Doing Double-Dutch: Womanish Modes of Play as a Pedagogical Resource for Theological Education

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DOING DOUBLE-DUTCH: WOMANISH MODES OF PLAY AS A PEDAGOGICAL RESOURCE FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

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A dissertation

submitted to the Faculty of

the department of Theology and Education

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Boston College
Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences
Graduate School

March 2018

DOING DOUBLE-DUTCH:
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In the United States and in the American Academy there is a historical reality much like jump rope. In jump rope there is but one rope, in the case of the U.S. there is one white, Western, male Christian narrative-a-rope that one jumps in one specific way. This can be very difficult for those that do not identify with or know how to jump this particular rope. Theological education has a unique opportunity to be a prophetic voice in advocating for the addition of a womanist rope in order to do Double-Dutch, together, regardless of difference. This rope is one that embraces a womanist consciousness as it advocates for the agency and identity formation of all, the lifting up, solidarity and accountability of all persons, the freedom of embodiment and expression in all forms, and remains active and critical of injustice and all systems of oppression. Once this rope is added everyone can begin to engage in womanish modes of play that are embodied aesthetic experiences and cultural expressions that function as a means of knowing, being, and making meaning. When all persons do Double-Dutch together womanish modes of play become a tool for learning and teaching religious education across difference.

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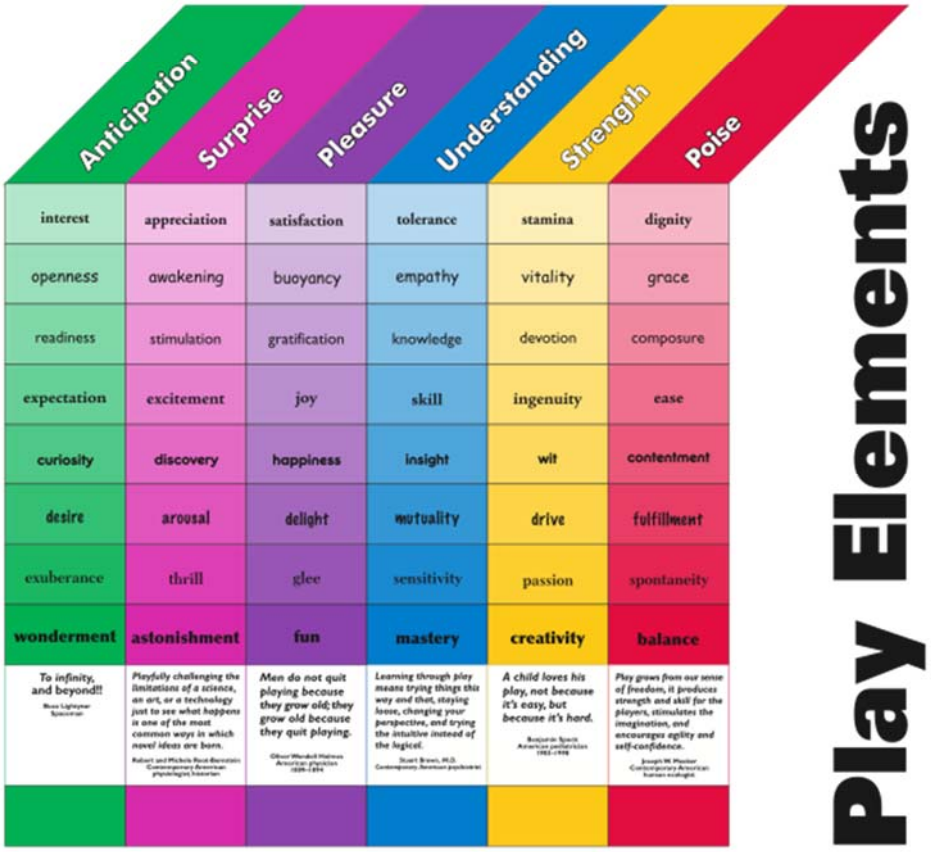

Figure 1. Elements of Play by The Strong

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to first, and foremost thank my creative and playful creator. It is only with God that all of this has been made possible and I am beyond grateful for the opportunities and the doors that were opened. In this same vein I would also like to thank the ancestors. It is only because of all the strong, brave, and courageous black women that have come before me and created the path that I am now able to walk it. I thank you and bring you all with me.

I thank my Boston College Advisor Tom Groome and committee members Karen Arnold and M. Shawn Copeland. Thank you all for your time, energy, feedback, direction, and openness to play with me through this work. Your wisdom and guidance have been invaluable. I also thank my Boston College "village." This village is filled with people who have helped me along the way like Theresa O'Keefe, Virginia Greeley, Stacey Grooters, and Kimberly Humphries. I send a special thank you to my fellow doctoral group folks Cindy Cameron, Susan Reynolds and Christopher Welch. I would not have made it without our text and email chains, study dance breaks, writing dates, and general friendship and encouragement. Thank you.

I would like to thank my new Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University family. You all have given me a home filled with supportive colleagues and brilliant students. You have given me the opportunity to do what I was called to do and allow me to focus on my writing instead of worry about jobs. I am eternally grateful for this place and the ontological space it provides for me to me exactly who I am. A special thank you to John Kinney for personally bringing me into the fold. Thank you.

I would like to send a special thank you to two amazing women who have been true sister-friends in holding me accountable for my work. I thank Melanie Jones for being my accountability partner and someone to check-in with, celebrate with, and stay focused with. I also thank Jessica Young Brown for being my writing partner. Every Wednesday morning we would meet at Brewer's Café, get lattes, sandwiches, and write. I wrote paragraphs and chapters as we laughed, dreamed, imagined, and played together. I would not be here without your friendship and our Writing Wednesdays. Thank you sis.

My family has been crucial on this journey. Their support and love continued to push me through, especially in the tough moments. Thank you to my mother, Barbara Hannah and my father Dwight Hannah. My older sister Everlean Rutherford, her husband Brandon Rutherford and my three amazing nephews Andrew, Jaylyn, and Christian. My oldest sister Danesha Little, her husband Carl Little, my nephew Jordan and my niece Ariana. This is especially for my niece and nephews. As a black girl and black boys in this world I want you to never forget that you and your bodies matter. Never stop playing.

Last, but certainly not least is my heart, my love, my best friend, my dance partner, my TV binge buddy, and my spouse Edward Rusch III. You believed in me when it was hard for me to believe in my self. You always knew I would be here and it was your vision and imagination that helped me see it and do it. Thank you for seeing me, pushing me, supporting me, loving me, and playing with me. Thank you bug!

INTRODUCTION

I was a sophomore in college when I had the privilege of being accepted into a two-week philosophical and theological institute at an Ivy League Institution. I was beyond excited to hear and read more about the philosophers and theologians that were beginning to help shape how I was thinking and viewing the world. On the last day of the institute one of the brilliant white male professors approached a group of us. He extended his hand to the other participants in the group, as they offered their appreciation for his work with the institute. As I extended my hand to thank him for leading the institute he tapped me on the very top of my head and said, "well, at least you're attractive." This was followed by words of affirmation about how great it was to have my voice and perspective at the institute. As the only African American and only one of two women at the workshop, I found this interaction problematic, degrading and a violent attack on my character, intelligence and very personhood. Immediately aggression, sadness, and pain began to grow inside of me. My body physically became heavier. I began to question myself, my intelligence, my voice and if I was really called by God to do this work.

