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STOP-*motion* as Theory, Method, and Praxis:
ARRESTING Moments of Racialized Gender in the Academy

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to my family for nurturing ingenuity, imagination, and Black girl magic within me. I come from creators, inventors, discoverers, and self-proclaimed everything. Because of you, I can imagine new worlds.

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First, I would like to thank my dissertation co-advisors and co-chairs, Drs. Aisha Durham and Chris McRae. Because of Dr. McRae, I value the process of performance and the imaginative possibilities of performance inquiry. Because of Dr. Durham, I can envision and articulate my work as theory, method and praxis rooted in Black feminist thought. I have been blessed with supportive advisors who had the courage to meet me with humanness and vulnerability empowering me to do this incredibly taxing labor without losing myself in the process. I can't imagine this journey with anyone else. Next, I would like to extend my gratitude to my committee members, Drs. Keith Berry and Jarod Roselló. You both have offered me invaluable guidance that has helped me cultivate this dissertation. Lastly, I would like to thank my family, friends, mentors, professors, colleagues, and students who have offered me community, encouragement, and new knowledge throughout my journey. It takes a village. Unfortunately, I am limited to one paragraph and unable to list everyone I am thankful for by name. I do want to acknowledge one person by name, Dr. Subrina "SJ" Robinson, my Sista Dr. who introduced me to Black feminist thought and helped me come into my Black feminist consciousness. I came to her towards the end of my master's program with my spirit broken after navigating graduate school as the only Black woman. Dr. SJ guided me to several Black feminist scholars who continue to restore my radical hope for Black futures in the academy. I truly believe I would not have come this far if it were not for Black feminist thought and the support of you all. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

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ABSTRACT

In this autoethnographic qualitative study, I introduce “**STOP-motion**” as a Black feminist organizing concept, methodological approach, and praxis to examine the twinness of arresting moments when disruption, displacement, disorientation, or disembodiment prompts critical reflection and transforms outsider-within moments into movements of resistance and collective empowerment. I recount three **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender I have endured in white-dominated academic spaces: being **STOPPED** in a breakfast line at a conference, **STOPPED** in a department bathroom, and **STOPPED** by a large promotional department banner that exhibited myself and two Black colleagues. Relying on Black feminist aesthetics, I experiment with various artistic democratized forms of representation in my critical autoethnographic performance inquiry. Specifically, I engage stop-motion animation, autobiographical comics, and personal narrative from a **STOP-motion** approach. I situate **STOP-motion** in Black feminist studies, performance studies, and critical cultural studies in communication. Ultimately, I argue that **STOP-motion** generates new ways of understanding identity, space, and institutional powers in the academy.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

I stopped fumbling with the stray curls in my fro' and turned away from the tiny mirror in our hotel room. I refused for my hair to be the cause of us attending our conference's complimentary breakfast behind schedule. Nervously, I looked over at my colleague, a longtime friend, hoping for her reassuring smile to tell me that I looked at least...*presentable*... *professional*... *passable*? We were invited to shadow a few members in our performance troupe at a "very important" conference, we were meant to blend in and stay close to them throughout the day. Essentially, we were asked to observe, and learn, and to not be seen. We were warned that the conference was for high status professionals in various fields, a population of primarily affluent white male bodies, and we were explicitly told to dress accordingly. Here I was, a first-year master's student, a baby-faced "Blackgirl" (Boylorn, 2016) trying to assimilate into a straight white masculine space. I did not have much professional clothing to choose from so I made do with high heels, jogger slacks, a chiffon blouse, and a cotton blazer. Even with my colleague's smile of approval, I still felt like an imposter. Holding my breath, I ventured into the "sea of whiteness" (Ahmed, 2012) and *slowly moved*

down
the continental breakfast line.
I avoided making eye contact
with anyone
but I could feel
the omnipresence of eyes
glued onto my body.
My troupe

had made their way to our table

but before I could finish
gathering my breakfast,
I was **STOPPED**
by an older white woman
who was dressed in a hotel staff uniform.

She pulled me out of line
and told me the breakfast was for
guests only.

I **FROZE**.

She alleged that
I was a **TRESPASSER**
who *wandered*
into the hotel.

We were in the mountains,
with a Black population
of less than 1%.

How would I have ended up
in this space
if I were not here
for the conference?
Speechless, I tried
to find words to
make my plea that
I belonged.

But she was convinced that I didn't.

I remained **FROZEN**.

The "cops in my head" (Boal, 1990) began to interrogate me:

What did I do to look suspicious?

Why can't I *pass*? Is it my clothes, my hair, my skin?

Am I making a scene? I was told to blend in.

Am I jeopardizing my troupe's reputation?

How do I safely make my next move?

She kept demanding that I **WAIT**
until she could confirm "my story."

Greatly disturbed
and confused

by the **ARREST**,
my body shifted
from **FREEZE**

to *flight*

and I started to *walk away*.

She tried to

STOP ME...again...AND again...AND again

But I just kept *moving forward*.

During the conference, I continued to feel disoriented and closely examined. I desperately wanted to escape this space because I knew my Blackgirl body could never fade into the background, not in the academy. I was **STUCK** here, and I clearly **STUCK** out. I now understand such reoccurring **ARRESTING** moments in the academy as a form of “**STOP-motion**.” Moments that continue to **STOP** me, moments that my body keeps replaying over and over again. Moments I am still learning how to *move forward* from. How does one reorient themselves from **HERE**? I invite you **HERE**, with me, to contend with such outsider-within moments as we *persist* towards a seat at the table.

As a Black woman, I can name several incidents in the academy where I have been treated like a “space invader” (Puwar, 2004a), immediately rendered out of place and subjected to “racializing surveillance” (Browne, 2015) practices. Nirmal Puwar theorized “space invaders” to express the experience of socio-spatial disruption that gendered and/or racialized bodies create when they occupy institutional white male spaces. Bodies shape and are shaped by space and relations of power informs how spaces and bodies are imagined, how space is demarcated, where bodies are placed, and how the movement of bodies are regulated (Neely & Samura, 2011). While navigating the academy, I have experienced **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender and unbelonging so frequently that I have come to understand the phenomenon as “**STOP-motion**.” My conceptualization of **STOP-motion** is inspired by the form and practice of stop-motion animation. Stop-motion animation relies on the repetition of photographing the movements of physical objects **FRAME-by-FRAME** and then rapidly playing the frames to create the illusion of animation. Touch, calculated movements, and repetition are key elements of performing stop-motion animation (McRae & Huber, 2017). Similarly, my experience navigating

the academy takes a lot of patience and *carefully deliberated movements* amid frequent **DISRUPTIONS**.

As an “outsider-within” (Collins, 2000), I am always considering my social location and the interlocking power relations at play. With each *move* I make, I deliberate the historical, sociocultural, and spatial landscape of the academy. I take into account how white bodies are often perceived as the normative figures in the academy and Black bodies as **DIS-IDENTIFIED** with the space or **OUT OF PLACE** (Puwar, 2004a). I weigh how my perceived “out-of-placeness” (McKittrick, 2006) as a Black woman may subject me to **HYPER SURVEILLANCE** and the **POLICING** of my body. Yet despite all the mental preparation I attempt, there are times I am **STOPPED** while doing everyday activities in the academy and it **CATCHES ME** completely off guard. Some of these moments are **ARRESTING**, so **AFFLICTIVE** that they become **ONTOLOGICAL RUPTURES** or “psychic violations” (Holland, 2012) that challenge my sense of identity and belonging in this space and time. To *move forward*, I have had to learn how to transform these **ARRESTING** moments through “naming,” “self-definition,” and “self-valuation” (Collins, 2000).

In this autoethnographic qualitative study, I introduce “**STOP-motion**” as a Black feminist organizing concept, methodological approach, and praxis to examine the twinness of arresting moments when disruption, displacement, disorientation, or disembodiment prompts critical reflection and transforms outsider-within moments into movements of resistance and collective empowerment. I engage in the transformative embodied acts of “recalling, (re)membering, and representing” (Durham, 2014) three **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender I have endured in white-dominated academic spaces: being **STOPPED** in a breakfast line at a conference, **STOPPED** in a department bathroom, and **STOPPED** by a large promotional

department banner that exhibited myself and two other Black colleagues. I situate **STOP-motion** in Black feminist studies, performance studies, and critical cultural studies in communication. Relying on Black feminist aesthetics, I experiment with various artistic democratized forms of representation in my critical autoethnographic performance inquiry. Specifically, I engage stop-motion animation, autobiographical comics, and personal narrative from a **STOP-motion** approach. I argue that **STOP-motion** will generate new ways of understanding identity, space, and institutional powers in the academy.

My dissertation is guided by three primary questions:

1. How do I make sense of racialized gender during arresting moments of unbelonging in the academy?
2. How does art enable me to revisit, reconstruct, and reimagine identity, power, and place differently in the academy?
3. How do my experiences echo other women of color in the academy?

In my dissertation, I aim to make three critical interdisciplinary contributions:

1. I will extend Black feminist thought in communication by expanding democratized forms of knowledge production within performance studies.
2. I will contribute to existing performance studies research by advancing **STOP-motion** as an embodied performance methodology.
3. I will update critical cultural literature about the lived experiences and representations of Black women and extend the notion of socio-spatial disruption as enacted and embodied.

In this introduction, I will discuss my coming to Black feminist thought and how it grounds my understanding of **STOP-motion**. I will then define **STOP-motion** as a Black feminist organizing concept situated within Black feminist studies, performance studies, and critical cultural studies.

Following, I will define **STOP-motion** as a Black feminist methodological approach informed by performance inquiry, autoethnography, and Black feminist aesthetics. I will end the introduction with a breakdown of each chapter.

On Coming to Black Feminist Thought

I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing

-hooks (1991)

bell hooks (1991) reminds us that it is extremely difficult to move through the world without an understanding of what is happening around and within us. An understanding of identity, power, and space can provide clarity and can be potentially healing. We often desire to make sense of our lived experiences and our social world, especially when we are subjugated to oppression. hooks (1991) recognizes the liberating effects of being able to “name our pain” (p.11). Theory is a potential location for healing because theory can be affirmational and facilitate a sense of belonging or recognition. Theory provides a language to communicate our identity and lived experiences to ourselves and to others. Although our individual experiences cannot be essentialized, the personal is often cultural. Theorizing my experiences creates opportunities for me to construct a map that helps me navigate through the academy and encourages others wounded by social relations of domination within the academy to reconstruct their own maps. According to hooks (1991) when theory is liberating “it not only enables us to remember and recover ourselves, it charges and challenges us to renew our commitment to an active, inclusive feminist struggle” (p.2). Theory is a potential location for transformation and

collective empowerment. I intentionally use the word “potential” because hooks warns that in order for theory to be healing or liberatory we must deliberately work towards those ends in our theorizing so that it can fulfill those functions. My longing to heal from outsider within moments and transform how race-gender bodies experience the academy has led me to BFT.

BFT is a critical social theory and social justice practice that aims to empower African American women and confront intersecting oppressions (Collins, 2000). BFT recognizes that Black women share a “legacy of struggle” against violence and that Black women may take unique approaches to actively responding to the intersecting oppressions attached to that violence (Collins, 2000, p.28). Thus, Black feminist standpoints are self-defined. Self-definition is a key part of Black women’s survival and empowerment (Collins, 2000). The different approaches to social justice and resistance creates the tensions and possibilities of a collective Black feminist standpoint. In this study, I add to the tensions and possibilities with my unique **STOP-motion** approach to re-articulating and theorizing my lived experience in the academy from an activist position. The Combahee River Collective describes a Black feminist activist position is both anti-racist and anti-sexist (1977, p.212).

BFT suggests that a Black feminist consciousness is co-constitutive of lived experience; thought and practice or theory and action is always linked (Collins, 2000). BFT honors two levels of knowledge. The first level of knowledge is “the commonplace, taken-for-granted knowledge shared by African-American women growing from our everyday thoughts and actions” (p.34.) BFT validates Black women’s power as human subjects. The second level of knowledge is the more specialized knowledge or expert knowledge. Collins (2000) argues that a new Black feminist consciousness can arise from infusing the two knowledges. In other words, Black feminist intellectuals generate experiential theory and embodied knowledge from

analyzing one's own social location. Black feminist thought and Black feminist practice must be dynamic because as social conditions change so does thought and action (Collins, 2000, p.39).

I use **STOP-motion** to explore my lived experience and to use my experience to theorize my identity, my negotiation within different domains of power, in the White-defined space of the academy. I use **STOP-motion** to resist or actively respond to the shared legacy of struggle and resistance that many women of color in the academy experience. My understanding of Black women in the academy is informed by my embodied experience as a Black woman in the academy and from the intersecting oppression that derive our legacies of struggle against racialized gender violence in academic institutions. I use my own experiences to generate democratized forms of knowledge production to reach audiences in and outside of the academy. I situate **STOP-motion** as an extension of BFT, a critical social theory and social justice practice.

Black Feminist Thought and Performance

My understanding and approach to Black feminist thought is greatly informed by performance studies. I am influenced by Black feminist performance scholar, D. Soyini Madison, who uses BFT to address the performative body and liberatory politics. According to Madison (1993), there are four points where BFT and performance intersect:

The combination of these four points—the process of recognizing ‘the repositories of a people’s theories of themselves’ carved out of everyday life; specialized knowledge as re-articulation for resistance; countering dominance through critical intervention; and finally, affirming subjectivity—are where Black feminist thought, Black discourse, oral narrative, and performance intersect. (p.230)

Performance studies provides a vocabulary for me to re-articulate my lived-experience. The language of performance studies describes the “world-as-experienced” and interrogates the body as a site of knowledge to discover new ways of knowing and resisting (Madison, 1993, p.230).

In performance studies, the body becomes a conduit for new possibilities. According to Madison (1998) some of the possibilities of performance include “transformation and transgression, dialogue, and interrogation, as well as acceptance and imagination to build worlds that are possible” (p.472). Accordingly, I use my taken-for-granted knowledge of **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender in the academy and my specialized knowledge of performance to theorize my experience and build new worlds. **STOP-motion** as a Black feminist organizing concept for re-articulating lived-experience allows me to embrace my experience of marginality as “the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance” (hooks, 1989, p.20) to imagine new worlds. **STOP-motion** enables me to affirm my subjectivity from a place of radical hope. In what follows, I define **STOP-motion** as a Black feminist organizing concept and methodological approach.

STOP-motion as a Black Feminist Organizing Concept

Extending Puwar, I understand Black women in the academy as space invaders which informs my conceptualization of **STOP-motion**, specifically the “**STOP.**” The **STOP** represents socio-spatial disruption. Both the space and the normative bodies that occupy the space are disturbed by the socio-spatial impact of bodies that have been historically dis-identified with the space (Puwar, 2004a). The presence of Black women in white-dominated male spaces, such as the academy, can cause others confusion and disorientation as they try to make sense of Black women’s occupation in these spaces where they are not the normative figure. Puwar (2004a) argues that “**DISORIENTATION**” and “**AMPLIFICATION**” are the two fundamental

dynamics that mark socio-spatial disruption (p. 33; emphasis mine). She asserts that no real threat needs to be present to elicit fear because the body out of place is **AMPLIFIED** and seen as “taking up more physical space than it actually occupies” (Puwar, 2004a, p.49). Space invaders movements are often criminalized and closely monitored as an anticipated space threat (Puwar, 2004b, p.49). Bodies that **STICK OUT** are subjugated to “**THE LOOK**” or the white gaze that fixes upon the Black subject body (Puwar, 2004a; emphasis mine).

I am specifically interested in the interlocking of race and gender and how Black women uniquely experience **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender during socio-spatial disruptions. Therefore, I extend Puwar’s concept of space invaders by strengthening its ties to Black feminist thought. Olga Davis (1999) argues that since Black women have arrived in America, “space provided a marker, a symbol of limits, a metaphor for outsider; spaces defined the dialectical nature of white and black” (p.366). Within historically white institutions, “the Black body, represents a dissonance; a jarring of framings that confuses and disorients” (Puwar, 2004, p. 42). White bodies on the contrary represents “coherence” (Ahmed, 2012, p.35). The Latin word for coherence is *cohaerere*, *co-* meaning “together” and *-haerere* meaning “to adhere, stick” (“coherence,” n.d.). But what of the race-gender body that does not cohere? What does it feel like to embody incoherence, to constantly **BREAK** the illusion of seamlessly stuck togetherness? What do you experience when your race-gender body **STICKS OUT**? My concern moves beyond how space invaders are perceived during socio-spatial disruptions to questions pertaining to how space invaders experience and embody these **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender, as well as, how they negotiate and resist them. **STOP-motion** helps me understand socio-spatial disruption in the academy as enacted and embodied. In what follows, I situate my conceptualization of **STOP-motion** within Black feminist studies in communication,

critical cultural studies, and performance studies, to define **STOP-motion** as a Black feminist organizing concept.

