular magazines and has authored poetry and children’s fiction in addition to her theoretical texts. Much of her work can also be found online and in videos, as she has presided over and participated in countless interviews, lectures, and dialogues.

Drawing on our joint expertise in critical race and ethnic studies, curriculum design and instruction, secondary education, and women’s, gender, and sexuality studies, we provide this outline based on lessons and assignments that have worked with the range of students we’ve taught in our classes. We love the idea that a high school teacher and a professor might come together to teach these lessons jointly or have their students partner in some way on one or more of the assignments.

What we offer here is a pedagogical toolbox on teaching bell hooks. While we created these assignments for use with high school and undergraduate students, they could also be easily modified for use within a community-based learning environment or book club. We’ve chosen to conceptualize our assignments this way because we are interested in making hooks’s work as accessible and inclusive as possible. To that end, we’ve included the texts and assignments we’ve had success with in our own classrooms to provide a coherent way to look at the range of hooks’s scholarship and ideas and to offer multiple assignments that have widespread applicability. Our framework can take the form of a monthlong or six-week unit; alternatively, it can be broken down into shorter,

topic-based lessons and/or paired with other readings, particularly within Black feminist thought.

The central text of this unit is *Feminism Is for Everybody* (hooks 2000). Introductory in nature, yet conceptually challenging, we see this as one of hooks's most accessible books and one that is appropriate for secondary and postsecondary students. Since much of the work of Black feminist thought requires application outside of the classroom, we have designed assignments that allow students to connect hooks with popular culture and current events. We also incorporate teaching strategies and methods that hooks prescribes and uses with her own students.

Objectives

Over the scope of this unit, students will:

1. Become conversant with Black feminist thought as defined by and through the work of bell hooks;
2. Develop the ability to synthesize and analyze hooks's scholarship, including her essays, books, videos, lectures, and dialogues;
3. Examine—personally and critically—the meaning of the phrase “imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy”;
4. Reflect on issues of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality in terms of social norms and identity politics;
5. Become familiar with key terms and philosophies in the fields of intersectional feminism and social justice studies; and
6. Have the opportunity to produce online media such as blog posts, videos, and other social media for feminist activism and inquiry.

Recommended Readings

We highly recommend that in addition to having students read *Feminism Is for Everybody*, the following texts, which provide rich pairings, should be assigned:

- Dialogues from bell hooks's New School residencies (2013–2015) available online as videos (The New School 2016)

- Essays from bell hooks’s collections *Reel to Real* (1996), *Outlaw Culture* (1994a), or *Writing Beyond Race* (2013b)
- “No Love in the Wild” (hooks 2012) published on the blog *NewBlackMan (in Exile)*
- Children’s works by bell hooks: *Happy to Be Nappy* (1999), *Homemade Love* (2002b), *Be Boy Buzz* (2002a), *Skin Again* (2004), and *Grump Groan Growl* (2008)
- “Dig Deep: Beyond Lean In” (hooks 2013a) written by bell hooks in response to Sheryl Sandberg’s bestselling book *Lean In*
- *Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality against Black Women* (Crenshaw and Ritchie 2015)
- *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected* (Crenshaw 2015)
- Blog posts by Ileana Jiménez’s #HSfeminism students at *F to the Third Power*, fthethirdpower.com

Readings, Assignments, and Projects

This lesson plan includes four main assignments: reader-response journaling, inquiry-based group discussion, blogging and social media engagement, and a social justice inquiry project. All assignments are designed and intended to promote and support deep engagement with texts and concepts and to encourage creative and critical thinking on bell hooks’s work. This plan may be modified and used holistically or in part. These assignments can be easily done as stand-alones or in conjunction with one another.

READING FEMINISM IS FOR EVERYBODY

Feminism Is for Everybody is 140 pages in length. There are 19 chapters, and while each is short, they are conceptually dense with feminist theory. In high school settings, a teacher may be able to cover one or two chapters per class session. Daily discussions that engage in a close reading and analysis of the text will be necessary to afford students the opportunity to dialogue and reflect with peers about the ideas raised in these chapters. Educators and academics may want to model their own process of meaning making by sharing their own stories of coming to feminist consciousness followed

by leading students through freewriting prompts that springboard off of selected passages from the text.