While walking back to my room I remember asking myself why.
Why was I the only one that got a pat on the top of my head?
Why was I the only one whose physical appearance was commented on?
Why was I the only one who seemed to not be bothered by this interaction?
Had I done something wrong?
Did I say something dumb?
WHY?

As I walked I remember not feeling safe enough to talk to anyone or even cry out in the open for fear of judgment or of being seen as inferior. I grew up being told that as a black woman I had to be double everything. I had to be twice as strong, twice as smart, work twice as hard, and be twice as nice. I had to do this because I was both a woman in a man's world and a black person in a white person's world. When mentioning the call I felt to

be in the academy and to teach I was told that I would have to work three times harder just to be taken seriously as a scholar, and this experience was proving that.

Once I got to my room I closed and locked the door and then placed a chair in front of it. As soon as the door was properly secured the water that I was holding back in my eyes, ran freely and quickly. I sobbed for everything I thought I was, that it turned out I was not. I cried for feeling like I could make it in the world of minds and failing miserably. I cried because this professor, whom I admired, only saw my black woman's body, not my mind or my heart. My body became even heavier as I took on all this like weights I was carrying. I wanted to hide this horrible body that made the professor not see all of me.

As I cried I found my feet moving in a familiar pattern. Soon the rest of my body began to follow my feet and before I knew it I was dancing around my room. My mind started to clear and my body started to become lighter. I was crying and dancing. Slowly I began smiling and then laughing. As I danced with my body, my mind followed. It danced with all these ideas, thoughts and emotions. I began to dance with different perspectives and possibilities. I danced with the idea that this one man didn't really know me. I danced with the thought that my voice, my ideas and I still mattered to God, if no one else. Once I stopped moving I noticed that two and a half hours had gone by. I immediately began to write these new revelations in my journal, including how much I needed to dance and how much I found out about myself, the professor, God and this work through my embodying it in dance form. In that moment I felt the presence of God and it was transformative.

Being Black in the Work Place

They take my kindness for weakness.
They take my silence for speechless.
They consider my uniqueness strange.
They call my language slang.
They see my confidence as conceit.
They see my mistakes as defeat.
They consider my success accidental.
They minimize my intelligence to "potential."
My questions mean "I'm unaware."
My advancement is somehow unfair.
Any praise is preferential treatment.
To voice concern is discontentment.
If I stand up for myself, I'm too defensive.
If I don't trust them, I'm too apprehensive.
I'm defiant if I separate.
I'm fake if I assimilate.
Yet, constantly I am faced with work place hate.
My character is constantly under attack.
Pride for my race makes me, "TOO BLACK."
Yet, I can only be me. And, who am I you ask?
I am that Strong Black Woman...
Who stands on the backs of my ancestor's achievements, with an erect spine pointing to the stars with pride, dignity and respect which lets the work place in America know, that I not only possess the ability to play by the rules, but I can make them as well!
Black History 365
~ Arthur Unknown ~

"You have turned my mourning into dancing,
you have taken off my sackcloth and clothes me with joy,
so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.
O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever."
Psalm 30:11-12 NRSV

The Context

The color of our skin may be different hues. The texture of our hair may not feel the same. Our past experiences and cultural upbringing may not share one resemblance. Our religious affiliations might be opposed to one another. However, even with all these differences, we share commonalities. One of those commonalities is play. Being playful and playing is a part of who we are as human beings. Think back for a moment to when you were a child. Think about when you played with other children. Did their skin color matter? Did their hair texture matter? Did their cultural upbringing matter? Did their religious affiliation matter? No. We all just saw another person to play with. We didn't place all of our own baggage, stereotypes, or societal conditioning that we have experienced as we have grown, on our play partner(s). No, we saw them for who they were and we played. As we played we learned new things about ourselves and our play partner(s). We learned to play fair, to be kind and we developed cognitive skills and agency as we made decisions. We learned to cultivate relationships and how to deal with things we were feeling inside. We made meaning of the world through play.

Just as when we were children, play is still important to our cognitive and affective well-being, meaning making and relationship building as adults. I would assert that it is even more important for adults as we are encountering issues of racism, sexism, homophobia, depression, patriarchy, ageism and other issues that question a person's worth, dignity and well-being. Play empowers people in the face of oppression, interrupts and allows for reflection, teaches skills needed for living, allows for a creative and imaginative outlet to express, explore and try things out, and play recalls us to not only our humanity but the humanity of others.

This dissertation looks specifically at the power of play, from a womanist perspective, within the academy and specifically theological education. The need for play in theological education is great and can aid in teaching and learning across difference through inviting persons to critically remember and reflect, deliberately question, creatively and collaboratively imagine and live into emancipatory hope. This critical consciousness stems from and is deepened by womanist thought's invitation to embrace self, embody God's love, engage in culture and community, and to enkindle the world.

Instances like the one that happened to me are not anomalies. These kinds of occurrences of favoring the mind over the body and objectifying the black woman's body happen in classrooms, churches, and institutions around the globe. To use Wesley Theological Seminary as an example, I was personally in classes were I was the only person of color. This often led to me providing the person of color perspective, because there was no one else in the class to give it and there were no voices or scholars of color on the syllabus to offer another viewpoint. This lack of diversity among faculty and student body led to a lack of diversity on syllabi, in planning, in teaching methods and strategies, as there was no diverse voice to offer another perspective or view point.

As a student here at Boston College I have also experienced the mind-body dualism. The work of the mind and many brilliant European white male scholars was appreciated and praised over the work of the body and experience of scholars of color. I have even personally been told to think and write more Anglo-Saxon, as if my black womanhood and experience were not enough. Once again favoring my mind over my embodied experience.

In her work, bell hooks[1] speaks of an engaged pedagogy that bridges mind and body as well as teacher and student. I will go a step further and say that her engaged pedagogy is also embodied as it requires recognition of both the bodies of the teacher and the student. hooks illustrates how some professors would use the classroom as an opportunity to enforce their dominance through control and power over their students and were extremely resistant to the idea of holistically incorporating ones mind, body and spirit in the learning process.[2] I find this resistance to holistic learning and continued use of control and power in the classroom to still be true in much of higher education today. hooks asserts, and I agree that to educate for freedom and transformation one must not only incorporate the mind but the body and spirit as well. There must be a break from the traditional role of the professor valuing the mind and intellect over bodily experiences and knowing as he/she acts as the sole barer of knowledge with students being mere receptacles.

We must make more space for the many ways in which people of this world come to know, learn, making meaning and have their being. We need to embrace more diverse means of teaching and learning. This diversity can happen when we encounter voices, and experiences that are not our own. When we encounter marginalized and oppressed voices and experiences, like that of black women, we can begin to rethink how we know and the many ways in which people come to know. People do not only learn and know through reading and using their minds, but also through their lived experiences and bodies as well. We must use our classrooms as places to resist and push back against the mind/body and

[1] *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. (New York: Routledge, 1994.)
[2] bell hooks. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. (New York: Routledge, 1994.) 18.

student/teacher dualism that has been the norm.[3] We should invite and welcome a more holistic learning and knowing that will deconstruct and de-center the kyriarchical epistemologies that re-enforce domination, oppression and submission. This will in turn re-center more diverse and holistic epistemologies, experiences and voices that are life-giving as they provide opportunity, agency, authenticity, freedom and transformation.[4]

One medium in which to welcome these diverse ways of knowing is to take notice and engage the body in the learning process in the classroom through womanish modes of play. Womanish modes of play invite embodiment and engagement that stem from womanist thought. In this way black women and all marginalized voices and experiences are lifted up as valid and valuable ways of knowing, being, and making meaning in the world.