A Black Feminist Sense of Space and Place

In this section I engage with conversations of space and place in critical cultural studies drawing from Black feminist geography. Critical cultural scholars argue that power is interlocked with the spatial organization and social practices of societies (Ewalt, 2017). Accordingly, geography studies have played an important role in understanding space and place in critical cultural studies. I turn to Black feminist geography specifically because it can greatly inform Black feminist communication and performance studies analyses of Black women and white-dominated spaces (Towns, 2016). Armond Towns (2016) suggest bridging Black feminist geography and communication studies to study how communication is structured symbolically and materially. Towns (2016) claims that Black feminist geography is particularly useful for communication scholars “theoriz[ing] how the structure of White supremacy is often connected to the ‘threatening’ physical movement of Black women” (p.123).

Take the work of Black feminist geography scholar, Katherine McKittrick. She demonstrates how the social production of space illuminates the interlocking relationship between Black women geographies and domination. McKittrick (2006) contends that geography “materially and discursively extends to cover three dimensional spaces and places, the physical landscape and infrastructures, geographic imaginations, the practice of mapping, exploring, and seeing, and social relations in and across space” (2006, p.xiii). By erasing Black women’s geographies, traditional geography renders Black women “placeless,” their place is “out of place” (McKittrick, 2006). When racialized-gendered bodies are rendered “out of place” they are often perceived as threatening and subjected to hyper surveillance (Puwar, 2004a). Hence,

structural white supremacy in traditional geography greatly hinders the spatial mobility of Black women in everyday life. McKittrick (2006) uses a Black feminist lens to resist Eurocentric understandings of geography and to exposed how Black women's bodies and subjectivities are not only shaped by traditional geographic arrangements but also challenges them. Black feminist geography studies offer a critical lens for communication scholars concerned with how power intersects with the relationship between Black women's bodies and space.

Black feminist geography is an embodied way of knowing place. Black feminist geographies are embodied and performed. According to McKittrick (2000), "geography speaks through bodies. It is on the body that the complexity and ambiguity of history, race, racism and place are inscribed" (p.225). When feminist geographers focus on socio-spatial processes they assert that "bodies are constructed in space, bodies build spaces, and spaces imbue bodies with meaning" (Jones, Nast, & Roberts, 1997, p.52). The notion of geographies as embodied and performed bridges performance studies and critical cultural studies. Critical cultural studies and performance studies both suggest that bodies and embodied politics, are socially constructed and performed. According to performance scholar Diana Taylor (2016), the body is "a thing we have and a thing we are, a product of regulations" (p.97). Accordingly, critical cultural studies and performance studies can provide insight on not only how bodies are socially produced but also how bodies are regulated in the social world. This idea further strengthens Towns (2016) argument that together both fields of study can significantly contribute to our understanding of how and why the physical movement of Black women become perceived as threatening in white-dominated spaces.

Critical cultural studies, further informs my understanding of how Black women's physical movements become perceived as threatening in the academy with the work of Black

feminist scholar, Simone Browne. Browne (2015) argues that Blackness is a “key site through which surveillance is practiced, narrated, and enacted” (p.9). Accordingly, to understand the perceived threatening nature of Black women’s movements one must consider the role of racialization. Racialization is a political process of classifying and sorting out bodies (Omi & Winant, 2014). Racialization ascribes racial meaning to bodies and often becomes deeply embedded into our social and political structures (Omi & Winant, 2014). Browne (2015) uses the term “racializing surveillance” to account for the role of racialization in surveillance practices. According to Browne “racializing surveillance signals those moments when enactments of surveillance reify boundaries, borders, and bodies along racial lines, and where the outcome is often discriminatory treatment of those who are negatively racialized by such surveillance” (p.16).

Technologies of racializing surveillance defines, controls, and punishes racialized bodies out of place. Browne (2015) claims that racializing surveillance is not fixed but instead dependent on time and space. However, Browne (2015) argues that although racializing surveillance is subject to change racializing surveillance commonly privileges whiteness and upholds the social structures and institutions rooted in European colonial expansion. Therefore, the physical movements of Black women may be perceived as threatening when they challenge or disrupt whiteness which echoes Puwar’s claims about space invaders. While whiteness grants some bodies the privilege to mobilize with ease, the lack of whiteness causes some bodies to be **STOPPED** (Brown, 2015). I further interrogate the regulatory nature of institutional white spaces by situating my conversation of **STOP-motion** within the white-dominated academy.

Together, Browne, Omi, and Winant help me understand that the racialization of space and rendering of Black bodies as out of place is socially constructed and thus co-exist with racial

projects that are always already challenging the naturalization and normalization of Black dispossession. For example, McKittrick recognizes the plantation as a significant “geographic locus” where racial meaning is ascribed onto bodies in used to shape discipline practices across time and space (2011, p. 949). Plantation logic and spatialized discipline functions as racial projects that embed the making and remaking of race into the social structure. According to McKittrick, the geography of the plantation marked Black bodies as “without’—without legible-Eurocentric history narratives, without land or home, without ownership of self” (p. 948). However, a Black sense of place as defined by McKittrick indicate that Black life can take place in white-dominated spaces. McKittrick (2011) defines a Black sense of place as “the process of materially and imaginatively *situating* historical and contemporize struggles against practices of domination *and* the difficult entanglements of racial encounter” (p. 949). A Black sense of place is resistive; it is dynamic and unsteady. A Black sense of place is reinforced through collective oppositional racial consciousness and resistance that challenges Black placelessness. According to McKittrick (2011), “a black sense of place locates the ways in which anti-black violence in the Americas evidence protean plantation futures as spaces of encounter that hold in them useful anti-colonial practices and narratives” (p.950).

Olga Davis connects plantation logic to the academy and demonstrates the possibilities for Black life in the white-dominated academic spaces. Davis (1999) sees departments and academic journals as symbolic of white, male controlled plantation houses and the gatekeepers of the status quo as symbolic of plantation mistresses. Thinking of plantation logic as a racial project challenges the idea that Black placelessness is natural to the social structure and geography of the academy. Davis purposefully connects the academy to plantation logic to encourage other Black women communication scholars to “violate the place of otherness”

(1998). She calls them to “(re)member” (Dillard 2008; Durham 2017) the plantation kitchen. Davis marks Southern plantations and the academy as “historically located space[s] of racialized and gendered oppression and domination” to reveal the legacy of the kitchen as a site of resistance for Black women (Davis, 1999, p.370). Although the plantation kitchen is a segregated space of Otherness, it was also the space where mastery of Southern cookery “subtly redefined and transformed their place of inferiority” (Davis, 1999, p.369). The kitchen became a space where Black women could teach their daughters the survival skills they learned through domination (Davis, 1999). Thus, one of the many lessons the legacy of the kitchen passed down to Black women is that they can subversively locate sites of transformation within white-dominated spaces. For many Black women in the academy, this site has been their classrooms (Davis, 1999).

Throughout history, women of color developed creative strategies for responding to hyper surveillance and constricted spatial mobility. Browne (2015) demonstrates how enslaved people subverted anti-Black surveillance and reshaped white-dominated spaces (p.21). Browne, McKittrick, and Davis all turn to the legacy of slavery “to address the idea that locations of captivity initiate a different sense of place through which black women can manipulate the categories and sites that constrain them” (McKittrick, 2000, p.xvi). Spaces of domination made possible Black women’s transformative geographic epistemologies (McKittrick, 2006). It is important for scholars to think critically about the possibilities of resistance for individuals working with and against anti-Black surveillance in the academy. Together, the scholarship informs my Black feminist sense of socio-spatial disruption and resistance that can follow. Bringing **STOP-motion** into this conversation will open new possibilities for understanding

space, identity, and power, as well as, new sites for resistance and transformation. *STOP-motion* resists out of placeness and re-maps a Black sense of place in the academy.

STOP-motion FRAME-by-FRAME

STOP-motion can function as a Black feminist organizing concept or a way to help frame socio-spatial disruption in the academy. *STOP-motion* is concerned with outsider-within moments that are consider **ARRESTING**, moments when disruption, displacement, disorientation, or disembodiment challenges one's sense of belonging and prompts critical reflection. In this sense, **STOPS** or **ARRESTS** can be understood as ontological ruptures that troubles our construction of identity and space. Black feminist scholar, Aisha Durham, refers to these moments as "epiphanic" moments that "emerge from interactions that render crises of identity and /or representation" (2014, p.13). *STOP-motion* as an organizing concept prompts me to identify these **CRISES** or **ARRESTS**. I must "name" (Collins, 2000) or mark what I consider to be embodied **ARRESTS** I have endured in the academy and mark my **ARRESTING OFFICERS**, whether that be people like the women who **STOPPPED** me in the breakfast line and in my department bathroom, or things like the recruitment banner that **STOPPED** me in the halls of my department. Collins argues that naming is a tool for "transcending the limitations of intersecting oppressions" (2000, p.118). Naming calls for rearticulation or redefining social realities (Collins, 2000). To do so performatively or poetically in my writing, I use the combination of CAPITALIZATION and **bolding** to mark **ARRESTS**. In textual form, this performative move becomes **JARRING** and **DISRUPTIVE** to readers in ways that echoes my embodied experience of being **STOPPED**. Naming my **ARRESTS** aesthetically provides an added layer of meaning. In this study, I frame three of my personal experiences as **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender in the academy. I have chosen these moments

because the visceral memories of them continue to impede my navigation of the academy. I continue to be **STOPPED** by them. **STOP-motion** is frequent **DISRUPTION**.

I frame **ARRESTING** moments of unbelonging in the academy as “**STOP-motion**” with the goal of reorienting myself and reclaiming spaces of belonging in the process. In addition to empowering us to name our oppression, Black feminist organizing concepts should help us locate sites of transformation. Hence, *motion* or *movements* of resistances and collective empowerment is a key part of **STOP-motion**. To frame outsider-within moments as **STOP-motion**, I must also name the ways in which I resist **ARRESTS** in my efforts to *move forward* or *reorient* and *redefine* myself within the contested space of the academy. Marking these *movements* is confrontational, it vulnerably and courageously demands change or action from me and others. To performatively or poetically name these *movements* in my writing, I use *italics*. I find that *italics* has the appearance of *movement* and *motion* that reiterates the unsettling nature of navigating these haunting moments. *Italics* slowly lingers across the page much like my carefully calculated *movements* in academic spaces. Ultimately, **STOP-motion** as an organizing concept invites me to frame my outsider-within moments around **ARRESTS** and the deliberate *movements* I take to transcend them.

STOP-motion not only shapes how I make sense of my experience in the academy but also shapes how I enter ongoing conversations surrounding how other women of color navigate and negotiate white-dominated academic spaces. In what follows, I situate the concept of **STOP-motion** within ongoing conversations in Black feminist studies in communication. I dramatize the scholarship with italics and bolded capitalization to emphasize the ways **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender are discussed in the field.

Occurrences of *STOP-motion* in the Academy

Many communication scholars informed by Black feminist thought and performance studies have explored how women of color navigate and negotiate space in the academy (Boylorn, 2006, Calafell, 2012, Davis, 1999, Durham, 2014; Griffin, 2012; Robinson, 2013, Woodruffe, 2020). Rachel Griffin (2012) speaks of an “omnipresence of oppression” that Black women academics feel in their everyday lives and I find that this omnipresence of oppression is resonate in much of the scholarship. Despite this haunting of domination that plague the halls of academic institutions, women of color are often framed as the monsters in the academy. Bernadette Calafell (2012) explains that throughout her experience in the academy, she has been made to feel like a monster that needs to be **TAMED** by whiteness. Women of color’s femininity is **AMPLIFIED** to the point of **MONSTROSITY** and the **DEMAND FOR CAPTIVITY**. Calafell (2012) claims, “the ‘excesses’ of my body and my emotional affect mark me as a monstrous Other in the sanitized world of the white academy” (p.112). Women of color in the academy are perceived as “**DANGEROUS**” and “**OUT OF CONTROL, UNCIVIL and SCARY**” (Calafell, 2012, p.123; emphasis mine). Calafell goes on to demonstrate how she learns to *embrace the power and agency of monstrous femininity* to resist internalizing the subjugated position of the monstrous Other. She recognizes her perceived “**UNRULINESS**” as a manifestation of her “*feminist awareness*” (Calafell, 2012, p.123; emphasis mine). She *resists the taming of her body* and “*refuse[s] to be marginalized*” in the academy (Calafell, 2012, p126; emphasis mine). She is a space invader who unapologetically *takes up and transforms space*.

Women of color must also resist being **SILENCED** in the academy. Subrina Robinson (2013) shares how during her doctoral studies she became hyper aware of her racialized gender experience in the academy and overtime she became **WEARY** to the point that she soon became

WITHDRAWN. Robinson explains that for her silence was a survival mechanism, but Black feminist theory soon allowed her to “*come to voice*,” a reference to bell hooks (1994) (Robinson, 2012; emphasis mine). Through her oral narrative study with Black female graduate students she learned that they frequently negotiate whether “to speak or not to speak and for whom and for what purposes” (Robinson, 2013, p. 161). Due to the lack of representation, Black women are often seen as **REPRESENTATIVES** of all Black women. To account for this dilemma Robinson theorized the concept of “spoketokenism,” the combination of spoken and token “to convey the significance of voice and physical presence and to underscore the perceived role of the speaker to particular audiences” (2013, p.161). Spoketokens quickly learn that “talking back” is risky and is often met with **CONSEQUENCES** (Robinson, 2013). When women of color speak up in the academy, it is heard as sonic **AMPLIFICATION** that reverberates, *taking up space and resisting silence*. Some of the Black female graduate students saw their spoketokenship as positive. *Speaking up* became an intentional act of resistance and collective empowerment. Spoketokens hold power in their voices and when used deliberately it possesses the potential to *transform space*. As I *come to voice* in my own qualitative study, I find myself repeating Lorde’s poetic prose to myself, “I am deliberate and afraid of nothing” (1973, para 3). These were words I adorned on my undergraduate graduation cap and continue to carry with me through the halls of the academy. Black feminist intellectuals empower me to *speak up* and *be deliberate* despite the **CONSEQUENCES**.

Robin Boylorn and Anjuliet Woodruffe are deliberate in the ways they use their voices to transform **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender in the academy into *movements of resistance*. At the time of their publications, Boylorn (2006) and Woodruffe (2020) were fellow Black women pursuing their doctoral studies at the University of South Florida, Tampa, as am I

now. Although we share different experiences, I feel intimately connected to their accounts of **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender. Some of the **ARRESTS** that Boylorn (2006) confronts includes walking onto campus and being struck by the fact that she is **THE ONLY BLACK STUDENT**, and being subliminally told by **DISAPPROVING WHITE LOOKS** to **TONE DOWN** her Blackness, and having **WHITE TEACHERS ONLY**, some of whom confess that Black students **CAN'T EARN** As or Bs in their classes. Woodruffe (2020) confronts **ARRESTS** that highlight the interlocking of race, gender, and citizenship such as, having a classmate ask what her **“ESCAPE STORY”** is (p.6), being told to **“LEARN TO SPEAK THE LANGUAGE”** on her judge ballot at a debate tournament (p.8), and having her white office mate tell her that her Black presence in the academy makes sense simply because she **“FITS THE STATISTICAL DATA NEEDS”** (p.10).

Boylorn and Woodruffe both use experimental autoethnographic qualitative methods grounded in Black feminist thought to *talk back* and *resist* these **ARRESTING** moments. Boylorn (2006) bridges multiple voices by combining autoethnography, narrative, and poetic ethnography compiled from interviews with Black Ph.D. students. She intentionally invites the reader to engage with the Black Ph.D. experience from multiple perspectives to understand that we are interconnected. For example, Boylorn often uses second person narrative to position the reader as a Black Ph.D. Student, an outsider within. In one section she puts the reader as Black Ph.D student in dialogue with another Black Ph.D. student she interviewed. Boylorn (2006) writes:

Harper: ‘Finally, being Black means to be lonely, hyperalienated, depressed, displayed, ignored, and harassed.’