On a 4-week schedule, *Feminism Is for Everybody* can be read as follows:

- Week #1: Chapters 1–5
- Week #2: Chapters 6–10
- Week #3: Chapters 11–16
- Week #4: Chapters 17–19

READER-RESPONSE JOURNALING

This recommended assignment provides the opportunity for deep engagement with course content through writing. In a journal, students record their analytical and personal responses to the readings and other course content. Journal entries should be kept in a notebook or digital folder. While reader-response journal entries are intended to be structured as freewriting, the following suggestions may be offered to students to assist in organizing their pieces:

- Select and highlight phrases and passages that you want to spend time writing about or researching further; annotate carefully and quote brief passages in your journal.
- Read the text, closely paying attention to the author's arguments and ideas and to the language used to convey those ideas. Respond both analytically and personally to the lines and phrases you find most compelling. Incorporate these lines into your reflection.
- Monitor, consider, and reflect on your reactions to the assigned text: How do the author's words make you feel and why (do you agree or disagree)? Do any of the concepts discussed cause you to feel anxious, confused, empowered, etc.)? Where do you feel pulled in or pushed out?
- Note any associations or connections between the text and current events, media, pop culture, and/or personal experiences; reflect on these connections by incorporating evidence from the text in your journal.

INQUIRY-BASED GROUP DISCUSSION

Inquiry-based approaches can be done in small-group, large-group, or whole-class formats. These discussions are framed by guiding questions

or inquiries that interest the group, highlighting details in the text as well as main ideas and overarching themes. Be sure to provide space for modest tangents, relevant external connections, and analysis of complex ideas and new concepts. Questions derived from the text can be generated by students, possibly in conjunction with their reader-response journals, and/or by their teachers. In reading *Feminism Is for Everybody*, three or four questions per chapter are recommended. Other questions, as well as sub-questions, will arise organically within the discussion, so flexibility is necessary. Questions that aren't answered in class can be integrated into reader-response journals and other written assignments, such as blog posts.

BLOGGING

Once students have finished reading *Feminism Is for Everybody* and other essays by bell hooks, as well as attending or watching videos of hooks's New School dialogues, we recommend that they pair these readings and videos with other readings they have completed in Black feminist thought throughout the term (e.g., the Combahee River Collective, Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, etc.), as a way to provide their own intersectional, feminist critique of a contemporary issue in the media, politics, education, arts, culture, or other venue.

Students should ground their blog posts in Black feminist theory while also taking into account their own personal reflections, experience, and analysis. As they develop their posts, they should try to move from theory to action, creating a thoughtful conversation across the readings they have done while generating new and exciting commentary on and even solutions for the issues they are raising in their writing. Their blog posts should be at least 800 words, though they can certainly be longer. A blog post should also be a cohesive, well-written, and engaging discussion that includes evidence from the various texts, videos, and research covered in class. While blogging, students should remember to:

- Include at least three sources from the readings throughout the term (e.g., an essay, an article, a video, etc.)
- Include at least one photo from an event or from an online source (being sure to provide credit to the photographer or organization for any images used)

- Create a strong headline for the post
- Use relevant categories and tags
- Check spelling and phrasing

THE BELL HOOKS SOCIAL INQUIRY PROJECT

The final recommended assignment engages students in composing a final paper/project that is five to seven pages in length. The paper must have an original title, use proper citations (APA, MLA, or Chicago), and include a reference page at the end (which will not be included in the overall page count). The format may be open, but the paper should meet the following criteria:

- Incorporate one of the social justice issues discussed in the course (race, class/socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality/LGBTQ+, etc.);
- Discuss a formative moment/event in the student’s own development as a learner in relation to an educational setting (it does not have to be “school,” it can be any learning environment);
- Use information (summaries, direct quotes, concepts, etc.) from course texts and materials by bell hooks, in whole or in part (*Feminism Is for Everybody*, videos from bell hooks’s residency at The New School, etc.);
- Reference three additional bell hooks texts (book excerpts/chapters, online articles, etc.) that were either covered or not covered in class, throughout the paper;
- Describe a vision of or for the student’s future self as a social justice worker (activist, teacher, writer, etc.); the vision may or may not include a concrete trajectory or timeline; and
- Include at least three external sources that enhance or further develop understandings of the student’s chosen topic, including but not limited to journal articles, TED talks, videos, documentary films, interviews, blogs, and books.

Using the above components, students should craft a paper that explores their relationship to their chosen social justice issue along lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, and so on. The paper should also demonstrate the students’ ability to reflect and engage critically with bell hooks’s work. Additionally, students should include an examination of their own personal

experience that relates to their topic; for example, if they choose race/anti-racism as their area of focus, they will want to make a connection to a life experience that speaks to their own personal racial and/or ethnic identity. Finally, this paper asks students to imagine their future identity(ies) as social justice workers. The paper can take the form of a narrative, critical essay, hybrid research paper, or creative vignettes; the creation of social media (a website, blog, video, etc.) is also an option.

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