Double Dutch
The girls turning double-dutch
bob & weave like boxers pulling
punches, shadowing each other,
sparring across the slack cord
casting parabolas in the air. They
whip quick as an infant's pulse
and the jumper, before she
enters the winking, nods in time
as if she has a notion to share,
waiting her chance to speak. But she's
anticipating the upbeat
like a bandleader counting off
the tune they are about to swing into.
The jumper stair-steps into mid-air
as if she's jumping rope in low-gravity,
training for a lunar mission. Airborne a moment
long enough to fit a second thought in,
she looks caught in the mouth bones of a fish
as she flutter-floats into motion

[3] hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom,* 21.
[4] Ibid., 29.

like a figure in a stack of time-lapse photos
thumbed alive. Once inside,
the bells tied to her shoestrings rouse the gods
who've lain in the dust since the Dutch
acquired Manhattan. How she dances
patterns like a dust-heavy bee retracing
its travels in scale before the hive. How
the whole stunning contraption of girl and rope
slaps and scoops like a paddle boat.
Her misted skin arranges the light
with each adjustment and flex. Now heather-
hued, now sheen, light listing on the fulcrum
of a wrist and the bare jutted joints of elbow
and knee, and the faceted surfaces of muscle,
surfaces fracturing and reforming
like a sun-tickled sleeve of running water.
She makes jewelry of herself and garlands
the ground with shadows.
~Gregory Pardlo~

Doing Double-Dutch

In this dissertation I use Double-Dutch as a metaphor in two ways. One way will describe the nature of the academy and will be explored further in the first chapter. The other way is a metaphor for the dynamic reality of being a black woman in theological education. Black women not only have to jump the rope of race, but also the rope of gender. Black women have a rich heritage with play, creativity, song, dance and aesthetics, but these embodied experiences are often not viewed as important in the academy. Embodied learning and expression are not given the same level of importance or weight as writing and publishing. With this disparity, no one, including black women can fully live into their playful, creative selves within the academy. Not having one's ways of knowing, life, and bodily experiences valued is demoralizing. While this acutely affects some black woman, there are wide reaching implications that affect all persons and those who do not fit into

the white, western, Christian male rope that the academy is turning. Being able to maintain the rhythm, of two ropes, being turned in opposite directions by two different entities is arduous. It is discouraging and disheartening trying to jump ropes that were traditionally, and often still, not intended for black women.

In order to resist and push back against these troubling ropes of theological education I offer a new rope that can aid in making theological education a more holistic environment through embodied learning. That rope is Womanism. We must first understand play as a cultural expression and medium for meaning making so that we can then understand the significance of play within the particular context of the lives and experiences of black women. Once these ropes turn together we can begin to use womanish modes of play as a pedagogical tool in our classrooms and churches. These womanish modes of play highlight the experiences and voices of black women, and in so doing highlight and uplift the voices and experiences of everyone. These modes of play remind us that this work is not done solely in the mind, but in the body as well. These ropes advocate for an awareness and celebration of the cultural heritage and importance of the embodiment of black women's playful identities. These modes of play promote a sense of self and identity, of one's history and heritage and the value in community and social action for the justice of God. These ropes are integral to ones cognitive and affective well-being and can be a valuable pedagogical resource for all of theological education.

The Rules

It is with these ropes in mind that this dissertation will take a literature-based and constructive approach. It will draw from relevant works in the area of womanist theology

and pedagogy, literature and ethics, history of African American religious and cultural experiences, social sciences and play literature to assert that womanish modes of play can be a resource in theological classrooms and churches to assist in teaching across difference through embodied womanist pedagogy.

While the majority of this dissertation will be theoretical research I will close the dissertation by suggesting practical tools for implementing womanist pedagogy in classrooms and churches alike to enhance the role of the body in theological education and aid in teaching across difference. I also hope this work will set the stage for further exploration and research around womanish play as a pedagogical tool for adults as well as children in religious education.

As this dissertation is a cross-pollination of various disciplines, I envision two central audiences for this work. The first is theologians and religious educators who are interested in bridging the Eurocentric mind/body dualism and want to make their classrooms more diverse, holistic places for embodied learning, knowing, and being. These educators would be interested in using the various womanish modes of play as pedagogical resources in the classroom to engender critical consciousness, reflection, and action individually and in community. While my particular interest is in the history, culture and experience of black women's play, this work has implications for all of those interested in embodied teaching across diversity.

The second audience is those educators and church leaders who are committed to a more diverse and holistic faith education that engages the mind, body, imagination and various theological aesthetics that help to connect people with the Christian story. Theological education has the unique opportunity to be prophetic in highlighting the

educative potential of womanish play as it encompasses the whole person that is made in the image and likeness of God. In this context, womanish modes of play can become a prophetic womanist practice that can remake theological classrooms and churches by acknowledging the value in everyone's cultural experience of and with play.

The Game Pieces

Each chapter will begin with a vignette, a poem or quotation, and a scripture passage. The vignette in each chapter is a composite based on actual experiences of the author (a black woman), experiences and encounters that were witnessed, as well as anecdotes of other black women, being used with permission. All identifying details have been obscured and the quotations are not verbatim, but summaries of experiences and encounters. The poems or quotations will also be from or about black women and will be followed by a scripture reference from the Bible, both of which align with the work of that given chapter. It is important to note that these beginning pieces are intentional. Since this work is lifting up the experiences, creativity, and voices of black women, it is important to actually practice what is suggested in the writing of this work through offering vignettes of actual occurrences and poems written by black women. I end with a biblical reference because this work and womanist theology are deeply rooted in the Christian story and vision for living out Gods justice and liberation for everyone.

The first chapter engages the historical reality of the United States, Christianity and black women as it further lays out the other Double-Dutch metaphor. The work of Willie Jennings and Charles Long are used to explain and raise issues of fragmentation and signification. This is followed by using the work of Emilie Townes and Katie Cannon to

discuss the reality of black women's roles, stereotypes and moral formation. This chapter lays the foundation for this work and is crucial in understanding the chapters that follow.

The second chapter focuses on play. It lays out the play process, properties, characteristics, and highlights the connection with culture and play. Hans-Georg Gadamer's ontological nature of play and Alejandro Garcia Rivera's concept of theological aesthetics are put in conversation to think about theology and play together in consideration of aesthetic experience as an aspect of theological anthropology. This chapter ends with describing the crucial mind and body connection in play.

The third chapter focuses on womanism. Womanism is defined and womanist theology, ethics, and theological anthropology are explained in detail. A womanist understanding of play is given with special attention to cultural expression. Play in the lives of black women is laid out along with the importance of the black woman's body during play and the creation of ludic learning spaces for transformation.

The fourth chapter moves toward a womanist approach to educating in faith discussing womanist pedagogy. The methodology of Olivia Pearl Stokes, Anne Streaty Wimberly, and bell hooks is discussed in detail and put into conversation with Katie Cannon's womanist pedagogy using the dance of redemption. The questions of who, what, why and how womanist teach are also asked and answered.

The final chapter offers up practical ideas for implementing womanist pedagogy using the four pieces of Alice Walker's definition and Stacy Floyd-Thomas' womanist tenets. This work concludes with explaining that in embracing self, embodying God's love, engaging culture and community, and enkindling the world, womanist pedagogy can

transform the classroom and the church into more holistic, diverse and embodied spaces that can aid in teaching across difference.