You: You recognize these feelings. You've been there. You are lonely. You are hyperalienated at times. Often depressed. Sometimes displayed. Sometimes ignored. Unknowingly harassed. You feel paranoid, looking over your shoulder, carrying the burden of the past. Being Black, as an experience, you wonder how much really has changed. (p.661)

Boylorn then invites the reader to get to know her personally. She transitions with, "Now, take a step back to consider your story, your world in comparison to the one around you, while I introduce myself" (p. 661). This is powerful, by *enrolling others* into her personal account she is *holding others accountable*. By introducing herself, she is *resisting being invisible and ignored*. She takes up space to *define herself* and to *humanize minoritized bodies*.

Woodruffe on the other hand, "talk(s) back in letter form" (2020, p. 14). She uses letter writing as an intimate Black feminist form of (re)membering. Woodruffe (2020) argues, "letters are intentional and purposeful, and the process of writing stimulates memory work and leaves a memory that can be preserved" (p. 5). Letter writing is a deliberate practice. She addresses "epiphanic" outsider-within moments in her personal letters to the late James Baldwin, beloved writer and activist. Baldwin's work has significantly shaped her sense of identity and vulnerably writing to him during these moments when her identity is being **ABRUPTLY CHALLENGED** allows her to work towards *redefining herself*. She claims, "*these acts of writing are acts of resistance*" (Woodruffe, 2020, p. 15; emphasis mine). The letters are an opportunity to *confront oppression and move towards self-empowerment*. Through sharing her letters with others, she is *also moving towards collective empowerment and raising Black feminist consciousness*. Boylorn and Woodruffe experiment with form and Black feminist aesthetics to deliberately *speak up*

against **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender. I intend to do the same with **STOP-motion**.

Each of these communication scholars turn to Black feminist thought and uniquely answers Olga Davis' call for women of color in the field of communication to **VIOLATE** the place of Otherness in the academy. Calafell, Robinson, Boylorn, and Woodruffe are just a few of the many communication scholars who demonstrate how women of color must negotiate and subvert power relations in the academy to create spaces for themselves. I have chosen to focus on their scholarship because I understand their experiences as occurrences of **STOP-motion**. They exemplify how the "omnipresence of oppression" (Griffin, 2012) within the academy plays a role in how their bodies constitute and are constituted by the predominantly white space. Their narratives illustrate Paul Gilroy's claim that "subversive or disruptive communicative opportunities can co-exist with the painful demands made upon black subjects by the everyday politics of white supremacy" (1995, p.17). I aim to further complicate the tensions of negotiating racialized gender in the academy. I will add to this repertoire of struggle and resistance regarding racialized gender in academic spaces through the lens of **STOP-motion**. I will use **STOP-motion** to organize the way I talk about, theorize, and conduct research on my own lived experiences. **STOP-motion** or transforming **ARRESTING** moments into *movements of resistance* is not a new concept but **STOP-motion** provides a nuanced way of understanding this phenomenon. In the next section, I will define and explain how **STOP-motion** can function as a methodological approach to performance inquiry.

***STOP-motion* as a Black Feminist Methodological Approach**

Situating **STOP-motion** as a Black feminist praxis within the performance paradigm, this qualitative study takes up **STOP-motion** as an embodied method of performance inquiry

committed to social justice. Fels and McGivern (2002) define performance inquiry as a “research methodology and mode of learning that invites [researchers] to explore imaginary worlds within which space-moments of interstanding and intercultural recognitions are possible” (p.23).

Performance inquiry allows researchers to learn through performance and come to new understandings throughout the embodied reflexive process. Researchers who engage in performance inquiry do not seek answers to their research questions, they seek possibilities (Fels and McGivern, 2002). Performance inquiry is productive for minding the role of the body and producing embodied knowledge. Performance inquiry allows researchers to engage the body to make meaning of lived experience. We can learn a great deal about culture through thinking reflexively about performances of everyday life (Berry, 2015). Cultural norms and values are embodied in performances of everyday life (Pelias & Shafer, 2007). Thus, performances of everyday life function as a communicative act (Pelias & Shafer, 2007). To explore **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender, I question how power (and oppression and resistance) is communicated and performed in the academy and what this tells us about culture. I take an autoethnographic approach to performance to document and question my lived experience of oppression with the goal of social change (Denzin, 2018).

Autoethnography is a qualitative method for analyzing and studying personal experiences with the goal of learning more about cultural experiences (Ellis et al., 2011; Durham, 2014; Berry, 2015). Critical autoethnography is more attentive to the role of power, privilege, and intersectionality in our lived-experiences (Boylorn & Orbe, 2016). Black feminist autoethnography is a form of critical autoethnography that is commitment to “a standpoint rooted in interrogation, resistance, and praxis” (Griffin, 2012 p.143). Autoethnography provides a space for Black feminist to challenge systems of domination and define themselves for themselves. For

example, Durham (2015), argues that autoethnography is a “political stance against the systemic objectification of the black feminist body” (p.20). She uses autoethnography to reclaim her sensed-self and its interconnectedness to “textual and real Black female bodies [she] encounter[s]” (Durham, 2015, p.20). In this sense, Black feminist autoethnography is a way of humanizing and empowering ourselves, as well as, other Black women.

My approach to critical autoethnographic performance inquiry is greatly influenced by the provocation that the future of autoethnography is Black or “engaged with blackness within the contexts of embodiment, aesthetics, and politics” (Durham et al., 2020, 292). Researchers can engage a variety of representational forms as sites of performance inquiry to make sense of racialized gender. Some examples of sites of performance inquiry explored by Black feminists within the academy include staged-performance, narrative, poetry, dance, music, painting, speculative fiction, and much more. In and outside of the academy Black feminists turn to performance-based aesthetics to raise Black feminist consciousness. hooks argues that the aesthetics is “more than a philosophy or theory of art and beauty; it is a way of inhabiting space, a particular location, a way of looking and becoming” (1990, p. 104). Exploring different aesthetic forms offers new possibilities and ways of knowing or becoming. DeFrantz and Gonzales (2014) claim, “experimentation with form and ingenuity are part of what has been called ‘the black aesthetic’” (p. 10). Black aesthetics is a survival and self-empowerment practice. According to Larry Neal the Black aesthetic is motivated by “the destruction of the white thing, the destruction of white ideas, and white ways of looking at the world” (1968, p. 30). The aesthetics of stop-motion animation invited me to look at the academy and my race-gender body from a new humanizing and agentic lens that rejects the white gaze. The aesthetics of stop-motion animation brought me to **STOP-motion** as a Black feminist methodological

approach that I can apply to various aesthetic forms, which I will explain in more detail following an example of the possibilities of bridging performance, autoethnography, and Black feminist aesthetics.

Take the work of Aisha Durham as an illustration of the possibilities that emerge when Black feminist scholars bring together performance, autoethnography, and “textual experience” to “recall, (re)member, and represent” Black women’s lived experiences (2014, p.14). Durham (2014) defines textual experience as

an active, interpretive process of bridging lived experience with living memories embedded in words, act, objects, or sounds to generate temporal, plural, partisan and partial meaning that is filtered through historically produced subject or a situated speaking position. (p.61).

Textual experience recognizes that reflexive engagement with cultural texts and living memories is a performative act. Durham argues that recall, (re)member, and represent are fundamental to “examin[ing] researcher/ed experience in relation to representations or living memories” (2014, p. 125). Durham mines autoethnography to recall or center her situated body within a particular historical and cultural context as she reclaims her living memories. She argues that the recall invites the researcher/ed to show how we are rather than who we are in our (re)membering of racialized gender encounters (Durham, 2014, p.126). She engages in textual experiences to (re)member or to participate in dynamic, “reflexive, embodied, and engaged conversation[s]” about the relationship between researcher/ed, representations, and living memories (p.126). (Re)membering is the textual experience. Lastly, she emphasizes form and crafts poetic transcription to represent or display and access a representation of her lived experience.

Representation is also a way to democratize her Black feminist knowledge production. Durham (2014) attributes recall, (re)member, and represent to her hip hop feminist framework.

STOP-motion provides a unique methodological approach for me to “recall, (re)member, and represent” (Durham, 2014) **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender that I have endured in the academy. What makes **STOP-motion** a unique method of performance inquiry and interpretive lens is its key features. Three key features emerged when I engaged stop-motion animation as a site of performance inquiry to question the **ARRESTING** moment of unbelonging that I experienced in a breakfast line, the same encounter that I detailed at the beginning of this introduction. I use the three features that emerged to define **STOP-motion** as a distinguished framework. The framework allows me to approach other aesthetic representational forms or sites of performance inquiry from a **STOP-motion** approach. I demonstrate this by engaging stop-motion animation (chapter 2), autobiographical comics (chapter 3) and personal narrative (chapter 4) from a **STOP-motion** approach in this qualitative study. In what follows, I outline the three distinguishing features of a **STOP-motion** approach.

Key Features of a *STOP-motion* Approach

This section provides an abbreviated discussion of my engagement with stop-motion animation as a site of performance inquiry to highlight the three distinguishing features that emerged and now inform **STOP-motion** as a methodological approach to examine **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender. A more detailed discussion will be provided in chapter 2, which is dedicated to unpacking stop-motion animation as a site of performance inquiry and exploring the reflexive embodied process of animating my living memory of being **STOPPED** in the continental breakfast line at the conference I attended from a **STOP-motion** lens.

To craft the stop-motion animation of the **ARRESTING** moment in the breakfast line, I used a combination of found objects and purposely purchased materials. I used the large box that some materials were shipped in as my stage. The box was manipulated to create a representation of the scene in a similar fashion to box dioramas. The embodied stage production included tasks, such as, hand painting peg dolls to represent myself and other conference attendees, as well as, the staff member who became my **ARRESTING OFFICER**, hot gluing popsicle sticks together to construct a table, crafting food out of construction paper for the continental breakfast guests, laying down brown construction paper as wood floors, and pasting images of the hotel lobby on the inside of the box. To capture the stop-motion animation, I used the Stop Motion Studio app on my iPhone. The app allows me to capture, rapidly playback, and edit photographs. I attached my iPhone to a tripod to maintain a steady frame as I positioned and repositioned the peg dolls frame-by-frame in relation to each other and the space to create an illusion of movement. Because of its process of deliberative movements and creative representational form, stop-motion animation invites considerations of (1) the body in relation to positionality, (2) the body in relation to the practices of looking, and (3) the body in relation to performances of space and time. I approach the aesthetic form from a Black feminist activist position, centering self and exploring the radical possibilities of marginality with the hope of building a more just world (hooks, 1989). **STOP-motion** animation as a method of performance inquiry has become a way for me to name or spell-out what has become my tacitly understood enfolded and socially-spatialized subjugated knowledge. In what follows, I briefly discuss how each feature of **STOP-motion** emerged during the embodied process of performing stop-motion animation.

Positionality

I attempt to animate my experience from my social location as a space invader, an outsider within, an African American woman occupying white-dominated Western academic spaces. The reliance on physical movement choices during the process of animating provides an opportunity for critical reflection on my social location in the academy. For example, my aesthetic choices regarding the physical positioning of the peg dolls in relation to one another and the socio-spatial dynamics is one unique way **STOP-motion** animation allows me to think about positionality in the academy. I am tasked with considering the interconnected constructions of my social location and the social location of others within the historical space specific context of the academy. Positionality recognizes that identity is relationally constructed “in a constantly moving context” and provides a “location for the construction of meaning” (Alcoff, 1988, p.434). Standpoints are situated and not static (Collins, 2000). Racialized gender is constructed during relational encounters or reinforced through “social relations of domination” (Collins, 2000). Positioning peg dolls during the animating process to represent my experience of **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender signified to me that **STOP-motion** is committed to addressing the body in terms of positionality. In addition, the aesthetic choices I make for how bodies are represented also invited me to consider positionality and the construction of my social location. When I “recall and (re)member” (Durham, 2014) my living memories from a **STOP-motion** approach I attend to questions of positionality. I also question how the aesthetics of the representational form I utilize as a site of performance inquiry uniquely informs my understanding of positionality.

Practices of Looking

The filming aspect of stop-motion animation shapes my understanding of practices of looking during **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender in the academy. Looking and choosing not to look is a social practice interlocked with relationships of power and ideology often engaged “to communicate, to influence, and to be influenced” (Sturken and Cartwright, 2009, p.9). As mentioned earlier, space invaders are often viewed through a “criminalizing gaze” (Puwar, 2004b). Looking ascribes meaning onto bodies and can be an oppressive racializing act such as the white gaze. Again, this is the same gaze Puwar (2004a) argues **AMPLIFIES** the movements of racialized bodies in white-dominated spaces. The same gaze Calafell (2012) claims typecasts women of color in the academy as the monstrous Other. Filming a re-presentation of my experience of being criminalized in the breakfast line empowers me to redirect the gaze and to shift power relations of looking in ways that humanize me and re-center my experience from my perspective. This move provides space for self-definition and reclamation of my agency. **STOP-motion** is committed to addressing the body in terms of practices of looking from an activist position. Accordingly, when I frame my **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender from a **STOP-motion** approach, I question practices of looking. I also study how the aesthetics of the representational form I utilize as a site of performance inquiry informs my understanding of practices of looking.

Performances of Space and Time

For the stop-motion animation, I had to create a sequential frame of the peg dolls in relation to space and time in a way that would generate an illusion of movement when the images were rapidly played back. I had to be deliberate in how I moved the peg dolls across the continental breakfast line and in proximity with each other to communicate my experience of

disruption, displacement and disembodiment. Creating stop-motion animation demands constant disorientation because stop-motion animation is produced through frame-by-frame ruptures of time. In-between the takes, I came to understand that my experience of navigating the academy as a Black woman also demands constant embodied disorientation as I experience ruptures of time that reshape my sense of space and challenges my movements forward. I even navigate some spaces in the academy anticipating the next time the motion of my body will be **STOPPED**. My experience of socio-spatial disruption is always already anticipated and embodied. I move amongst the omnipresence of oppression that is historically and culturally situated and reinforced through socio-spatial relations that I embody and enact during those encounters. **STOP-motion** prompts me to question these performances of space and time that I experience. Thus, a **STOP-motion** approach is committed to addressing the body in terms of performances of space and time, as well as, considering how the aesthetics of the representational form I utilize as a site of performance inquiry informs my understanding of spatiality and temporality during **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender. In summary, a **STOP-motion** approach is committed to addressing the body in relation to positionality, practices of looking, and performances of space and time.

Ethical Concerns of STOP-motion

Relational ethics are a concern of mine, I understand that “all identity is relational” (Eakin, 1999, p.42). My **STOP-motion** approach implicates myself, my home department, professional organizations, and individuals, such as faculty, students, and family members, who are directly connected to my **ARRESTING** moments. I know that my story is not only my own and I have a responsibility to ethically portray others who are an intricate part of my story. Being tied to racism and sexism can be upsetting and uncomfortable (DiAngelo, 2011). It is not my

intention to label anyone a “racist” or a “sexist” and create such fixed representations of my **ARRESTING** officers. I understand that gendered-racism is ingrained systemically and culturally in ways that we all become perpetrators of, including myself, which is why I aim to reflexively move between the individual and the structural. I plan to represent my **ARRESTING** officers positively by taking an empathic approach. I do not intend to advance my arguments by making dehumanized white others, instead I aim to consider their motivations in ways that afford them complexity in their humanity within our shared narrative. I do not want to portray social injustice as a black and white issue and rely on scapegoating others. I turn the critical gaze inward to hold myself accountable and work towards the Black feminist goal of a dynamic “humanist vision” (Collins, 2000, p. 42). According to Denzin (2018), “A relational ethics is advocated, an ethic that asks researchers to act from their hearts and minds, to be caring, open inquirers, to bring respect and dignity to the researcher relationship” (p.194). I intend to be respectful and represent others with careful consideration.

To ethically represent others in my re-imagining I plan to change or omit names of people and places when possible. I want to offer some anonymity. According to Lapadat (2017), “Even with pseudonyms for names and places, intimate others can be easy to identify, and they certainly can recognize themselves in a written account” (p.598). My **ARRESTING** moments take place in the academy and anonymity is difficult in some of my stories such as the one with the department banner. I see this as an opportunity to “elicit ethical action from self and others...and to point a way towards socially just possibilities” (Lapadat, 2017, p. 596). In other words, I see the relational ties to my **ARRESTING** moments as an opportunity to invite restorative justice. In terms of representation, Madison (2003) states that she hopes we find the “space between absolutely refusing to perform because the stakes are *too* high and absolutely

rushing to perform because they *are* so high” (p.471). Like Madison, I situate my ethics of representation within this between space and I choose to perform because the stakes *are* so high.

Chapter Overview

In this qualitative study, I take a STOP-motion approach to stop-motion animation (chapter 2), autobiographical comics (chapter 3), and personal narrative (chapter 4) to make sense of three **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender in the academy: being **STOPPED** in a breakfast line at a conference, **STOPPED** in a department bathroom, and **STOPPED** by a large promotional department banner that exhibited myself and two other Black colleagues. Each chapter is prefaced with an artist statement that is structured into two parts. First, I discuss the unique aesthetics of the representational form and how it functions as a site of performance inquiry. Second, I explicate how I attend to the three key features of **STOP-motion** in my recollection of the **ARRESTING** moment(s) of racialized gender in question given the aesthetical qualities of the form. In other words, I explain how I consider positionality, practices of looking, and performances of space and time from an activist position in each chapter.

In chapter 2, I utilize stop-motion animation as a site of performance inquiry to revisit my experience in the breakfast line when I was accused of being a trespasser or a conference guest imposter. The **STOP-motion** animation itself is chapter 2. The artist statement provides a **STOP-motion** lens to make sense of the stop-motion animation. In chapter 3, I turn to autobiographical comics as a site of performance inquiry to explore the same **ARRESTING** moment at the conference, as well as, other significant moments that occurred throughout that day. The autobiographical comic itself is chapter 3 and the artist statement provides a **STOP-motion** lens to make sense of the text. In chapter 4, I explore personal narrative as a site of performance inquiry to make sense of two **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender in my department,

being **STOPPED** in my department bathroom and **STOPPED** by a promotional department banner that featured me and two other Black colleagues. Similarly, to the other artist statements, the one that prefaces chapter 4 provides a **STOP-motion** lens to make sense of the personal narrative chapter. Lastly, in chapter 5, I end the dissertation with a discussion of **STOP-motion** as a Black feminist praxis that I practice in my everyday life and hope to inspire others to practice as well.

ARTIST STATEMENT:
STOP-MOTION ANIMATION

In this artist statement, I offer a **STOP-motion** approach to making sense of my autoethnographic stop-motion animation, *BREAK-fast*, presented in Chapter 2. **STOP-motion** asks us to consider the body in terms of positionality, practices of looking, and performances of space and time within the representational form from an activist position. I will first discuss the form of stop-motion animation as a site of performance inquiry and then discuss my **STOP-motion** approach to stop-motion animation, which I refer to as **STOP-motion** animation.

STOP-motion Animation as a Site for Performance Inquiry

Black feminist epistemologies often employ performance-based aesthetics and embrace “that the process of research is as important as the product of research” (Nadar, 2014, p.20). Stop-motion animation involves visual sequential frame-by-frame movements. The process of deliberative movements and creative representational form of stop-motion animation serves as a productive site of performance inquiry and Black feminist knowledge production. Jeremy Blaire (2014) argues that when stop-motion is used to engage personal narratives, “stop motion animation forces the artist to disassemble self and other and dissect personal narratives into minute fragments leading to new knowledges for self and others” (p. 8). In addition, the process of stop-motion animation invites new ways of thinking about and questioning culture (McRae & Huber, 2017). The form of stop-motion animation can trouble how we process and reconstruct identity, power, and space. When researcher-performers engage in stop-motion animation to

analyze and critique culture they can engage in generating theory from and about the craft of stop-motion animation (McRae & Huber, 2017). For example, when documenting oppression, the form of stop-motion animation prompts me to think of oppression itself as a process or a system that can be broken into multiple sequential frames or movements. The visual nature of stop-motion animation invites me to consider how I might visually communicate cultural processes such as racialization and gendering that is operating within my framed life event. A Black feminist methodological approach to stop-motion animation, such as **STOP-motion**, prompts me to consider my social location in relation to “interlocking” systems of oppression.

McRae and Huber (2017) encourage researcher-performers to reflexively engage in stop-motion as the event itself, using the method to display the “process of finding” and to model conceptualization as opposed to displaying findings and modeling concepts (p. 115). In other words, stop-motion animation becomes an opportunity to engage research questions throughout the embodied practice of stop-motion animation. When stop-motion is used to engaged research questions, realizations “might emerge as metaphors, analogies, or embodied explanations” (McRae & Huber, 2017, p.120). I use the form of stop-motion animation to recall and make meaning of my lived-experience in the academy *and* to reflexively engage in the embodied process of making the stop-motion animation. Aisha Durham (2014) argues that “to recall means more than retell; it implies reclaiming and calling again lost memories” (p.22). She adds that recalling prompts the researcher-performer to see her body “as instrumental to sensing gaps, holes, fissures, and fixtures of culture and identity” (Durham, 2014, p.22). Thus, I am not simply re-presenting my life event through stop-motion animation, I am learning more about myself within a specific cultural context throughout the reflexive and embodied process of performing the stop-motion animation. I engage the form of stop-motion animation as both a “witness and a

doer” (Madison, 1999, p. 108). Stop-motion animation demands that bodies actively participate in the process *and* enables researcher-performers to position their body as a site of knowing that is invested in personal experience to retool or narrate meaningful life events.

Preparing stop-motion animation requires physical crafting and performing stop-motion animation requires repetitive physical manipulation by touch. Both preparation and performance involve embodiment. During these activities, one must rely heavily on the body as a tool. I created my set, characters, and props by hand. Stop-motion animation is a sensual hands-on world-building performance. Depending on the materials used, embodied tasks can range from cutting, pasting, hot-gluing, sculpting, constructing, painting, etc. Each of these tasks demands bodies full participation. Stop-motion animator, Barry Purves, is worth citing at length here to provide another example of the embodied nature of animating:

When I am animating with puppets I feel like an actor, engaging myself within the individual characters’ thoughts and motivations. I feel a deep sensation, getting into the characters’ minds and bodies. I’m most happy animating when it’s flowing well, and when the animation is working that I don’t need to check it. We’re fulfilling the need of the illusion of life – we’re making characters breathe and live. They become believable. (2012, p.71)

Animating as performance requires being fully immersed in the re-imagined social world.

Animating is a co-performance. Animators must orient the audience and guide them where to look and what to look for (Purves). Stop-motion animation often relies on affective framing and intersubjectivity that provokes the audience to also immerse themselves into the re-imagined world enough to believe the movement of characters within that world. In other words, stop-motion animation relies on the audience’s imagination. One-way animators help guide

audience members is by attempting to incite empathy for the characters and inviting them to be emotionally invested in the imagined world. For example, background music is an effective affective frame that cues the audience of the overall mood. Being in tune with the atmosphere and characters' feelings helps move the story along. If the background music establishes that the animation is a thriller, then the audience may anticipate something scary or surprising to happen. There are many ways for animators to guide that audience.

Informed by Black feminist thought, I continuously look for opportunities to explore and expose power relations during the animation process. Ethics, aesthetics, praxis, and epistemology become interconnected in acts of representation (Denzin, 2000). My re-imagined social world of animation quickly became rife with micro and macro power relations that helped me recall, negotiate, and challenge the **ARRESTING** socio-spatial encounter I experienced in the breakfast line at the conference I attended. The setting of my stop-motion animation structures a specific location, one can consider the macro power relations that organize and regulate the professional conference, hotel, and continental breakfast. The social interactions between the peg dolls and the space provide a glimpse into how power is exercised and negotiated on a micro level. For example, the buffet table orders guests to prepare their breakfast and make their way to their table in a linear fashion. Social norms would not permit cutting in line or delaying the progression of the line. Although, I recreated moments where some guest appeared to engage in conversation as they waited, I was mindful of the social order and norms that expect their conversations to not interfere with the line progression. The hotel staff member pulling me out of line before I finished preparing my breakfast **DISRUPTS** the organization of the space but also animates her exercise of power over me in this specific moment in time. Within this context, it became alarming to me that I was forced out of line. The representational form of stop-motion

animation enables me to imaginatively reconstruct and creatively bear witness to my lived-experience in the academy from an activist position. In other words, I question how power operates during **ARRESTING** moments. Taking a **STOP-motion** approach to stop-motion animation, I study my body in terms of positionality, practices of looking, and performances of space and time. In what follows, I will discuss some of the many ways that my **STOP-motion** animation presented in chapter 2 invites me and others to consider these three key features of **STOP-motion** in my recollection of the **ARRESTING moment** at the conference.

STOP-motion Animation and Positionality

In the stop-motion animation, I frame my experience working my way through the breakfast line. I represent being **STOPPED** then pulled aside by the hotel staff member, who accused me of trespassing. I also represent how I fled towards my colleagues table to escape. Initially, I was unsure how to direct the movements of the hotel staff woman in the beginning of the film. I considered the power dynamics at play in the social situation and how in that moment I perceived her as “the gatekeeper” that maintains the coherence of (white) space in the academy (Davis, 1998). I placed her wooden peg doll body in the far-right corner, giving her a panoptic view of the buffet line. I identified her as a potential **ARRESTING OFFICER**, and I imagined that she identified me as a potential “**SPACE THREAT**” (Puwar, 2008), a trespasser who did not belong in the breakfast line among the other conference guests. I explored the power dynamics of our relationship. In the first few frames, I moved her body left to right to scan the room while I moved conference guests along the breakfast buffet table. Once the peg doll that stood in for my body, the “not-not me” (Schechner, 1988), became in frame I made the **ARRESTING OFFICER’s** gaze fixed on my movements. This shift in focus on the not-not-me positioned me as an outsider-within amongst the other conference guests.

To further position me as an **OUTSIDER** the **ARRESTING OFFICER** demanded that I **STOP** what I was doing, and she began to police my movements. One way the **ARRESTING OFFICER** asserted her ability to police my movements was by successfully pulling me over and steering me out of line. I used **CLOSE-UP** frames to stress how the peg dolls became intimately close in proximity in this moment; **TAKING UP** my personal space was another way she asserted her power. In the next few frames, I slightly moved the not-not me back and away from the **ARRESTING OFFICER** to resist and recreate some distance in my struggle to regain personal space. While the not-not me was pulled over in **CONFRONTATION** with the **ARRESTING OFFICER**, the remaining conference guests continued to make their way down the continental breakfast line. It is this juxtaposition between the not-not me being **POLICED** by the **ARRESTING OFFICER** and the conference guests continuing to go about their day that the hypervisibility and invisibility of Black women in the academy is undeniably exposed.

While I made aesthetic choices for each of the characters in my story, I reflected on why my body might have been perceived as **OUT-OF-PLACE**. Aesthetic choices in skin, hair, clothing, and body shape are some of the many ways I had to grapple with intersectional axis of difference and privilege such as race, gender, class, age, etc. My aesthetic choices for the not-not-me asks that I question how I make sense of my racialized gender and how I embody my social location. My aesthetic choices for others prompt me to reflexively consider the ethics of my representations in my **STOP-motion** animation and reconcile with my potential biases.

***STOP-motion* Animation and Practices of Looking**

Filming my **STOP-motion** animation from my cellphone shapes how I make sense of practices of looking during **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender in the academy. The cellphone has become both a symbol of resistance and domination. In 2020, it is common to see

cellphone recorded videos of **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender virally shared on various social media platforms and news sources (Solano & Robson, 2020). These videos range from Black people being **STOPPED** from doing everyday activities such as going to the gym to Black people being **KILLED** for jogging in their neighborhood (Solano & Robson, 2020). Cellphones are often used to record and trouble these incidents however they are also frequently used by **ARRESTING OFFICERS** to bring in even powerful, sometimes **LETHAL**, law enforcement into the space. Take for example Amy Cooper, a white dog walker, who called a cop on Christian Cooper, a Black birdwatcher, and made the false accusation that he was threatening her life in Central Park (Solano & Robson, 2020). Fortunately, Christian Cooper had filmed their entire encounter from his cellphone which proved he never threatened her. At a time where law enforcement engagement increases the risk of a fatal outcome, the use of cellphones by **ARRESTING OFFICERS** to make false accusations and call in law enforcement is a power move that upholds white supremacy.

Law enforcement is often called on Black women in academic spaces. Oumou Kanoute, a Black graduate student at Smith College, had the cops called on her because she “looked out of place” eating lunch in a common space on campus (Whitford, 2018, para 1). Lolade Siyonbola, a Black graduate student at Yale, had the police called on her after she fell asleep in the common room of her dorm while studying (Griggs, 2018). Paige Burgess, a Black undergraduate student at Texas University, was escorted by police from her lecture hall after her white professor called the cops on her for allegedly propping her feet up on a lecture hall chair (Espinoza, 2018). Perhaps the most haunting example is the recent case of Christin Evans, a Black undergraduate student at Stephen F. Austin State University who had a squad of officers break into her dorm room while she was sleeping after a false accusation was made alleging that she threatened to

stab a white woman with scissors (Burke, 2020). This incident comes seven months after Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old Black woman, was shot and killed in her sleep by a squad of cops that broke into her home (Burke, 2020). Although my **ARRESTING OFFICER** did not call the police, she verbally threatened to call for back up to confirm my story of belonging. I feared for my safety as a Black woman in the academy. I feared the fate that awaited me after being accused of being **OUT-OF-PLACE** at the conference by a white woman who felt she needed back up.

STOP-motion animation enables me to use my cellphone as a subversive technology to reclaim a sense of agency over my body and reject “**OUT-OF-PLACESSNESS**” (McKittrick, 2006; emphasis mine). According to Mann (2013), using a mobile device to look back and subvert a gaze of power can be considered a form of sousveillance. Sousveillance reposition those in power as the subject under close observation (Mann, 2013). Browne (2015) expands Mann’s concept of sousveillance and coins the term “dark sousveillance” to account for the impact of racialization. Browne (2015) explains dark sousveillance, “as an imaginative place from which to mobilize a critique of racializing surveillance, a critique that takes form in anti-surveillance, countersurveillance, and other freedom practices” (p. 21). Browne (2015) includes artistic critiques of surveillance experiences as an extension of dark sousveillance. **STOP-motion** animation shifts the power relations of looking and can be used as a subversive technology to engage sousveillance in the academy. Much like **STOP-motion**, subversion is a creative and imaginative act of resistance. One must be crafty! Browne contends that in the Black gaze that challenges and questions surveillance there is transformative power and hope for Black existence (Browne, 2015). Dark sousveillance is an “analytical frame” where the Black gaze becomes a “form of argumentation” (Browne, 2015, p. 164). Thus, **STOP-motion** animation as dark

sousveillance enables an “*oppositional gaze*” (hooks, 1992) where one can “*talk back*” (hooks, 1989) and “*violate the place of Otherness*” (Davis, 1998). To look back on **ARRESTING** moments from a **STOP-motion** lens, means subverting the gaze and reclaiming my sense of self, as well as, my sense of belonging in the academy.

***STOP-motion* Animation and Performances of Space and Time**

The form of stop-motion animation echoes my embodied experience of making my way through the breakfast line. To create an illusion of movement through the breakfast line I had to slightly move each peg doll **FRAME-by-FRAME**. In each **FRAME** or **STOP**, I had to calculate the movements for the not-not me and the surrounding bodies. As mentioned in the introduction, when I walked through the breakfast line I felt as if I was holding my breath. I was walking on eggshells and scrambling to keep myself at ease as I felt lingering eyes on my body. I slowly and cautiously attempted to make my way through the line while keeping the movements of others in my peripheral vision as I gazed downward.

The process of creating the **STOP-motion** animation, felt very similar to the performances of space and time I embodied in line. Although this moment in the breakfast line and the experience of being **STOPPED** was brief, it felt dragged out and prolonged because I was hyperaware of my body and surroundings. I was anticipating an **ARRESTING** moment however; I did not expect being commanded to physically **STOP**. I thought maybe someone would say something offensive about me under their breath or ignore my personal space in line or look at me disapprovingly; all things I have experienced in institutional white spaces. My paranoid anxiety as a Black woman occupying a white-dominated space is reasonable (Ahmed, 2009). Ahmed (2009) argues that paranoia is created by racism. I am not fearful or suspicious of white people, I am wary of how anti-Black racism sustains institutional white spaces. My past

experiences of racism in similar spaces sometimes puts me on edge and causes me to tense up until I enter a new space. The process of **STOP-motion** animation invites me to experience the intensity of moving through white-dominated academic spaces.

Frank Wilderson helps me understand my experience of socio-spatial disruption as always already anticipated. Wilderson (2011) argues that black subjectivity is at the crossroads between subjective vertigo, “one’s environment is perpetually unhinged stems from a relationship to violence that cannot be analogized” and objective vertigo “a life constituted by disorientation rather than a life interrupted by disorientation” (p. 3). I move through the academy amongst an omnipresence of oppression that feels like being under constant surveillance and in turn I attempt to remain hyperaware. My life in the academy becomes constituted by disorientation. I navigate some spaces in the academy anticipating the next time the motion of my body will be **STOPPED** and **STOP-motion** animation allows me to demonstrate this everyday experience. I do not always experience a fear-based paranoia, it’s more like a nagging intuitive feeling. It is knowing with certainty that an **ARRESTING** moment of racialized gender will happen again and questioning whether I am prepared to respond. Although there is a negative connotation associated with paranoia, it is empowering because it is a survival mechanism (de Becker, 1997). **STOP-motion** animation helps me understand that my embodied paranoid anxiety during **ARRESTS** is a performance of space and time that provokes *movements of resistance*.