CHAPTER ONE: TWO TRUTHS AND A LIE:
The Historical Reality of Black Women

Renee was the first in her family to go straight to college after high school. Although she was bi-racial, she identified as black. Her school was predominately black, she went to a black church and her white father left when she was a baby and now sends the occasional birthday card. Her other siblings, who have two black parents, all went into the military. One went Army, another Air Force, and one went into the Navy. While Renee felt strong enough to enter any of those armed forced, she was always drawn more to books, theories and intellectual questions that she felt the military would not satisfy. She also had the ability to not choose the military because of the full scholarship that Brown University offered her. She knew that her family could never afford to pay for college, so she needed a scholarship to continue doing what she loved and felt called to do.

In choosing college, her family was extremely happy for her and proud that she got into such a great school and with a full scholarship. She was lifted up in her family, community, high school, and local church as having "made it." She was what all the little black girls and boys were told they should aspire to be like. All the church parents asked her to take their little girl or boy out to lunch or dinner to talk about colleges and doing well in school. While Renee felt honored and humbled she also felt a heavy burden on her shoulders to do well to make her family, community, and church proud. She felt she could not let them down in anyway, now that she was held up so highly.

During her first semester she began to find her rhythm at college. She made A's with the occasional B, studied hard, played volleyball and made a few friends. During her sophomore year she maintained her academic excellence, but began to have a bit of a harder time managing her social life. She found that for some of her black friends and teammates she was not quite "black enough." They teased her about "sounding white." Her non-black friends and teammates always praised her for how articulate she was and how happy they were to have someone to answer all of their black questions. It was during this time that she began to think about her own identity and what she felt about her own blackness, whiteness, and the mixture of the two that was her.

As she started her junior year she was beginning to figure out who she was and not what others were wanting her to be. She became more comfortable in her own beautiful cinnamon and cream colored skin and often found herself by herself. She was studying even harder because she

now knew she wanted to go to graduate school for psychology and work with children around issues of identity. She met with one of the psychology faculty at the school to ask if he would mentor her through the application process for graduate schools and be a mentor to her in general. The fact that he was an older white male didn't matter to Renee, she just wanted someone that had walked the road she walked and could help her. Dr. Jacobs was happy to assist her. He began by telling her that she needed to start working on her thesis, because graduate schools would be looking at it. She told him that she wanted to do her thesis on the struggle of identity for bi-racial girls because it was something she could speak to and had passion around. Dr. Jacobs told her to write up a proposal and then they would discuss it.

When it came time to talk about the proposal, Dr. Jacobs told Renee that he wasn't sure about how well her proposal would hold up in terms of getting into a good graduate school. When she asked why not, he mentioned that the issue of being bi-racial was not one that everyone could relate to. He said that she needed to be more universal and less controversial. When asked what he meant by that Dr. Jacobs responded that issues of race and racism make people uncomfortable and that in order to make it, she needed to think less racially. Renee began to talk about her own story and the unique struggle of identity for bi-racial girls in this country and how important it was to address this, yet Dr. Jacobs was un-moved. He even offered up that she talk about identity for all young girls, without the differentiation of race. He also mentioned that she needed more reputable scholars in her bibliography. He admitted that he didn't even know half of the folks on her list. Renee mentioned that they were black, Asian, and other bi-racial women in the field that she had been inspired by and whose work helped develop her own. Dr. Jacobs gave her a list of about fifteen more scholars that he thought she should choose from. Renee looked at the list and noticed that they were white men, with the exception of two Asian men. Renee asked him if there were other women or bi-racial male scholars he could recommend. Dr. Jacobs told her that his list was the more well-known and reputable scholars that graduate schools would be looking for. He told Renee that this was like playing a card game and that she needed to play her cards just right in order to make it to the next level. He began to get very frank with her. He told her that this next level was very male and very white and that she needed to think and act more white. He told her not to rock the boat, but to just play the game. He told her that if she did this, she

was sure to get into a good program and then she could go back to all that "race stuff."

Renee left the meeting feeling defeated and wondering if graduate school was for her. She thought that if she had to deny a part of who she was, just to gain entrance, then maybe this was not the place she needed to be. Then she thought about her family, her community, her church and all the little black girls and boys she had taken to lunch that looked up to her. She couldn't let them down, she just couldn't. Torn and with a heavy heart she sat down at her computer, deleted her previous proposal and began again. [5]

Dancing in the dark

At an English conference presentation,
77 people and I breathe molecules
from Julius Caesar's last dying breath.
This is the only connection between us.
I am in a herringbone tweed suit.
Gray and black crosshatch pattern confines
my hips, chest, back. Hair twisted,
tight coil, no loose ends escaping.
Small pearl earrings, one in each ear,
Match the thin strand around my neck.
I present papers in white academia.
I match their foreign movements.
My jerky fox trot is invisible to them.
They see a waltz of standard diction.
"She speaks so well for a black woman."
One or two others like me,
Dancing to a rhythm, they can't hear,
Smile, nod, exchange partners.
I return home, shed herringbone layer,
Run hands over warm caramel skin,
wide hips, small breasts, ashy knees.
Put my hair in thick braids.
Muddy Waters on the box.
Soul Slow dances back into my body.
~ Demetrice Anita Worley[6]~

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[5] This vignette is a composite based on actual experiences of the author, experiences and encounters that were witnessed, as well as anecdotes of other black women, being used with permission. All identifying details have been obscured and the quotations are not verbatim, but summaries of experiences and encounters.

[6] Demetrice A. Worley is an African American woman and an accomplished poet, scholar and associate professor of English at Bradley University in Peoria, IL.

For Freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.
Galatians 5:1 NRSV

I. The Problem

Reflecting on the story of Renee and inspired by the poetry of Demetrice, I begin by setting out in summary form some of the problems and injustices in this dissertation. In the United States and in the American Academy there is a historical reality that all would be participants must recognize and understand.

I liken this historical reality to jump rope.

In jump rope there is just one rope: often, there are three players, two hold each end of the rope and swing it in an arc while the third enters the space the arc generates and jumps or skips over the rope, careful not to stumble or trip. At other times, there is but one player, who holds each end of the rope and swings it over the head and under the feet again, careful not to stumble or trip. Jump rope is a game used for play and recreation, but professional athletes use it for exercise. Success at jump rope requires neuromuscular conditioning, skill at managing the centripetal and centrifugal forces of the swinging rope, a dynamic and acute sense of timing and rhythm.

In the history of the U.S. there has been but one, white, western, male, Christian narrative-a rope that one jumps in one specific way. This can be very difficult for those that do not identify with or know how to jump this particular rope. The possibilities of stumbling, tripping, falling, or getting hit by the very rope are real. It is almost impossible to jump a rope swinging at a rhythm that does not account for the jumper or the jumper's body type, ability level, environment, experience, or culture.

Writer, womanist, feminist, and civil rights activist Audre Lorde proclaimed, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change."[7] I agree with Lorde. How can one expect to engender change if the system or rope is designed only for a particular group or class or set of jumpers? Theological education cannot expect to engender change across gender, race, geography and religion if the system continues to favor only white western male Christian scholars. While many black women may attempt to jump this single rope they often fall, stumble, trip, or are injured by these ropes in a game never intended or meant for them. What is needed is an additional rope to help even things out and provide support and understanding of differing perspectives, abilities, genders, races, and religions.

When the same racist patriarchal ropes are used to view what the racist patriarchy has produced, the perspective and vision can only be narrow, obscuring a fuller view, ignoring what and who may lie on the margins of one's peripheral vision.[8] In an effort to remedy such narrowing and isolation of a fuller horizon I propose the usage of an additional rope: womanism. A womanist rope uplifts the voices and experiences of black women and by doing so it also lifts up all persons who are oppressed and marginalized in the academy and society. Moreover, when these two ropes begin to turn together in the form of Double-Dutch, rope jumping becomes an embodied communal activity that invites new ways of thinking about not only how to turn the ropes themselves, but also how and when to jump.