CHAPTER TWO:

A STOP-MOTION ANIMATION: ANIMATING ARRESTING MOMENTS

In this chapter, I present my **STOP-motion** animation, *BREAK-fast*, which explores an **ARRESTING** moment of racialized gender that I experienced at a professional conference. I was **STOPPED** in line by a hotel staff member during the continental breakfast offered to conference guests and accused of trespassing. The short **STOP-motion** animation film representing this moment is 1 minute and 58 seconds in length and can be viewed on YouTube using the following link: <https://youtu.be/tQFbNAg520E>. This is an unlisted video on YouTube and can only be found via the link provided.

ARTIST STATEMENT:
STOP-MOTION COMICS

In this artist statement, I encourage a **STOP-motion** approach to making sense of my autobiographical comic presented in Chapter 3. **STOP-motion** asks us to consider the body in terms of positionality, practices of looking, and performances of space and time within the representational form from an activist position. I will first discuss the form of autobiographical comics as a site of performance inquiry and then discuss my **STOP-motion** approach to autobiographical comics, which I refer to as **STOP-motion** comics.

Autobiographical Comics as a Site for Performance Inquiry

Comics are an art of storytelling, a means of self-expression, and a mode of communication (McCloud, 1993). Like stop-motion animation, comics are a sequential art form but with its own unique qualities and embodied process. Cartooning oneself into the comic form becomes a “way of seeing” and focusing our attention (McCloud, 1993, p.31). I engage autobiographical comics as an intimate embodied site for performance inquiry to make sense of **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender in the academy. Elisabeth El Refaie defines autobiographical comics as “a loose category of life writing through the use of sequential images and (usually) words” (2012, p.48). Autobiographical comics also welcome the Black feminist process of “recalling, (re)membering, and representing” life events to understand our social selves within specific sociocultural contexts (Durham, 2014, p.125). Frederik Byrn Køhlert, argues that autobiographical comics are a political matter for “people on the social and cultural

margins” who utilizes comics to “see and negotiate [their] relationship with the world through the form’s self-reflective engagement with autobiographical representations” (2019, p. 3). For marginalized voices, autobiographical comics provides a resistive space to be heard and seen.

Autobiographical comics can be used as critique, a vehicle for self-emancipation, and cultural production (Tolmie, 2013). Jane Tolmie claims that autobiographical comics can function as a form of “feminist art activism, art that deliberately self-defines as a form of creative emancipation” (2013, p. xvi). The transformative possibilities for self-definition within the comic form support a Black feminist methodological approach to autobiographical comics such as **STOP-motion**, which I will unpack more later in this statement. Cathy Thomas further affirms this move stating that “the cultural work of Afrofuturism, Black feminist thought, intellectual activism, and intentional diversity has been a necessary part of the Black comic book tradition in the United States” (2018, p. 91). My **STOP-motion** approach to autobiographical comics contributes to this rich tradition.

What draws me to the comic form is the unique engagement of embodiment and performance as inquiry. Jarod Roselló (2017) argues, “when we draw, we use our entire bodies, our limbs and organs, but also all those things that make us feel: memories, experiences, desires, fears” (p. 248). Drawing myself into the comic form invites me to be *with* and *in* my body as I recall my experiences of **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender. Comics calls me to draw my whole self in and attempt to translate the complexity of my emotions within the images. El Refaie (2012) finds the heavy reliance of images in the comic medium both constraining and empowering. She claims, “the requirement to produce multiple drawn versions of one’s self necessarily involves an intense engagement with embodied aspects of identity, as well as with the sociocultural models underpinning body image” (p.4). Artists not only engage their entire

bodies to create comics, but the process allows them to think critically and reflexively about the embodied aspects of identity. I turn to autobiographical comics to grapple with my body in its wholeness in the moments where I feel most incomplete as a form of resistance and performance inquiry.

I engage my autobiographical comic from a **STOP-motion** approach to specifically address the body in terms of positionality, practices of looking, and performances of space and time from an activist position. In what follows, I will discuss some of the many ways that my **STOP-motion** comic, *The Body in Pain*, presented in chapter 3 invites me and others to consider these three key features of **STOP-motion** in my recollection of the **ARRESTING moment** I endured at the conference.

STOP-motion Comics and Positionality

I originally turned to comics longing to be seen. In Fall 2016, my graduate professor assigned a mini engagement performance in our performance seminar on “The Body in Pain,” an invitation to explore an experience we were still healing from. It had been a year since I endured the **ARRESTING** moment in the continental breakfast line, but the **TRAUMA** lingered. I could not stop replaying that moment in my head. I just kept thinking about how determined I was to blend in and how before I could even step foot into the conference, I was positioned **OUT-OF-PLACE** and accused of being a **TRESPASSER** who did not belong. I also kept thinking about the responses I received when I disclosed what happened to me and how subdued I felt after. The year before, I had talked to my professor about the experience, but I left that conversation feeling as if I did not effectively communicate my experience to gain the response that I needed from my professor to feel seen. I felt comfortable disclosing to my professor because of the support and validation I often receive in response. I felt sympathetically heard but to be

empathetically seen I knew I needed to effectively communicate the affect. I took this assignment as an opportunity to heal from the **ARRESTING** moment and to better communicate how I felt in that moment.

I ripped out a few blank sheets of textured off-white watercolor pages from my sketch book and laid them out on my bedroom floor. The sequential nature of comics empowered me to draw what led up to and what followed the incident in the breakfast line during the conference. I began with a pencil. I first drew myself into the conference hotel looking into a mirror seeing the results of my failed twist out that left me with misguided curls. I did not have the products I needed to restyle my hair and I was already nervous about wearing an afro in a professional and predominately white setting for the first time. I was petrified. To capture my expression, I looked at my reflection in my bedroom mirror and attempted to conjured up the emotions that overcame my body that morning in my hotel room before I entered the complimentary breakfast. I drew what I felt to the best of my ability and then continued to draw each of the moments that seemed significant to storying this life event. Then once *again*, this time with a pen, I retraced and reimagined my lived experience. And then *again*, I returned to each panel, this time with color pencils, to color my body in. Each layer of the comic forced me to take a hard look and contend with representations of myself as a racialized gendered body in pain.

Various aspects of my positionality seem more salient as I struggled to be seen in my comic. I was reminded of the moments leading up to and following the **ARREST** in the breakfast line that felt like moments of confirmation that I was **OUT-OF-PLACE**. Moments such as my hair not cooperating in the morning and my Blackness reminding a conference guest of his daughter's mission trip to Africa. All these bits seemed to give the **ARRESTING** moment of racialized gender in the breakfast line more meaning. All these bits illuminated the ways I was

marginalized at the conference and in the academy. The comic form allows artists “to structure[e] personal identity and externaliz[e] subjectivity, in a direct visual engagement with the various cultural processes that marginalized them” (Køhlert, 2019, p. 19).

STOP-motion Comics and Practices of Looking

Black women often endure the contradictory position of being both invisible and hyper visible in the academic spaces where they are underrepresented. Daniel (2018) argues that the in/visible position greatly impacts Black women’s wellbeing in the academy. Comics are especially useful for illustrating emotions and the tensions of in/visibility during **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender. For example, Tolmie claims that “traumatic memory of something as intangible as being unable to speak can be made visible in the comics medium” (2013, p.xi). After the **ARREST** I endured in the breakfast line, I felt silenced and **OUT-OF-PLACE** the rest of the conference. I had internalized that I was at the conference to shadow and represent my academic institution. Displaying my emotions felt inappropriate so I bottled them up and tried to fade into the background until I could go home and embrace the range of my emotions.

The comic form empowers me to direct the gaze of my readers at the embodied emotional toll that navigating in/visibility following an **ARRESTING** moment of racialized gender has on my body. According to Tolmie (2013) some of the aesthetic choices that “force the viewer to ‘see’ an often-invisible culture of shaming and silencing” include “the representation of hunched bodies, sideways glances, turned backs, and averted eyes” (2013, p.xi). Some of those aesthetic choices are present in my own **STOP-motion** comic. For example, in one panel I draw myself frowning with my eyes looking downwards and my arms crossed at a dining table during the breakfast that followed the **ARREST**. My body is presented as closed off in juxtaposition to my colleagues who are drawn sharing a lively conversation with smiles on

their faces. To further display my vulnerability and reclaim my humanness, I offer readers a look into my thoughts using thought bubbles that display various iconic symbols that represent my anxieties and emotions. By forcing readers to look at my emotional state and discomfort, I actively reject the controlling image of the strong Black woman that many Black women in the academy feel they must take up amidst adversity in institutional white spaces (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009). In the comic form, I have the power to represent myself in ways that “meet, challenge, and resist the reader’s would-be objectifying gaze” (Køhlert, 2019, p. 22).

STOP-motion Comics and Performances of Space and Time

Comics are an interesting medium to explore performances of space and time. Time can be depicted moment-to-moment, action-to-action, subject-to-subject, or scene-to-scene in comics (McCloud, 1993). I use scene-to-scene in *The Body in Pain*. Scene-to-scene displays transitions between panels by depicting “significant distances of time and space.” Each panel of a scene-to-scene comic presents a new scene or moment in time. For example, in one panel I provide a scene of me at breakfast with my colleagues and in the panel directly following I provide two scenes of two different moments in time that took place in different spaces at the conference. These large jumps in time and space requires that the reader engages in deductive reasoning to create closure and make sense of the sequence (McCloud, 1993). The scene-to-scene approach asks the reader to fill in the gaps and imagine how I move from one scene to the next. Comics are evocative and demands that readers not only gaze but co-create meaning.

In my *STOP-motion* animation I focus on the moment of **DISRUPTION** and brake down that moment into smaller fragments of time that can be further interrogated. However, in my *STOP-motion* comic I show how I carry that moment of **DISRUPTION** that occurred in the breakfast line with me the rest of the conference, as well as, at school and home later that day.

The moment lingers and persists through time. I still carry that moment with me till this day. That one moment in time continues to impact how I move through academic spaces and how I see myself within these spaces. In the **STOP-motion** narrative in chapter 4, I further interrogate the ways in which I sometimes become tethered to **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender in the academy and struggle to break free of the psychological hold of the representations that are inflicted onto me. Comics are a useful representational form to visually draw attention to these performances of space and time. Much like animation, the comic form allows for crafty intervention that is unique to form. The comic form enables me to move my experience forward in time and to complicate one's understanding of temporality and space in ways that better reflect my lived experience in the academy during these persistent **ARRESTING** moments.

CHAPTER THREE:

A STOP-MOTION COMIC: DRAWING ARRESTING MOMENTS

In this chapter, I present my ten-page **STOP-motion** comic, *The Body in Pain*, which explores the **ARRESTING** moment of racialized gender I experienced at a conference. The ten-page comic was originally crafted with the intention of being displayed as a comic strip by placing the individual pages in a side-by-side sequence. However, in what follows, I present the comic in Figure 1, which consists of individual photocopies of each page of *The Body in Pain*.

The Body in Pain - Page 1



Figure 1. *The Body in Pain*: a 10-page comic



Figure 1. *The Body in Pain*: a 10-page comic (continued)



Figure 1. *The Body in Pain*: a 10-page comic (continued)



Figure 1. *The Body in Pain*: a 10-page comic (continued)



Figure 1. *The Body in Pain*: a 10-page comic (continued)



Figure 1. *The Body in Pain*: a 10-page comic (continued)



Figure 1. *The Body in Pain*: a 10-page comic (continued)



Figure 1. *The Body in Pain*: a 10-page comic (continued)



Figure 1. The Body in Pain: a 10-page comic (continued)



Figure 1. *The Body in Pain*: a 10-page comic (continued)

ARTIST STATEMENT:
STOP-MOTION NARRATIVE

In this artist statement, I offer a **STOP-motion** approach to making sense of my personal narrative presented in Chapter 4. **STOP-motion** asks us to consider the body in terms of positionality, practices of looking, and performances of space and time within the representational form from an activist position. I will first discuss the form of personal narrative as a site of performance inquiry and then discuss my **STOP-motion** approach to personal narrative, which I refer to as **STOP-motion** narrative.

Personal Narrative as a Site for Performance Inquiry

Personal narrative is a rich part of the Black feminist tradition. Black feminists identify lived experience as a “criterion of meaning” and “credibility;” they use storytelling as a way of knowing to theorize their experiences (Collins, 2000, p. 274). Personal narrative becomes a means to “comprehend, resist, transform, and heal” from interlocking systems of oppression (Hua, 2013, p.31). Personal narratives often function as counternarratives. Self-definition engendered in counternarratives have the power to **DISRUPT** master narratives and empower Black women to **REJECT** the master’s images (Collins, 2000). Anh Hau (2013) claims,

By looking within ourselves and making sense of our experiential memories along with embodied, temporal and spatial histories, women of color can create a truer version of reality, and can begin to make sense of the world in order to liberate ourselves” (p. 37).

Personal narratives serve as a representational form that allows researchers to study experience and experiential memories (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). The transformative possibilities of personal narrative make it a productive site for performance inquiry.

Personal narrative as performance inquiry is grounded in embodied, reflexive, autoethnographic writing. Durham (2014) argues that this kind of writing “centers the situated body as the interpreter of knowledge, privileges the emotive, and employs poetics that move from the “I” outward.” (p.14). She goes on to say that the poetics enables researchers to “capitalizes on that felt-sense or that embodied knowing” that derive from privileging the emotive (Durham, 2014, p. 105). Accordingly, when I re-story my lived experience of **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender in the academy in Chapter 4, I turn inward and engage my body as a site of knowledge to make sense of my social location in the academy. I also turn outward to work towards better understanding the sociocultural underpinnings of the academy and to consider how my experience might echo other Black women’s experience in the academy. Specifically, I connect my experiences of **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender in the academy with the objectifying properties of enactments and performances of diversity. I also take seriously the power of poetics by incorporating performative writing techniques that embed my narrative with more layers of meaning. Poetics demands that my body fully participates in the embodied process of writing and that I focus on my embodiment in the re-storying of my life event.

I engage my personal narrative from a **STOP-motion** approach to specifically address the body in terms of positionality, practices of looking, and performances of space and time from an activist position. In this artist statement, I will discuss some of the many ways that my **STOP-motion** narrative presented in chapter 4 invites me and others to consider these three key features

of **STOP-motion** in my recollection of two **ARRESTING** moments I endured in my department: being **STOPPED** inside the department bathroom and being **STOPPED** by the promotional department banner that displayed me and two of my Black colleagues.

STOP-motion Narratives and Positionality

I creatively combine narrative and scholarship together to critically explore my positionality in the academy. I employ poetics such as performative writing in my narrative to emphasize the **ARRESTING** language of diversity. Scholarship on performances and enactments of diversity in the academy greatly shape my understanding of **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender. I consider how embodying diversity entraps me in a space of belonging and unbelonging in the academy. As a Black woman, I have come to understand this space of un/belonging from the contested social location of “outsider within” (Collins, 2000). As an outsider within, I often experience a double consciousness. W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) describes double-consciousness as, “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others...one ever feels his two-ness...two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body” (p.8).

Throughout my autoethnographic reflection, I employ poetics that embrace two-ness to bring the experiences of racialized gendered bodies in the academy into question. For example, I discuss my **ARRESTING** experiences on the department banner and in the department bathroom to demonstrate the tethering between me and an “**OTHER ME**,” the Othering of me produced through power-laden representations of diversity. The “**OTHER ME**” is the personification of these representations enacted through the language of diversity. The “**OTHER ME**” becomes its own character in my narrative. The narrative form enables me to aesthetically draw a line between my understanding of self and how I perceived others see me in the academy.

This is one of the unique ways I trouble my understanding of positionality in my *STOP-motion* narrative.

***STOP-motion* Narratives and Practices of Looking**

The **OTHER ME** in my narrative also serves as a creative way to trouble practices of looking. The **OTHER ME** is an embodiment of my rejection of the power-laden representations of diversity often inflected onto my body during **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender in the academy. By making a distinction between how I see myself and how I am represented by others during **ARRESTING** moments, I become empowered to turn the gaze and talk back to those objectifying representations. For example, I reject the tokenization and commodification of my body on the department banner, as well as, the mammification of my body in the department bathroom by naming the **OTHER ME** as present in those moments. Writing the **OTHER ME** into my *STOP-motion* narrative as separate from me invites me to engage in self-definition.