[7] Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays & Speeches* (New York: The Crossing Press, 1984) 112.
[8] Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 111.

Doing Double-Dutch rejects the "divide and conquer"[9] mentality and embraces a more holistic understand and empower mindset.[10]

In order to jump these two ropes one must understand both the ropes and oneself. In this process one might encounter what civil rights activist and historian W.E.B. Du Bois calls "double consciousness."[11] Double consciousness is the understanding and internal conflict among subordinate groups who must live in an oppressive society and constantly see themselves through the lens of the dominant group. This experience forms part of the fantastic hegemonic imagination,[12] allowing this type of consciousness and thinking to persist until an entire society believes that the dominant group is indeed in control and the subordinate group should be oppressed and viewed as less worthy, less human. The subordinate group must be aware not only of their oppressed minority culture, but their oppressed minority culture within the larger white western male Christian culture. This makes understanding one's identity and reality a struggle twice over for the subordinate group. The addition of a womanist rope allows for reconciliation and play or jumping between these two cultures. The addition of a second rope offers support and understanding, welcomes all perspectives, provides more challenge, requires more focus, and welcomes new ways of understanding, knowing, being and playing or jumping.

The one, white, western, male, Christian rope is the narrative that is promulgated, most well known, most often recited, and remembered. However, there are other narratives

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[9] Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 112.
[10] Ibid.
[11] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. (New York: Signet Classic, 100th Anniversary Ed.1995.)
[12] Emilie Maureen Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 7.

that should be told in order to understand subordinate groups and to appreciate why a second womanist rope is crucial. For, in fact, minority cultures are not to be the only groups who operate from out of a perspective of double consciousness. Everyone should understand the realities of oppressed cultures and the societies that oppress them. It is only in equally acknowledging the strength in difference that any country will have the power to begin to live in new and creative ways of being and acting together in the world.[13]

This work acknowledges the strength in difference by proposing creative new and imaginative ways of being and acting together in theological education, while specifically concentrating on the realities of black people and, in particular, the realities of black women. As theological educators, ministers, pastors, and practitioners, our mission calls us to create space for the kind of learning, growth, and risk that will set believers free through the transforming power of Christ.

II. Fragmentation and Signification

In the remainder of this chapter I will outline the history and struggle of black women in the United States, with special attention to their experiences in the church and the academy. Here, I draw on the work of theologian Willie James Jennings and that of historian of religion Charles Long. In particular, I make use of Long's notion of signification in order to demonstrate the various means by which black women signify their realities and identities. In the United States, black people's reality and place in the world has constantly been named for them through a discourse and language that is not their own.

[13] Lorde, *Sister Outsider,* 111

The term signification, or meaning making, supports my notion that black women, both historically and contemporarily, have used various media as the process of creating meanings in order to generate a new narrative using a rhetoric and language of their own. Through their various media black women re-name themselves and their realities and embrace and perform their embodied ways of knowing and being.

This chapter surely cannot review the entire history of the struggle of black women in the United States.[14] I lay a foundation for my proposal through specific examples drawn especially from the works of Delores Williams, Katie G. Cannon, and Zora Neal Hurston. I pair these examples with Emilie M. Townes' notion of the "fantastic hegemonic imagination." With this phrase, Townes refers to the function of imagination as the false consciousness that insists there is only one way in which to view the world and that way is set by the dominant group.[15] For example, the use of the Bible by Christians to justify slavery as ordained by God demonstrates how a dominant group shapes and conditions a view of reality of the world and how the world should be. By placing Williams, Cannon, Hurston, and Townes in conversation with the historical study of cultural fragmentation and the usage of signification, I then can name more accurately some of the various means by which black women signify their realities and identities.

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[14] For a more robust review of African- American history and experience see the following: *Life Upon These Shores: Looking at African American History* by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. ; *Race: A Theological Account* by J. Kameron Carter; *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience* edited by William R. Scott and William G. Shade; *The Black Image in the White Mind* by George M. Fredrickson.

[15] Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 21.

Charles Long[16] argues that signification is "one of the ways in which names are given to realities and peoples."[17] Further he claims, "the cultural reality of blacks in the United States has been created by those who have the power of cultural signification."[18] In other words, other cultures and peoples have named black people's reality and have represented the meaning of African American culture using their language and rhetoric, overlooking the capacity of black peoples to name themselves and their cultural meanings. Adding to Long's proposal, literary critic Henry Louis Gates, Jr. defines signification as "the nature of the process of meaning-creation and its representation."[19] This refers to how people choose to represent another culture, person or even themselves and can include undercutting gibes and subtle banter. Given the racialized and dominating history of the political and social interactions between whites and blacks, Gates distinguishes between significations and Significations. Although these words may seem like the same, they come from two different discourses. The word signification represents what white signifiers within a white discourse do and the word Significations represents what black signifiers within a black vernacular discourse do. Gates explains their paradoxical relationship as the "difference inscribed within a relation of identity."[20] Depending on one's history and identity the word can take on a different meaning. This issue of language and rhetoric becomes crucial in meaning making and considering both significations and Significations.

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[16] Charles H. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Colorado: The Davis Group, Publishers, 1995.)
[17] Long, *Significations,* 4.
[18] Ibid., *8*.
[19] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African- American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 47.
[20] Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey, 45.*

As Gates explains:

> To revise the received sign (quotient) literally accounted for in the relation represented by the *signified/signifier* at its most apparently denotative level is to critique the nature of (white) meaning itself, to challenge through a literal critique of the sign the meaning of meaning. What did/do black people signify in a society in which they were intentionally introduced as the subjugated, as the enslaved cipher? Nothing on the x-axis of white signification, and everything on the y-axis of blackness.[21]

Here Gates claims that white people originally signified or proffered a white representation of blackness in which, to be black meant one was enslaved and considered less than. Because of this signifying of black people's subjugated and oppressive reality, in naming themselves, black people had to revise what already has been signified about them. White representation of blacks as enslaved and oppressed people became a kind of "colonizing trick"[22] even for black people themselves, and white-devised rhetoric and formal language was deemed the only correct or appropriate way to signify black people. Black people were forced to learn how to jump the one, white, western, male Christian rope. Since law disallowed reading and education for most enslaved people, often they were unable to learn fully formal English. Moreover, they came from places from within the continent of Africa and already possessed languages, cultures, and communication systems of their own. Since language and rhetoric signified a certain level of class difference between the races, Gates argues that blacks had to engage in a renaming ritual to "revise the received sign" and name their own reality. Yet, in order to try to rename their realities for themselves, black people had to use the "master's tools"[23] of formal language in order to Signify their own meanings

[21] Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey,* 47.
[22] David Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.)
[23] Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays & Speeches* (New York: The Crossing Press, 1984.) A phrase used by Audre Lorde in her 1983 article to talk about the barriers of difference and what is

and sense of being. Hence, one can understand how black people already were placed in a disadvantaged situation as they tried to jump the rope and navigate a world in which their own languages and means of communication were not valued and their very identity and place in society was forced upon them.

A similar situation plays out in the academy. To return to the words of the poet Demetrice:

> I present papers in white academia.
> I match their foreign movements
> My jerky fox trot is invisible to them.
> They see a waltz of standard diction.
> "She speaks so well for a black woman."

The rules and codes of the academy were made and set by a dominant, white, male group and culture, without consideration of the ways of knowing, communication systems, or identities of other cultures or groups of people. Therefore, when these 'others' attempt to navigate or jump the rope of the academy, frequently the jumping is two or three times more difficult and discouraging. This rope was never intended for them and does not value their identity, their ways of knowing or communication and meaning making.

III. Christianity and Black Women

Gates poignantly questions: "what do black people signify in a society in which they were intentionally introduced as the subjugated?" I would push this question further and ask why were black people intentionally introduced as subjugated. In response, Willie

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deemed appropriate that are often against minorities and their experiences. Her famous quote is "for the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." Here she is saying that we should embrace our own differences and not try to do what the dominant group says we should do because it will never change or deconstruct the systems of patriarchy, hierarchy or oppression, only using our skills and differences will do that.

James Jennings asserts that one cannot discuss United States history and identity without also discussing Christianity, without understanding critically how persons live, treat each other and have their being in light of religion and the divine.[24] Jennings states, there is,

> a history in which the Christian theological imagination was woven into processes of colonial dominance. Other people and their ways of life had to adapt, become fluid, even morph into the colonial order of things, and such a situation drew Christianity and its theologians inside habits of mind and life that internalized and normalized that order of things.[25]

Christianity's option for colonizing dominance has played a major role in the cultural formation and social construction of the United States. Christianity's use of the Bible as the word of God was used during slavery to keep human persons in chattel slavery. This repository of truth and wisdom provided comfort and hope for some, provided proof of racial domination and justification of violence for others. As Jennings notes, "the intimacy that marks Christian history is a painful one, one in which the joining often meant oppression, violence, and death, if not of bodies then most certainly of ways of life, forms of language, and visions of the world."[26] Specific passages and translations of Sacred Scripture were used to pacify the enslaved people, to keep them docile and frightened, while other passages were not allowed to be read to them. This shaping and fitting, subjugating the word of God to the system of chattel slavery, according to Jennings, explains why "Christianity in the Western world lives and moves within a diseased social imagination."[27] Just as Long and Gates argued the importance and the effect of language and rhetoric, Jennings also asserts that through literacy, translation, and the vernacular, the

[24] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).
[25] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination,* 8.
[26] Ibid., 9.
[27] Ibid., 6.

dominant group made Christianity the vehicle through which they justified the displacement of other groups of people and regulated their identities through manipulating the Scriptures to affirm their unqualified primacy and privilege. This hierarchical system valued the commodification of place, space, and geography over and above genuine human relationships and community with diverse individuals and groups. We cannot face up to present social realities if we deny this history and "bypass the deeper realities of Western Christian sensibilities, identities, and habits of mind which continue to channel patterns of colonialist dominance." [28]

The kyriarchal[29] history of the United States has systemically conditioned its inhabitants to know and understand who and what are important, to know and to understand to whom dignity and value must be accorded by way of external or empirical criteria grounded, among other things, in race, religion, class, gender, sexuality and ability. In other words, through epistemology-how one comes to know- one either accepts and surrenders to oppressive signification or contests and repudiates it.

Asian feminist theologian Kwok Pui-lan rightly declares:

> I have been reflecting on my long intellectual journey to "struggle to know." Why is knowing a struggle? It is a struggle because you have to spend years learning what others told you is important to know, before you acquire the credentials and qualifications to say something about yourself. It is a struggle because you have to affirm first that you have something important to say and that your experience counts.[30]

[28] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination,* 8.
[29] A term coined by Elisabeth Shussler Fiorenza, that recognizes overlapping layers of power. This term extends patriarchy to include other structures of oppression and privilege, such as, ableism, racism, capitalism, etc.
[30] Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005) 29.

Here Kwok is naming a reality for many women and other racial, ethnic, and cultural minorities. Non-white non-men in the United States have struggled to know themselves because they have been told that they and their stories, their language, their means of communication and expression, their ways of knowing are not important, pertinent or valid within the academy except as exotic objects of anthropological study. They are told repeatedly that their religion supports and affirms their oppression, enslavement and servitude. These women and other minorities are told that other stories, experiences, languages, and ways of knowing are more important than theirs. These other stories, experiences, languages, and ways of knowing must be engaged before studying or reflecting on their own. This is what Renee, in the chapter's opening vignette, experiences. She is told that her experience as a bi-racial woman does not matter in her work. She first must learn, understand and write about the experiences and accomplishments, ideas and theories coming from 'important,' white, male voices. These continued patterns of colonial dominance and hegemony must be de-centered, if black women and people of color are to re-center and find a new identity in the triune God of love, community and justice revealed in Jesus Christ.

Although I will discuss womanism and womanist theology more thoroughly later, it is important to mention at the outset that this work is motivated from out of a womanist theological anthropology that makes space for the type of de-centering and re-centering proposed here. Theologian, professor and womanist Cheryl Kirk-Duggan provides a definition:

> Womanist theological anthropology involves an in-depth study of humanity amid the interconnectedness of biological, linguistic, and sociocultural systems as black women experience holistic life aware of oppressive

> systems of classism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ageism. Such epistemology or ways of knowing reconstructs ideas of God and womanhood.[31]

Because black women understand and live double consciousness, they are aware of the contradictory reality in which they live and desire to communally change these oppressive systems. Through oppression and struggle, in many forms, black women have developed a need and deep desire for survival and liberation through Christ Jesus. During slavery and times of oppression, violence, sadness and death many found and continue to find hope in knowing that Christ suffers with them. Womanist theological anthropology aids in looking at this reality and assesses all oppressive systems along with personal and communal values because in this theological anthropology they are one in the same as relationships and community engender agency, change, transformation and flourishing.[32] One cannot look at self without also looking at community because one is striving for survival and liberation, not just for themselves, but also for all of God's children.[33]

Since womanist theological anthropology understands the intersectionality of identity and being, it welcomes and lifts up all ways of knowing and embodied expression. This includes mediums such as: music, food, poetry, dance - play. These creative means engender vulnerability while valuing differences that can be salvific and liberating.[34]

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[31] Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, "Signifying Love and Embodied Relationality: Toward a Womanist Theological Anthropology." *Womanist and Black Feminist Responses to Tyler Perry's Productions*. Ed. LeRhonda S. Manigault-Bryant, Tamura A Lomax, and Carol B. Duncan. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 43.
[32] Kirk-Duggan, "Signifying Love and Embodied Relationality," 43.
[33] Ibid., 43.
[34] Ibid., 52.

Womanist theological anthropology values love and the Spirit and strives for freedom, justice and empowerment of all people, especially those who are marginalized.[35]

By using the lens of the lives and experiences of black women, one is able to see, analyze, challenge, and resist all types of oppression while being a catalyst for change. This type of womanist thinking, knowing, and being exposes the injustices toward all marginalized persons and communities just as Jesus did.[36] This type of theological anthropology allows persons to view others and themselves in a more holistic way as beings made in the image of God. Not just the mind is made in God's image, but the heart, body, and entirety of a person. Womanist theological anthropology looks not just to the individual but to the community, the culture, the life and experiences that one holds in the very marrow of their bones.

Jennings speaks eloquently about this diverse reality in relation to Christianity:

> A Christianity born of such realities but historically formed to resist them has yielded a form of religious life that thwarts its deepest instincts of intimacy. That intimacy should by now have given Christians a faith that understands its own deep wisdom and power of joining, mixing, merging, and being changed by multiple ways of life to witness a God who surprises us by love of differences and draws us to new capacities to imagine their reconciliation.[37]

Christianity is a religion that celebrates interconnected diversity and values differences. It is those in power who have resisted diversity and difference and prostituted Christianity for their own personal gain. There is a multitude of ways in which to live and have being, and a God of love, justice, freedom and reconciliation values all.