***STOP-motion* Narratives and Performances of Space and Time**

Narrative is a rich site to explore performances of space and time because of the ability to incorporate foreshadowing and flashbacks that move me through time and space in the staging of my memories (Durham, 2014). Narrative also allows for my embodied memories of **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender to be situated alongside the historical socio-spatial dynamics and geographies of white-dominate academic institutions. For example, I embody time and space in my narrative as I “recall” the tokenization and commodification of my body on my department banner and “(re)member” the history of Black bodies being commodified taken up as lynching souvenirs (Durham, 2014). Bridging these past-present performances of space and time forces me to seriously consider McKittrick’s claim that “it is on the body that the complexity and ambiguity of history, race, racism and place are inscribed” (2000, p.225). A *STOP-motion*

approach to narrative nuances my understanding of **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender in the academy.

CHAPTER FOUR:

A STOP-MOTION NARRATIVE: WRITING ARRESTING MOMENTS

“Is it okay to come in?”

I hesitate. “um, yeah,” I said to an older white woman in business casual dress addressing me in the bathroom doorway as I dry my hands.

She stands there looking at me and looking for an answer. I look at her confused.

When we pass each other, she adds with levity in her voice, “You clean it up, we mess it up.”

I keep walking. Halfway to my office, I replay it wanting to return to the bathroom to reply to her race-gender assumption associating my body with what she condescendingly considers the help. I want to return. But, I can barely turn around to whisper a watered-down response.

“Oh, I’m not, the cleaner!”

I replay it. It sounds firmer and louder in my mind. Somewhat frozen, I make my way trance-like to my office room. It is the same room near the department doorway where I confront a towering image of myself with my Black advisor and another Black graduate colleague—all **CAPTURED** on an extra-large photograph showing our proud pearly-white smiles from a previous department party now used to promote the graduate program. In my office room, I prop my iPhone on the desk and set the self-timer to snap a full-body photo of myself. I try to **CAPTURE** an image of what she and other colleagues see that I still do not believe myself to

be. I share the “black in white” space photo in a family group chat. It is my desperate attempt to make sense of the **ARRESTING** moments of ontological rupture in doorways and departments that surveil my presence.

Introduction

In this chapter, I use **STOP-motion** as an autoethnographic lens of interpretive analysis to make sense of **ARRESTING** moments of un/belonging in the academy. I find that embodying diversity entraps me in this space of belonging and unbelonging. Doorways and departments in the academy are haunted by “power-laden representations” (Durham, 2014) of diversity that I am expected to enact, perform, and/or embody. Durham (2014) introduces the term “power-laden representations” to articulate how racist ideologies are often reproduced in stereotypical and objectifying constructed images of Black female bodies. She argues that power-laden representations are not just stereotypical images but instead operate through both form and function or appearance and social role (Durham, 2014). Power-laden representations are always connected to power and thus work to maintain social relations of domination. I adopt the term “power-laden representations” to discuss diversity because I recognize enactments of diversity in the academy as a gender-specific representation of people of African descent. Enactments of diversity are used to explain, justify, or legitimate systems of exploitation. Specifically, enactments of diversity attempt to use difference to erase differential power relations. For example, my department’s promotional banner can celebrate difference without attending to the specific experiences of Black women, including mine in the bathroom. The banner presents a happy image of diversity despite the race-gender trauma I endure daily from being forced to embody diversity for the academy. Entering the academy as a racialized-gender body means moving between these paradoxical spaces of un/belonging.

Although there are many definitions for “diversity,” diversity in the academy is generally understood as the inclusion of bodies that are “different” (Ahmed, 2012; Puwar, 2004). Diversity is not only a euphemism for racial difference, it usually signifies Black bodies specifically (Nieli, 2010; Pippert, Essenburg, & Matchett, 2013). White bodies are often perceived as the normative figures in the academy whereas Black bodies are perceived as dis-identified with the space or **OUT OF PLACE** (Puwar, 2004). Thus, Black bodies are perceived as “embodying difference” (Mirza, 2009) or “embodying diversity” (Ahmed, 2009). From my lived experience of embodying diversity, I have found that enactments of diversity function as technologies of containment used to **FRAME** and make sense of Black bodies in institutional white academic spaces or to put Black bodies in their place and define their social role. I am *frequently STOPPED* by the **MAMMIFICATION**, **TOKENIZATION**, and **COMMODIFICATION** of my race-gender body and forced to grapple with these ontologically rupturing representations of me, whether it be proudly displayed on my department’s promotional banner or condescendingly projected onto me during an interpersonal exchange in my department bathroom.

As a Black feminist, I have come to understand this space of un/belonging from the contested social location of “outsider within” (Collins, 2000). I recognize that my distinctive marginality offers me a unique vantage point of power in the academy and I have come to understand that power through what Collins calls the “matrix of domination,” four domains of power including the structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains (2000, p.276). Collins argues that the structural “**ORGANIZES**” oppression, the disciplinary “**MANAGES**” oppression, the hegemonic “**JUSTIFIES**” oppression, and the interpersonal “**INFLUENCES** everyday lived experience and the individual consciousness that ensues” (2000, p. 276; emphasis mine). These domains of power work together to maintain interlocking

oppression. For example, Collins argues that “the significance of the hegemonic domain of power lies in its ability to shape consciousness via the manipulation of ideas, images, symbols, and ideologies.” (2000, p.285). She asserts that “by manipulating ideology and culture, the hegemonic domain acts as a link between social institutions (structural domain), their organizational practices (disciplinary domain), and the level of everyday social interactions (interpersonal domain)” (Collins, 2000, p.284). Power-laden representations of diversity are rooted in the hegemonic domain and link the academy (structural domain), surveillance practices and objectification (disciplinary domain), and microaggressions (interpersonal domain). In the department bathroom I was confronted with **THE MAMMY** and on the department banner I was confronted with **THE TOKEN** and **THE COMMODITY**, each of these power-laden representations of diversity appropriate the Black body to uphold white supremacy in the academy.

According to Durham (2014), one way to reorder power is to speak about how the black body is appropriated to uphold white supremacy (p.70). Therefore, I share my counternarrative to talk back to power-laden representations of diversity and to engage in self-definition. I reject these representations of me and name them the “**OTHER ME**,” asserting that they represent the Othering of me produced through power-laden representation of diversity but are not me and do not define me. I performatively re-narrate my encounters with the department banner and in the department bathroom to demonstrate the tethering between me and the **OTHER ME** to the mammification, tokenization, and commodification of Black female bodies in white-dominated academic spaces. Collins argues that, “when it comes to knowledge, Black women’s empowerment involves rejecting the dimensions of knowledge that perpetuate objectification, commodification, and exploitation” (2000, p.289). My counternarrative is a form of knowledge

production, oppositional consciousness raising, and self-valuation (Collins, 2000). Telling my story grants me agency over how I am represented beyond stereotypes (Boylorn, 2016). In what follows, I recall the outsider within moments of un/belonging in the doorways of my department to frame my recurring **ARRESTING** experiences of becoming the mammy, the token, and the commodity for the academy that seems more invested in enactments of diversity than the welfare of Black women.

STOP: Becoming the Mammy

She did not enter the bathroom right away. I could still sense her presence in the doorframe behind me while I tossed my damp paper towels into the trashcan. When I turned around our eyes met, and we politely exchanged smiles before crossing paths in the doorway. She giggled as she passed and then she turned her smile into a friendly joke between mammy and plantation mistress. “You clean it up, we mess it up.” It was frivolously uttered without second thought. It was the kind of joke delivery that anticipated that others would find the joke funny simply because it was true. She expected that I would be in on the mammifying joke and together we would bond over the shared laugh. The gut-wrenching blow of becoming her punch line did not immediately hit me because my trauma response was to dissociate and begin interrogating this **OTHER ME** that was **CAPTURED** by my **ARRESTING OFFICER**. My position as a doctoral student and graduate teaching associate was **RENDERED SUSPECT** when she casually conjured up this **OTHER ME**, someone who she suspected to be grateful that their sole purpose was to be subordinate to others. There were no markers to identify me as part of the custodial staff. I had no uniform, cleaning cart, or supplies on my body. Yet, she saw before her a custodian. This unfamiliar social reality she constructed for us as I exited the

bathroom became too much for me to contend with. I was **DISPLACED** and felt completely **DISORIENTED**.

The interpersonal domain of power helps me understand that power-laden representations of diversity are perpetuated in everyday conversations and interactions in the academy (Durham, 2020). Like bodies, language and speech acts **DISRUPT** and **SHAPE** space. Flowing through the halls of the predominately white academy are conversations about difference and the belonging of Black bodies. Speech acts have the power to subjugate Black women through the power-laden representations thrown onto their body during these daily communication exchanges. Some might refer to these oppressive speech acts as microaggressions. According to Sue (2010), microaggressions are “the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership” (p. 3). Racial microaggressions have a negative impact on Black bodies physically, psychologically, and academically, and have a negative impact on the overall racial climate of the academy (Holling, 2018). Thus, racial microaggression not only operate within the interpersonal domain of power, it is interlocked with the structural, disciplinary, hegemonic domains of power. It only took a brief exchange in passing, a split second, for a microaggression to be **INFLICTED** on my body and shatter all sense of my personhood. The ontological rupture was so **AFFLICTIVE** that I even attempted to **CAPTURE** the image of this **OTHER ME** on my iPhone to rationalize the assault. My instinct was to justify the enactment of diversity imposed on me.

A common power-laden representation projected onto Black women is “**THE MAMMY**” (Durham, 2014; emphasis mine). The Mammy is the “faithful, obedient domestic

servant” (Collins, 1991, p.266). The place of the Mammy is one of subjugation to the slave master and his family (Collins, 1991). She is perceived as harmless and happy to serve and nurture those around her. Today, Black women in the workplace are still assumed into the position of “modern day Mammy,” expected to be “nurturing, supportive, and all giving” (Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas, & Harrison, 2008, p.137). Although I did not fit the description of a custodian, the white woman’s reading of my body implied that I did fit the description of the mammy. The appearance of the mammy is commonly associated with dark complexion, deeply melanated skin like my own. She displays a happy disposition and offers a welcoming expression, an Aunt Jemima smile, to everyone around her. Her smile is often appropriated to suggest complacency and to justify the exploitation of her labor and subordinate position. For example, Robin Boylorn (2016) argues, “Black women are expected to suppress their anger and ‘mammy’ their way through oppression, injustice, and critique” (p.135). Boylorn defines mammying as “the expectation that Black women acquiesce to disrespect and duplicity” (2016, p.135). The utterance during the interpersonal exchange in the bathroom mammified me and racialized me as happy help. I became the “dark-skinned, ever-smiling, diligent, and doting” mammy (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009, p. 28-29).

Although I was initially **SHOCKED** by the mammification of my race-gender body in the bathroom, I soon learned that many women of color experience this in the bathroom so frequently that it has become commonplace. Williams, Phillips, and Hall (2014) report that Black and Latina women in STEM are often mistaken for janitors. According to Williams, Phillips, and Hall (2014), “Latinas encountered persistent assumptions that they were janitorial staff, even if they had on white lab coats” (p.47). It doesn’t matter how I am dressed, what my educational level is, or how many accolades I receive from this institution. To some people in the academy

Black women cannot be imagined beyond the subjugated position of mammy in servitude to the master and his family. The white woman's attempt to foster camaraderie with another woman in the bathroom, exposed uneven power relations and structures of racial dominance in the academy. She revealed the ways in which objectification of Black women comes in the form of enforced or imagined service to the academy. There was an expectation that the white bathroom must remain sanitized by Black women. Becoming the mammy in this moment in time represented a "space-specific" (Durham, 2009) racialization of my gender in the bathroom. In that moment, I was not imagined as a student or an instructor. I was perceived as strictly a service to the academy. "You clean it up, we mess it up." "We," as in not you. "We," as in insiders. I was the outsider-within, not an insider, not "we." I was assumed to be tasked with attending to the **DEFECATION**, the **EXCRETION**, the **WASTE** of the academy. This was a duty I was expected to do when **SUMMONED** by the mess left behind by others.

I was not only assumingly tasked with the abject, I felt like the abject. Monahan (2017) argues, "abjection implies a fundamental lack of fit with existing social and spatial orders, rendering the abject subject unknowable and largely invisible, at least as a collective ethical responsibility" (p.192). I shut down. I could not bring myself to turn back around and confidently talk back to her. I felt zombified in the way that hooks (1992) describes Black slaves and servants: "reduced to the machinery of bodily physical labor, Black people learned to appear before Whites as though they were zombies, cultivating the habit of casting the gaze downward" (p.340). I desired to return **THE GAZE**, but I could not, not then. I was **TRAPPED** under her white gaze and rendered to the "realm of the invisible" (hooks, 1992, p.340). Black staff members often are treated as if they are invisible in the white dominated academy (Cunningham,

D’Silva, & Cheatham, 2007). Although she acknowledged my presence, she never truly saw me in that moment and consequently I did not feel seen and I no longer felt like myself.

STOP: Becoming the Token

Still processing, I move trance-like towards my office following the **ARRESTING** moment in the bathroom before I am **STOPPED** yet again, this time by the department promotional banner near the department doorway. When I look at the banner, I see an **OTHER ME**, someone else wearing my face as a mask. In face-to-face **CONFRONTATION** with the banner, it physically towers over my 5’4 body and **LOOKS DOWN ON ME**. The **OTHER ME** always closely **SURVEILS** me when I pass her post. She **TAUNTS** me with her haunting smile and beaming bright eyes. She is always happy like her advisor and colleague beside her as they proudly hold up their earned accolades from the annual department award ceremony. They have become the poster-faces for the power-laden representation of **THE TOKEN**. I have become transfixed by their gaze. They seem to be looking for a smile to be mirrored on my face, but this is not a reflection of me, and I cannot find happiness within me to smile back. Each time we cross paths, I obsessively contemplate if I am measuring up to the academic standards set by the **OTHER ME**. What if I stop performing well academically? What if I can never be as successful as I was last year? The **OTHER ME** always seems smarter than me. She makes me feel like I am the **IMPOSTER**.

The (Black) token is made to serve as the representative for their underrepresented group to create the illusion of racial progression and diversity (Lee, 2020). Becoming the token spirals, me into a state of cognitive dissonance. Mikkaka Overstreet argues that Black women in the academy are “tokenized until she is left questioning herself and her experiences” (2019, p. 22).

Unpacking the strategically constructed form and function of the token is a way for me to reject becoming the token. Tokens are imagined as “prized possessions easily put on public display” (Flores & Rae Gomez, 2020, p. 239). The token’s Otherness is made visible to be showcased on university websites, brochures, and promotional banners (Durham, 2020; Calafell, 2012). My race-gender body is tokenized and exhibited on my department promotional banner. The token’s construction is also grounded in its function. According to Lisa Flores and Logan Rae Gomez (2020), the function of tokenization is that of “disciplinary containment” a practice that “contain—halt, restrain, arrest, **STOP**—the academic lives and careers” of underrepresented faculty (p.237; emphasis mine). Flores and Rae Gomez (2020) claim that,

tokenization comes with the (often) unspoken expectation that ‘we,’ the palatable tokens, will not threaten whiteness like ‘those’ other Black and nonBlack people of color. We, the acceptable and exceptional ones, will contain—even hide—our Otherness, only displaying it ‘appropriately.’ (p.239)

The token’s appearance of Otherness is managed and disciplined to maintain a controlled (happy) image of diversity that sustains institutional whiteness and racial power imbalances (Durham, 2020).

The same Aunt Jemima-like smile that sells plantation memories of enslaved Black people as content with serving white supremacy is the same smile on the promotional banner that suggests Black woman academics like me are content in white-dominated academic spaces. The department banner locks the **OTHER ME** into a perpetual state of happiness and obligatory niceness. When I look at her, I see a sinister smile, a smile that tells me to fix my face, to remain silent about racism, and to happily smile back. Like the mammy, the token must embody happiness for the academy invested in enactments of diversity because representations of

diversity do the work of creating a (happy) “face” for institutions (Ahmed, 2012, p.33). My photo on my department promotional banner provides a happy blackface for a predominately white graduate program. Ahmed (2009; 2012) insists that Black women who embody diversity are expected to display “happy hybridity” and never get angry (p.46). Happy hybridity is the appearance of Black and white people happily working together within a white institution (Ahmed, 2009). Power-laden representations of diversity becomes a disciplinary tool for **RESTRAINING** “angry Black women” from uprising in the academy (Ahmed, 2009).