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[35] Kirk-Duggan, "Signifying Love and Embodied Relationality," 54-5.
[36] Ibid., 43.
[37] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination,* 9.

While no group is monolithic, the history and continued oppression of non-white and non-male persons in the United States are real. The dominant group believed and acted as if anyone who did not look like them, speak and express meaning like them, or come to know like them was inferior. This fantastic hegemonic imagination continued to foster this belief and action in others, including the oppressed that began to believe and be convinced by the church, others in power, and political parties that they were in fact inferior. If a group or a person did not share the same color skin, gender, language, or religion they were suppressed and not seen as equals. Since the dominant group held the most power, this mindset and world-view became pervasive and has continued to permeate the minds and realities of those in the United States throughout the years. This fantastic hegemonic imagination is what led to the dominant group signifying or naming as inferior the realities of other groups and cultures that were different from their own. Every person living in our society, with this history, has been conditioned on how they come to know who they are and their place in the world based on the realities that have been named for them by the group in power. To state this more directly and personally, *we* have been conditioned on how we come to know who we are and our place in the world based on the realities that have been named for us by the white, western, male Christian group in power. This dominant group used language, rhetoric, and religion to control, oppress and fragment cultures and groups of people simply because of their difference. This is the historical reality that African American women were brought, bought, and born into.

IV. Black Women's Roles, Stereotypes & Moral Formation

On the basis of this historical understanding, I turn to the work of womanist scholars Emilie M. Townes, Kate G. Cannon and Delores Williams, to give the realities of the historical roles and stereotypes of black women in particular. In this section, I explore the various avenues of agency and formation that black women employed to know and express themselves outside of the framework designed by the dominant group, to re-name themselves for themselves, and to tell a new narrative distinct from the one that was forced upon them.

The fantastic hegemonic imagination became a worldview that allowed for black women's realities, ways of knowing, and identities to be named and forced upon them by the dominant white male culture. This same fantastic hegemonic imagination became so pervasive that it also allowed for the creation of stereotypes and caricatures of the categories that black women were forced into. As was briefly mentioned earlier, Emilie M. Townes introduces the infamous fantastic hegemonic imagination, which "helps to hold systematic, structural evil in place."[38] This is the false consciousness that there is only one way in which to view the world, which is set by the dominant group.[39] The fantastic hegemonic imagination uses a "politicized sense of history and memory to create and shape its worldview. It sets in motion whirlwinds of images used in the cultural production of evil."[40] These images and roles that were forced on black women include the mammy/aunt Jemima, tragic mulatto, welfare queen, sapphire, pickaninny, and black surrogates.

[38] Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*. 21.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.

We begin with looking at black surrogates. The black woman's body has been, and often continues to be, coerced, abused and hyper-sexualized, often being viewed as chattel and commodified. During the antebellum period black women served as surrogates while fighting for survival and quality of life. Black women had two kinds of social roles of surrogacy that affected them negatively: "coerced surrogacy and voluntary surrogacy."[41] The coerced surrogacy "was a condition in which people and systems more powerful than black people forced black women to function in roles that ordinarily would have been filled by someone else."[42] Black women were forced into roles of being sexual objects to white slave owners and serving as mammies to white families.[43] Their bodies, lives, and decisions were not their own and they were often forced to act as a substitute for white women in the home and in the bed. Black women knew the experience of coerced surrogacy and following emancipation black women had to uplift their black men through voluntary surrogacy. This type of surrogacy came from the social pressures involved in "choosing to substitute their energy and power for male energy and power in the area of farm labor."[44] While coerced surrogacy was by force, this voluntary surrogacy was one in which they chose to act as a substitute for their black men. Neither of these types of surrogacy was desirable or even fair, but it was a reality of life for black women.

These were just the beginning of the various roles that were placed upon black women and their bodies. Townes lifts up several other images that have turned into

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[41] Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993) 60.
[42] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 60.
[43] Marcia Y. Riggs. *Awake, Arise, & Act: A Womanist Call for Black Liberation* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1994) 48.
[44] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 73.

caricatures and stereotypes that still exit today. Some images and roles that black women were and continue to be segregated into are: mammy/Aunt Jemima, Sapphire, tragic mulatto, black matriarch/welfare queen, and topsy/pickaninny. In order to show how far these caricatures and stereotypes have reached, I will use modern day examples from various media to explain and unpack each role and how they have turned into caricatures over time.

The Aunt Jemima role, which stemmed from the mammy role, was to show just how happy black women were with their work and their enslavement. The mammy figure was "asexual, fat, excellent cook, excellent housekeeper, self-sacrificing, and above all loyal to her family…so loyal that she neglected her own family."[45] She was often viewed as a "surrogate mother," caring and nurturing white children, taking away time and energy from providing this same care and nurturing to her biological children.[46] Aunt Jemima was placed on boxes of pancake mix and bottles of syrup with a handkerchief on her head. This was one of many ways in which black women's image, body and skills were bought and sold. This role is one in which she possesses little to no sexuality, often seen as genderless and a hard worker.[47] Her cleaning is impeccable, her meals are delicious, and she is everyone's loving, compassionate mother figure. This role is played out in modern day TV shows when there is a heavy set, non-threatening black woman who mothers everyone. A modern day example of this is the Miranda Bailey character on the T.V. show *Greys Anatomy*. Bailey is a surgeon who everyone looks up to, is non-threatening, and

[45] Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 32.
[46] Riggs, *Awake, Arise, & Act,* 49.
[47] Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 48.

holds everyone accountable. Everyone comes to her for advice and she often has to choose between her job and her personal life. She gets looked over for promotion and awards while she is constantly sacrificing her self and her position to care for others in the hospital. She is a modern day mammy/Aunt Jemima figure.

The sapphire role is "malicious, vicious, bitchy, loud, bawdy, domineering, and emasculating…inherently and inescapably evil."[48] This role is one that always makes the black woman out to be bad, wrong, evil and just another angry black woman. It is this stereotype and caricature that make it almost impossible for black women to express themselves passionately or be assertive or decisive for fear of being automatically thrown into the angry black women category. The modern day sapphire would be the character Annalise Keating from the T.V. show *How to Get Away with Murder*. Keating is a no-nonsense lawyer who doesn't take no for an answer and holds no punches in the courtroom or in life. She has no problem raising her voice and making her opinion known, even if it's at the expense of someone else's feelings. She is often referred to as a bitch or another angry black woman because of her actions. She is rough and tough and seen as emasculating because of her assertive and blunt nature.

The tragic mulatto appears in two ways. First as "the light-skinned woman of mixed race…beautiful, virtuous and possesses all the graces of White middle-class true womanhood."[49] Second as "a woman controlled almost completely by her libido" a harlot who breaks up homes, steals husbands, and nearly coerces the slaveholder to rape her. [50]

[48] Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 61.
[49] Ibid., 85.
[50] Riggs, *Awake, Arise, & Act,* 49.

The tragic mulatto is often seen as a desirable role because it is closer in skin color to being white than darker hued women. The closer one is to white, the better, as they could sometimes "pass" or be seen as being white and be granted the preferential treatment and advantages reserved for white people. The tragic part is that this woman was often the victim of systemic and sexual violence. The modern day tragic mulatto would be the character of Olivia Pope in the T.V. show *Scandal*. Pope is a light brown-skinned Washington, DC fixer. She falls in love with a white man who is not only married with children but also the President of the United States. She is given status and privilege, as she is able to straddle two racial worlds. She is presented as untouchable as she rips apart a family and begins to find herself in a tangled web of power and control in which she delights.