Maintaining the image of happy hybridity becomes a way to **CIVILIZE** the anticipated primitive nature of Black women. The language of diversity in the academy is often associated with “citizenship” (Urciuoli, 1999). To embody diversity and good citizenship in the academy is to be expected to display happiness all the time, even when faced with racism. Ahmed (2009) states, “for an oppressed person not to smile or to show a sign of being happy is to already be recognized as negative: as angry, hostile, unhappy, and so on” (p.49). She goes on to explain how diversity as a technology of happiness **SILENCES** Black women from talking about racism because racism is unhappiness and disrupts the idea of happy hybridity (Ahmed, 2009). Making happiness or smiling back mandatory for Black women perpetuates the idea that their niceness is needed to end anti-Black racism because “naming racism is often seen as not nice, triggering White fragility” (diAngelo, 2019, para. 11). Thus, the tokenized Aunt Jemima smile on college promotional materials can be attributed to the interlocking oppression and power struggles that Black women endure in the academy. Sharing space with a massive banner amplifying my body perpetuating happy hybridity in the department has taken a psychological hold on me. For example, after seeing the banner following the incident in the bathroom, I began assessing if I should ever disclose to my department the racism I just faced in the bathroom. I knew that

speaking out would disrupt the image my department had made up of me and materially invested in.

The tokenization of my race-gender body on the department promotional banner also functions to endorse Black exceptionalism. Gray (2016) states, “the exceptional condition, person, or ideal operates in conjunction with the principle of normalization to showcase appropriate/desirable behavior as well as to mark the boundaries of unacceptable behavior” (195). The desired behavior of Black women is to be academically successful and to keep up with the rigors of the academy. In fact, she often must remain ahead of her peers. It should go unnoticed however, that she works twice as hard to maintain academic exceptionalism as to not disrupt the image of post-racism. As the token, she feels the added pressure to be perfect and make no mistakes. She knows that “our failures become testimony to the benevolence of whiteness and presumed inadequacy of racial otherness” (Flores and Rae Gomez, 2020, p. 238). Consequently, choosing an image of Black bodies holding earned accolades is a strategic power move to mark the boundaries and conditions for other Black bodies in the academy. This image illustrates to the public that Black bodies in the academy must not only be exceptionally happy but they must be exceptionally intelligent, award-winning, to enter and succeed. Albert Lee (2020) claims that “exceptionalism only tokenizes a person when it is an agreement between the token and institutional forces” (p. 391). He explains that, “the institution is responsible for the deception” and that “the token is responsible for buying into the delusion in the face of all evidence that points to a lack of respect and lack or appreciation for actual contributions they are making to an institution” (Lee, 2020, p.391). This point is made to warn that failure to reject becoming the exceptional Black token can lead to us becoming the **GATEKEEPERS** who

maintain the status quo by setting exceptionally high bars for ourselves, as well as, for other Black students and faculty in the academy (Lee, 2020).

The token's performance of Black exceptionalism is **EXPLOITED** to uphold post-racism discourse. Post-racism discourse is a political strategy used to **DENY**, **OVERLOOK**, or **LOOK PAST** the prevalence of racism and racial barriers (Ono, 2010). Our image on the department banner is capitalized on to reinforce the idea that the white/Black achievement gap is a thing of the past, which my southern university prides itself on being nationally recognized for. Every orientation I have witnessed our incoming graduate students be informed that we have made great strides in reducing racial disparities on our campus. While these strides are important, the constant reiteration of our achievement gap statistics overlooks the many other racial barriers faced by Black students. Power-laden representations of diversity extract or use the body without attending to power. Because whiteness is valued and centered, to be a (Black) token is to be connected to dominant power and disconnected from a marginal one. Thus, racial disparities in the diverse academy can seemingly cease to exist. Tokenization is a form of objectification because it strips Black persons of culture, history, and identity. Anjuliet Woodruffe expresses the anger and frustration she feels when she is treated like “statistical data” and “framed as a quota for diversity initiatives” on an interpersonal level (2020, p. 10). I feel the same Black feminist rage pulse through me each time I hear my university utter how statistically we are more racially progressive than other institutions. The statistics do not account for my lived experience as the Black token at my institution or account for the lived experiences of other tokenized bodies.

The day the photo was taken, I was overjoyed for being recognized for all the hard work I put into my first year of doctoral studies. I was honored to be given the “Burgeoning Scholar Award.” My advisor asked that the three of us take the photo to commemorate our genuine

excitement. Unfortunately, our image was used without our consent for recruitment material and what the department **CAPTURED** instead was the **OTHER ME**, a prime face for diversity. I was **DIGITALLY FIXED** as the white-dominated academy's Burgeoning Scholar. While my colleague and I may be photographed proudly holding up our earned accolades, the department banner allows the White academy to hold us up as their own accolades. The **OTHER ME** sits pretty and is a good token, a worthy trophy. On the contrary, my body out of frame has grown tired and bitter, hardly an easy comparison to the **OTHER ME** anymore. Black women at White institutions often suffer from **RACE FATIGUE**. Harley (2007) describes race fatigue as "the syndrome of being over extended, undervalued, unappreciated, and just knowing that because you are the 'negro in residence' that you will be asked to serve and represent the 'color factor' in yet another capacity" (p. 21). J Shim (2020) coined the term "token fatigue" to describe the race fatigue endured from tokenization. My physical body continues to weaken. Even as I am bent up and tarnished, they still **DISPLAY** the **OTHER ME** proudly on their shelf. Black women do not have to be a good token to be **TOKENIZED**. They just need to take one good picture.

STOP: Becoming the Commodity

The first time I was **ARRESTED** by the department promotional banner was at a national conference. I entered the Open House event for prospective graduate students and made my way to my department's recruitment table. I was not given any warning prior that I was **WANTED** on this poster for advertisement. I had no idea that I would find my body like this, surrounded by official university trademarks and framed by department highlights. I was **STRUCK** by the **COMMODIFICATION** of my body as I witnessed this **OTHER ME** on the promotional banner. The **OTHER ME** wasn't really me; she was a marketing tool. She was **THE COMMODITY**, a product of the academy, and there was no need to ask for my consent

because the **OTHER ME** belongs to them. This was the price white institutions frequently make racialized bodies pay for becoming their token.

I have come to understand **THE COMMODITY** as its own power-laden representation of diversity that is marked by official institution branding and invested in maintaining institutional whiteness. The banner is a method for selling the department to prospective students. Objectification and commodification of Black bodies on recruitment materials forces the commodity to perform the labor of diversity. As a saleable commodity in service to the department and the academy, the **OTHER ME** is always working to bring in new students. According to Urciuoli (1999), diversity is a marketing tool for prospective white students. Urciuoli (1999) claims, “admissions recruiters are betting that smart white prospectives will choose a place with ‘a lot of diversity’ because that reflects how the white students see themselves as good citizens-- a rationale coherent with that of the college presidents” (p. 292). Thus, these admissions recruiters want white students to buy into the idea of diversity without having to fully invest in it. Non-white students are a largely untapped market for recruitment materials because of their low attendance rates (Pippert, Essenburg, & Matchett, 2013). The commodification of Black women becomes another means to maintain institutional whiteness. So, as I have alluded to before, the tokenization and commodification of my race-gender body on recruitment materials enables my body to act as a gatekeeper for the white-dominated academy. The commodity can be used to keep Black students out. I am the welcome mat that makes it easier for the white liberal student to feel comfortable walking into the house that will never be my home. People of color often must do the work of making others “comfortable” despite their own **DISCOMFORT** from their “failure to fit” and “inhabit Whiteness” (Ahmed, 2012, p.41).

Black bodies continue to be commodified. Browne (2015) traces the commodification of the Black body to branding practices during the transatlantic slave trade. Browne (2015) contends that branding is a “racializing act” and not limited to marking the body with hot iron. She asserts that branding is the act of “making Blackness visible as a commodity” (Browne, 2015, p.94). Browne (2015) claims, “by making Blackness visible as commodity and therefore sellable, branding was a dehumanizing process of classifying people into groupings, producing new racial identities that were tied to a system of exploitation” (p.94). The Black body is **BRANDED** on college recruitment and promotional materials. Their body is branded in official college logos and core colors that must be approved by Brand Management. Their body is then put on display for the public and **EXPLOITED** for the advancement of institutional whiteness under the guise of celebrating diversity. I cannot overlook the fact that in the photo that my department sold, I adorned large wooden hoop earrings with the shape of Africa inside and a replica of T’Challa necklace from the Afrofuturistic film, *Black Panther*. I purposely paired this jewelry with a black dress and Afro styled hair to pay homage to the revolutionary self-realized Black representations finally being celebrated on the big screen. The same performances of Blackness I used to rejoice Black futures was stolen from me and rebranded, an act that seemed to only set me back in time.

Lynching souvenirs provide another historical context to understand the commodification of Black bodies. Following plantation slavery, **LYNCHING** became a spectacle and opportunity to collect, auction, and sale Black body parts as souvenirs (Harrison, 2012). Harrison (2012) argues, “it was common for the entire lynching site to be stripped bare by souvenir-seekers” (p. 109). Before being striped for parts to exhibit on the family mantel, the Black bodies would be put on display, photographed, and often turned into postcards (Harrison, 2012). Sometimes

before the skull would be burned the White spectators and relic-hunters would take the Black victims' teeth (Harrison, 2012). Young (2005) proclaims, "lynching objectified the body. Lynching souvenirs commodified it" (p. 647). I draw a connection to lynching souvenirs not to argue that the banner is a form of lynching souvenirs but instead to bring to question the legacy of White pride attached to tokenizing Black bodies. Our teeth, our smiles, our happiness are commodities **SOLD** to white others.

When I asked how the department banner came to be, the faculty member I asked denied any involvement or knowledge other than that the banner had been made very quickly to be ready in time for our national conference. Not knowing who made it or their intentions behind it, I was left questioning its purpose. Instead of feeling honored to have my photo on the department banner it began to function as disciplinary **CONTAINMENT**. Not only was I tokenized on the department promotional banner, I was commodified and made into a brand that endorses happy hybridity. Speaking out against the racism and mammification I experienced in the department bathroom not only disrupts the tokenized image of happy hybridity, it risks me becoming off brand. When I entered my office following the **ARRESTING** moment of racialized gender in the bathroom, I had to **STOP** and contend with the mammification, tokenization, and commodification of my race-gender body to calculate how I would respond to the interlocking oppression *moving forward*.

Conclusion (*Motion: Movements of Resistance*)

STOP-motion as a lens is useful for examining **ARRESTING** moments of un/belonging in the academy. **STOP-motion** place emphasis on what follows **ARRESTS**, such as the **ARREST** I endured in my department bathroom and the **ARRESTS** I experienced from my department banner. The **STOP** in **STOP-motion** illustrates how **ARRESTS** become a form of

CONTAINMENT that constricts how I move in the academy. Consequently, **STOP-motion** enables me to interrogate how I am tethered to the academy and how that tethering constricts my movement. In this chapter, I looked closely at how Black women as bodies **OUT-OF-PLACE** are tethered to power-laden representations of diversity including, the mammy, the token, and the commodity, and I interrogated how these representations function to put us in our place and define our social roles. Providing a personal testimony of the **ARRESTING** moments of un/belonging I experienced in the academy welcomed me into a space of vulnerability that Black women are often denied. I disclosed my pain, frustration, and anger. I divulged my regret, doubts, and fears. I clearly named my oppression so that I could locate sites of transformation.

I now turn my focus to the *motion* in **STOP-motion** which invites me to think critically about how I can transform these **ARRESTING** moments into *movements of resistance* and collective empowerment. *Motion* is not about transforming myself into the “strong Black woman” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009) instead it is about assuming my responsibility as a Black feminist committed to social justice. According to Collins (2000),

The existence of Black feminist thought suggests that there is always choice, and power to act, no matter how bleak the situation may appear to be. Viewing the world as one in the making raises the issue of individual responsibility for bringing about change. It also shows that while individual empowerment is key, only collective action can effectively generate the lasting institutional transformation required for social justice. (p.290).

I am ready to step into my power and re-imagine the academy as a space of belonging for Black women.

I think of my *movements of resistance* as a series of steps. I conclude this chapter with my first three *steps forward*:

Step one. I refused to succumb to **CONTAINMENT** or continue to passively accept misrepresentations of me. I am not the mammy. I located the woman from the bathroom and she remorsefully apologized to me. At first, I honestly did not know how to accept her apology. I felt guilty for feeling angry about her pleas for forgiveness. I thought about how Audre Lorde (1981) argues that, “[White] guilt is only yet another form of objectification” (p.9). I thought this was another attempt to restrain me from becoming the angry Black woman. In all my years of being misrepresented in the academy I cannot recall a time when I received an apology. This first step was hard, I had to imagine what amends could look like. When I found out that she was a department chair, I asked my department chair to meet with her and collectively plan how they could help prevent similar situations in the future. I have learned how to forgive her and acknowledge her humanness without discounting the way she made me feel when she mammified me in the bathroom. I hope that she too feels empowered to act now and incite change.

Step two. Once again, I refused to succumb to **CONTAINMENT** or continue to passively accept misrepresentations of me. I am not the token or the commodity. In solidarity with others in my department who shared similar views about our promotional banner I voiced my concerns to faculty. The banner has since vanished and we are now required to give our consent for our photos to be used by the department but, no apology.

Step three. I reject the **OTHER ME** to define myself for myself. I am a Black woman and I matter. I am matter and I am not afraid to take up space. I belong in the academy, as do all Black women. We cannot be **CONTAINED** and that is our magic.

CHAPTER FIVE:

STOP-MOTION AS BLACK FEMINIST PRAXIS (FULL CIRCLE)

“People think of time as a physical manifestation, but it really is like so many things, in our minds. We get fixated on moments, stuck in them, but time never stops...this moment will pass.”

-Hippolyta Freeman from *Lovecraft Country* (2020).

Time never stops...this moment will pass. Time never **STOPS**. This moment will *pass*.

On repeat in my head are these seven words Hippolyta Freeman says with conviction to her daughter Dee in episode 10 of *Lovecraft Country*, “Full Circle” (Green, 2020b). She assures Dee that the unfortunate circumstances that has temporarily **STOPPED** her ability to draw comics will pass and she will draw again and continue reimagining new worlds for herself and others. Dee once conjured the world of Orithyia Blue, an intergalactic space hero, a Black woman with the infinite power to “name herself” (Green & Houston, 2020) and become anything in the universe at any point in time. Orithyia Blue gives credence to the Afrofuturistic knowledge that “those who are alienated adopt modes of resistance and transformation” (Womack, 2013, p.34). Orithyia Blue’s Afrofuturistic persona empowered Hippolyta to name herself and resist the confines of time and space or to reclaim her time and take up space as a courageous Black woman. Unbeknownst to Dee, her comics about Orithyia Blue guided Hippolyta into her new Black feminist consciousness, giving her the power of self-definition and the courage to center herself. In the moment when Dee lost all hope and became angry with the world as many Black girls and women do when they feel the weight of interlocking oppression pulling them down,

Hippolyta was able to remind her that this moment will pass, that there is still space for hope. She told Dee that she had every right to be angry, she did not deny her pain instead Hippolyta encouraged Dee to envision a future beyond the moment that she was currently stuck in. Hippolyta was able to help Dee embrace her position as a “site of radical possibility” (hooks, 1989) and encouraged her to never stop building new worlds in the same ways that Dee once did for her through the creation of Orithyia Blue. Hippolyta restored radical hope in Dee. The consciousness raising between Dee and Hippolyta demonstrate how Black feminist praxis is reciprocal and comes full circle. It makes space for Sankofa or the Akan philosophy that it is okay to go back to the past to regain what has been forgotten (Temple, 2010). From time to time we need to (re)member radical hope. Sure, the moments will pass but sometimes we must **STOP** and re-locate our power within so that we can *move forward* from **ARRESTING** moments. Our power will always be there for us to reclaim it, no matter how much we lose sight of it. Nobody and no amount of time passed can take away the power of Black feminist consciousness. It is infinite and boundless. It will embrace us back every time we dare to *move forward*, dare to *imagine*, dare to *become* again.

Black feminist praxis as a praxis of liberation positions Black women to reclaim “radical Black female subjectivity” (Perlow et al., 2018, p.3). When Black women reclaim radical Black female subjectivity, we embrace “our vulnerabilities as well as, our knowledges, skills, and ways of being” (Perlow et al., 2018, p. vii). Black feminist praxis empowers Black women to become active agents guided by the belief that we can enact radical transformative change and challenge oppression (Perlow et al., 2018). Anything is possible. Black feminists’ radical thoughts can transform into radical actions that can inspire radical hope and transform into *movements of resistance* and collective empowerment. When we believe in and advance our liberating thoughts

nothing is impossible. The future is ours to imagine. Black feminist praxis is why despite all the **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender I have endured, I still radically believe I belong in the academy. It goes without saying however, that like Dee, I sometimes get so fixated on moments that time begins to feel like it has **STOPPED**, and I am left having to find my way back to myself. **STOP-motion** as Black feminist praxis helps me process through **ARRESTING** moments from a place of self-empowerment and self-definition. **STOP-motion** brings me back to myself and to the Black feminist shared legacy of struggle and resistance. It reminds me that I have a future in the academy and that Black women have always belonged here. **STOP-motion** has become a daily practice that prompts me to **STOP** and re-center my lived experience so that I can 1. embrace my vulnerabilities, 2. find my ground/reject out-of-placeness, 3. reclaim the past (Sankofa), and 4. locate sites of belonging in the academy. In what follows, I discuss how I practice **STOP-motion** as a praxis of liberation in my everyday life. I integrate critical reflections on the previous chapters into the conversation to synthesize key points that inform **STOP-motion** as praxis. I then end this dissertation in the same way I began it, with an invitation.

1. Embrace My Vulnerabilities

STOP-motion as praxis begins with **STOPPING** and taking time to re-center my lived experience so that I can better understand myself and the world around me. What I have learned through **STOP-motion** animation, **STOP-motion** comics, and **STOP-motion** narrative is that the complexities of my emotions inform my sense of self, socio-spatiality, time, and power. Embracing my vulnerabilities is how I re-center my lived experience in the academy. I am human, I feel, I hurt, I fear, I rage and then some. All my emotions are valid and important. As part of my praxis, I am honest and transparent with others about what I am feeling. For example, when the department chair who mistaken me for the custodian apologized to me, the first thing I

told her was how she made me feel during the **ARRESTING** moment in the department bathroom. I did not tell her this to make her feel guilty or to shame her for her actions. I told her for me, because I needed to honor my feelings and communicate my pain. I no longer tell others “it’s fine” when it’s not or that I am okay when I clearly am not because that would be an act of self-inflicted violence. When I deny my vulnerabilities and repress my emotions, I continue to feel disoriented and disembodied. My emotions are what makes these **ARRESTING** moments real and what makes me whole.

Recently, I was honored with a prestigious award in my field at an academic conference and during the award presentation one attendee made it publicly known that they felt that the award was robbed. Initially, I was **ARRESTED** by the comment and for a moment I felt like an imposter in the academy again. I began to spiral outside of myself but then I remembered **STOP-motion** as praxis. I **STOPPED**, re-centered my lived experience, and embraced my vulnerabilities. A few days later I received a heartfelt personal apology, and this marked the second apology I could recall ever receiving in the academy during my ten years of frequent **STOP-motion**. Again, I responded with sharing how I felt during the **ARRESTING moment** from a place of compassion for self and others. By vulnerably sharing how I feel I am inviting others to be reflexive. By voicing my vulnerabilities, I am affirming to myself and others that I am human and vulnerable to the realities I co-create with others. After sharing how I felt I chose to forgive the department chair and the conference attendee. For me forgiveness means letting go of resentment towards others and reclaiming my power to define myself for myself. I know who I am, and nobody can take that away from me. Sometimes I just need reminding, which starts with re-centering my lived experience and embracing my vulnerabilities.

2. Find My Ground/Reject Out-of-Placeness

Every **ARRESTING** moment that I recalled in this qualitative study occurred during times and/or places where I was most vulnerable. Each of the **ARRESTING** moments were “break” moments when my guard was lowered. I was **ARRESTED** while preparing my breakfast. I was **ARRESTED** while going to the bathroom. I was **ARRESTED** while walking to my office. Being **STOPPED** during these “off” moments in the academy where I am not thinking and being in my student-instructor-scholar mode intensifies my experiences of disruption, disorientation, disembodiment, and displacement. Suddenly I am **ALARMED** and forced into survival mode. In each of the chapters, I discuss how my survival mode in the academy is complicated by my perceived role as student-instructor-scholar. For example, I recalled how when I was **STOPPED** in the breakfast line, I was afraid of making a scene because my role was to blend in and how when I was **CONFRONTED** by the department promotional banner, I was concerned that speaking out about racism would risk me becoming off-brand. Because I am caught off guard, I often feel as if I have no time to center myself and privilege my needs. Survival mode is widely understood as fight, flight, and/or freeze. Sometimes we are moved to act, sometimes to escape, and other times we just **STOP**. I am not ashamed that in these split moments of time it is difficult to center myself and privilege my needs. My body is forced to grapple with way more than I anticipated when I took those “break” moments in the academy to prepare my breakfast, to go to the bathroom, to walk to my office. It is reasonable for my body to feel **OVERPOWERED** and **TRAUMATIZED** by these unsuspected **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender in the academy.

At the end of the artist statement for chapter 2, I acknowledged that socio-spatial disruptions and frequent **ARRESTING** moments of racialized gender in the academy are

traumatic and can intensify paranoid anxiety informed by gender-racism. Naming my pain “trauma” and “paranoid anxiety” has brought me to grounding techniques that help me cope when I have time to **STOP** and re-center my lived experience. Grounding techniques are strategies for working through or managing strong emotions and traumatic memories. Grounding techniques help individuals become more present in the here and now. In my **STOP-motion** animation, **STOP-motion** comic, and **STOP-motion** narrative I grounded myself in the here and then, moments that have already passed. The here and then was difficult to embody and brought back troubling visceral memories. In my everyday practice of **STOP-motion**, I choose to ground myself in the present to calm myself down. One example of a grounding technique is reminding yourself of who you are by stating your name, age, location, what you did today, and what you plan to do later. Another grounding technique is engaging your five senses by identifying things you can hear, feel, smell, taste, and see around you. One grounding technique I often practice is writing out my intentions or setting my boundaries by determining how I will and/or will not respond to the anxious thoughts or **ARRESTING** moments. This grounds me because when I am done, I no longer worry about what I could have done in the past or should do in the future, I am able to just be present in the now.

Practicing grounding techniques enables me to reject out-of-placeness in the academy. Grounding techniques invite me to be present, reclaim my roots in my environment, and sense the world around me in a way that is affirming. When I was spiraling following the recent **ARRESTING** moment of being accused of robbing an award, I set intentions to find my ground and reject out-of-placeness. I wrote the following:

I will not be the martyr
I will not be the teacher

I will not be the mender
I will not be the perfect saint
I will not be the super strong Black woman

I was hurt
I will choose my power over my insecurities
I will choose compassion over hate
I will choose my words wisely to speak my truth
So that I can move forward

I hope others stop and do the work
I know that it is not my job right now
My energy is needed elsewhere
So onward I go

After setting my intentions I felt free to just be present again. I felt empowered to celebrate my award and to keep moving through the academy. I even shared my intentions with my advisor which held me accountable to honoring my words. I know I belong in the academy and nobody can take that away from me. Sometimes I just need reminding, which starts with re-centering my lived experience and finding my ground/rejecting out-of-placeness.

3. Reclaim the Past (Sankofa)

Sankofa has become a Diasporan practice that some African Diasporan communities in the United States interpret as returning to African consciousness, learning from our ancestors and elders, and/or letting the past guide us (Temple, 2010). Sometimes we must return to the past to move forward (Temple, 2010). The past is a construct and to me it means time before the here and now. Accordingly, my Black feminist consciousness is informed by my foremothers and all the Black feminists of today who have carved out spaces of belonging for me in white-dominated

spaces such as the academy. I am not alone on this journey. Many Black women have walked the halls of the academy before me and many Black women walk alongside me now. One way I reclaim the past is by giving these spectacular space-shifting “Sista Doctas” (Jones, 1997) in my life haikus that function like little breadcrumbs that I can follow whenever I need to get back.

For Sista Docta D. Soyini Madison I wrote:

Poetic like fire

Legacy ignites brilliance

Got my soul burning

(See Figure 2)

For Sista Docta Aisha Durham I wrote:

She conjures new worlds

Got folklore Black girl magic

She is the future

(See Figure 3)

I have much to learn from Black women in the academy. They continue to inspire me. When I am stuck in an **ARRESTING** moment that brings my sense of identity and belonging into question I **STOP**, re-center my lived experience, and return to my Black feminist roots to (re)member our legacy. As I have noted in the introduction, the rich legacy of Black feminist struggle and resistance is a testament that we are resilient, subversive, inventive, radically hopeful and boundless. People will try to contain us, but we cannot be contained and that is our magic. I know there is much to be learned from the past and that our legacy lives on. Sometimes I just need reminding, which starts with re-centering my lived experience and reclaiming the past.

4. Locate Sites of Belonging

Black feminist thought has taught me that I am an active agent of change and that no matter how bleak my situation, I have the power to act and to build more just worlds (Collins, 2000). As part of my Black feminist praxis, I attempt to locate sites of belonging in the academy for myself and others through my pedagogy, research, service, friendships, and coalitions.

Overtime it has become easier to locate sites of belonging in the everyday. For example, I have located a site of belonging in the here and now:

It is December 23, 2020. It is now a little past 7 pm. I am sitting at my desk in my Tampa Florida apartment. I am in the process of writing the conclusion to my dissertation. In between writing I have been receiving text messages from Anje, my colleague, co-author, and dear friend. She and I are two of the last three remaining Black graduate students in our department. We check in on each other regularly. Our check in today has shifted to talk of strength, vulnerability, and courage. This topic came serendipitously. I texted her: "I'm literally writing my diss conclusion about how I need to constantly remind myself I'm powerful and how that doesn't make me weak & how we can't be strong all the time, sometimes we need to just be with the complexity of our emotions." She texted back: "Sometimes we simply cannot be strong but if we are lucky, we get helped up, supported and reenergized to try again" (A. Woodruffe, personal communication, December 23, 2020).

She had no idea how much resonance her statement had with everything I have written in the past three days. She has been a constant reminder that I am right where I am meant to be and that I am never alone. Through our digital exchanges we co-create a space of belonging in the academy where we can uplift and support one another whenever we need our radical hope restored. Our Black feminist praxis is reciprocal and comes full circle like Hippolyta and Dee's. These are the moments that keep me grounded in the academy and help me reject out-of-placeness. The reciprocal relationships that I build with others in and outside of the academy provide a sacred space for me to embrace my vulnerabilities. This sacred space always brings me back to Black feminist thought and back to myself again. It is here where I locate belonging.

Full Circle

Recall the introduction. (Re)member when I invited you into the continental breakfast line at the conference following the **ARRESTING** moment when I was accused of trespassing. (Re)member when I asked you, “how does one reorient themselves from **HERE?**” (Re)member when I invited you **HERE**, with me, to contend with such outsider-within moments as we persist towards a seat at the table. Meet me where we began. I am now returning **HERE** with new knowledge, a way to reorient ourselves. I invite us to embrace **STOP-motion**. I invite us to **STOP** and re-center ourselves to

1. *embrace our vulnerabilities,*
2. *find our ground/reject out-of-placeness,*
3. *reclaim the past (Sankofa), and*
4. *locate sites of belonging.*

(Re)member that our seats have been reserved
and that our table is eagerly awaiting our presence.

(Re)member that this moment will pass and

that although time does not **STOP**,

sometimes we should

in order to *move forward*.

The time has come again

for us to reclaim

OUR seats at OUR table.

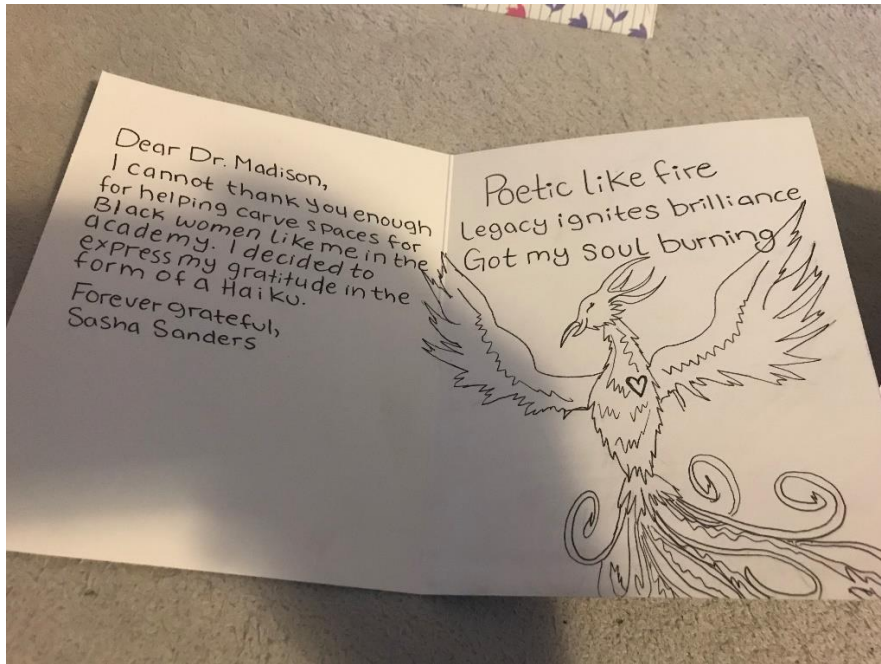


Figure 2. Handmade card and original haiku gifted to Dr. D. Soyini Madison.

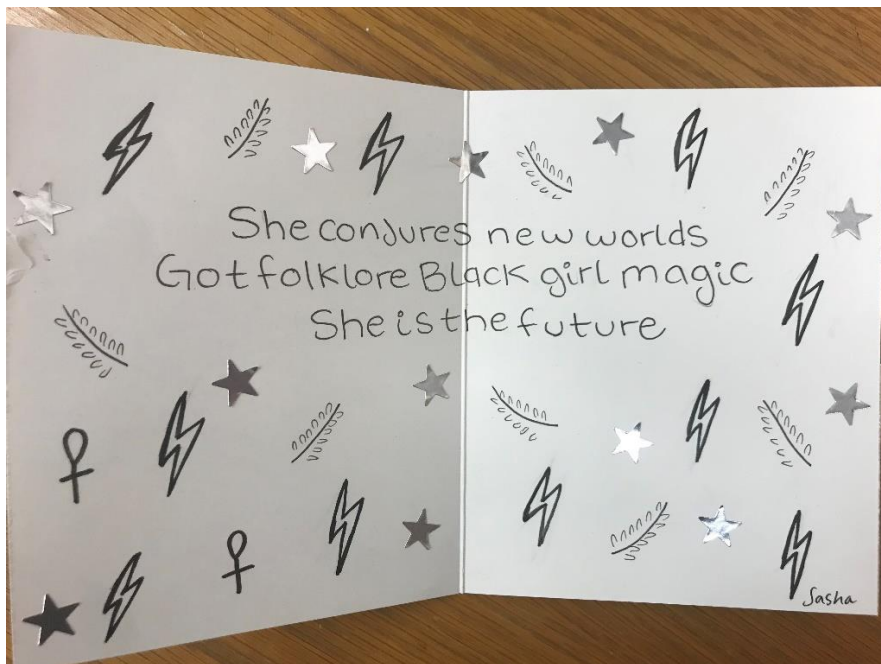


Figure 3. Handmade card and original haiku gifted to Dr. Aisha Durham.

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Dr. Sasha J. Sanders successfully defended her dissertation on March 5, 2021 from the Department of Communication at the University of South Florida. She received her bachelor's degree and master's degree in Communication Studies at California State University Long Beach. Sasha is a proud (San Francisco) Bay Area native committed to social justice. She considers herself a critical scholar-artist and activist. Her embodied, reflexive approach to exploring media and culture engages Black feminist thought, critical cultural studies, and performance studies in Communication. Her critical interdisciplinary approaches to studying racialized gender and sexuality appear in venues across the humanities. Her present and forthcoming scholarship can be found in *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research*, *Journal of Autoethnography*, and *Synoptique: An Online Journal of Film and Moving Image Studies*. Sasha is a special issue co-editor for *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research*, the forthcoming special issue is titled, "Working the circuit: Cultural studies of Florida." Sasha has received several honors and recognition for her scholarship and service. In 2020 alone, she was honored the Marie J. Robinson Scholarship Award from the National Communication Association Performance Studies Division, the Top Paper in Performance Studies Award from the Western States Communication Association, and the Bernard Downs Spirit Award from the USF Department of Communication.