It is also important to note that all three of these characters: Miranda Bailey, Annalize Keating, and Olivia Pope appear in television shows created, directed and/or produced by one of the most powerful black women in show business today, Shonda Rhimes. The fact that Rhimes holds such a position points out the pervasive and structural persistence of the fantastic hegemonic imagination-these stereotypical images of black women have been written, developed, and/or produced by a black woman. Rhimes has been praised for creating shows with strong black women characters and providing job opportunities for black women actors. However, these roles continue to perpetuate the stereotypes that have been forced on black women such as mammy, tragic mulatto and Aunt Jemima. This mindset has become such an ethos in this country that even today in 2018 a black woman television show creator, writer, and producer cannot escape and move beyond what has been forced on black women throughout history.

The Black Matriarch, also known as the Welfare Queen, represented the "domineering female head of the Black family in the United States."[51] She has many problems and is angry because she is a single mother with many children and must use welfare to support her family. This is often where the term superwoman comes from because the black mother is forced to do and be everything for her family. Sometimes she does this well and sometimes she does not. A modern example of not doing this well would be the character Mary Jones in the movie *Precious*. Jones is the mother of her daughter Precious and survives off of welfare, lives for her boyfriend and uses her child as a servant to cook, clean, and sexually pleasure her whenever she wants.

The last image is the topsy/pickaninny who is "lazy, mischievous, wild-looking, and prone to thievery…nameless, shiftless clowns who were constantly running from alligators and toward fried chicken and watermelon."[52] This role is seen to have little to no morals and scare those around her. The modern day pickaninny would be the character Suzanne Warren, better known as "Crazy Eyes" in the Netflix series *Orange is the New Black*. Crazy Eyes is given her nickname because she acts crazy and offbeat. She lacks social skills, has emotional outbursts, obsessive tendencies and everyone else is scared of her.

These various images were forced upon black women and even many years later, these stereotypes and caricatures are still being played out in the media, just in different ways. This is how the world has come to know who black women are and how black women live and have meaning in the world. Black women are still constantly being placed

[51] Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 115.
[52] Ibid., 142-3.

into one of these categories, as evidenced by the ease with which one can find these images in popular media. While some of these images stem from a strand of reality, they are taken and contorted in a way that demeans and devalues the worth and very being of black women. Townes says it best:

> The damaging effect of such epistemological musings is that they take bits of Black reality and transform them into moral depravity as the norm for Black existence. This is structural evil working at its best (or worst). What this and the other stereotypes do is detract and deflect from examining the structures framing our existence and the assumptions we have made about the veracity of our knowledge about others and ourselves.[53]

Through these images and roles women's ways of making meaning, knowing and their bodies and lives continue to not be their own. The experiences of these women went unseen as if all the suffering and pain they experienced were invisible. [54] We combat this fantastic hegemonic imagination and the various caricatures and stereotypes that have been mentioned through realizing that the story can be told another way. The story of black women is not only the story and images given and appropriated by white western male Christian culture. There is a story of black women that "can be told in such a way that the voices and lives of those who, traditionally and historically, have been left out are now heard with clarity and precision."[55] There can be a story told of black women that speaks to their compassion and care of all humanity, not just how well they cook and clean. There can be a story told of black women's sense of morality and living for the good, not just their mean and assertive ways. These new narratives live and find meaning in womanist discourse. Womanist ethics, specifically, examines theories that concern action,

[53] Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 116.
[54] Ibid.,149.
[55] Ibid., 7.

relationship and human agency while rejecting these social constructs that have oppressed and rendered invisible a group of women whose hard work and labor built this country.

Professor and womanist ethicist Katie G. Cannon lays out three dimensions of black womanist ethics: 1) the incorporation of invisible dignity, 2) quiet grace, and 3) unshouted courage.[56] She uses the work of black women writers to show these three components in action in the history and lives of black women.

Using the life and work of writer Zora Neale Hurston, Cannon writes about how "her life conveys the way that Black women embrace, out of this loss of innocence, an invisible dignity in the self-celebration of her survival against great odds."[57] Hurston, as many black woman, had to become aware of "the evil systems and social institutions that existed outside of her supportive, nourishing environment." [58] These systems and institutions included dealing with unfair treatment, being humiliated and insulted as well as always watching her actions and movements so she would not "make the wrong step or wrong response that could literally jeopardize her life."[59] When insults would be thrown or humiliations happened it was the moral wisdom of black mothers that sustained; this was handed down and taught to the younger black women "not only how to survive but also how to prevail with integrity against the cruel systems of triple oppression."[60] Many blacks, including Hurston, came to understand and view this suffering and horrible treatment as "the typical state of affairs."[61] Black women had to learn how to live within

[56] Katie G. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988) 99.
[57] Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 99.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 101.
[61] Ibid., 104.

the white power structures and the black male power structures while internally grappling with being a black woman in the world. This treatment engendered this invisible dignity in which "black people maintain a feistiness about life that nobody can wipe out, no matter how hard they try."[62]

The second component of moral agency that Cannon lays out is quiet grace. Here quiet is defined as "the qualifying word describing grace as a virtue in the moral agency of black women…it acknowledges the invisibility of their moral character."[63] The word grace here involves "the search for truth."[64] As, has already been laid out, the lives of black women depended on how well they navigated the system and learned how to decipher and adapt to the various events and situations that happened in the world. Because of this "the Black community is called forth to fashion a set of values in their own terms as well as mastering, radicalizing and sometimes destroying pervasive, negative orientations."[65] This development of the black women's community creating their own values and terms is essentially quiet grace. It well names living in community with others and searching for the truth through resisting and critically reflecting on the deeper meaning of life and one's own experiences.[66]

The third component of the moral agency of black women is unshouted courage. This component is "a virtue evolving from the forced responsibility of Black women."[67] This virtue is fortitude in the face of triple oppression of race, gender, and class that black

[62] Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 104
[63] Ibid., 125.
[64] Ibid., 128.
[65] Ibid., 126.
[66] Ibid., 127.
[67] Ibid., 143.

women are forced to develop.[68] The invisible dignity, quiet grace, and unshouted courage "teach Blacks the usefulness of prudence, the relativity of truth and how to dispel the threat of death in order to seize life in the present."[69] These virtues are essential to the moral agency of black women and their will to survive, thrive and contribute to their community and the world at large.

The kind of moral formation needed involves learning the moral lessons of doing Double-Dutch in this society and jumping the ropes of being a black woman. These ropes include: lifting up and being accountable to ones community, history, culture, seeing one's self (mind, body, and soul) as deserving of love from God and others, and to struggle and fight at all costs in search of truth, justice, freedom, and equality. As Cannon states, this work "mandates that for black women, true liberation necessitates no compromise, mortgage, or trade-off."[70] The history of black women is an oppressive one that is constantly stereotyped and made into caricatures to continue to feed into the cultural fragmentation, what has been signified and named by the dominated culture in power also known as the fantastic hegemonic imagination. This is why it is crucial for black women to re-name themselves, how they make meaning, how they come to know and how they choose to communicate and express themselves, for themselves. Black women cannot afford to compromise more, as enough of their personhood has already been involuntarily compromised because of the white western male Christian culture and voluntarily compromised for the black male culture. These womanist ethical tents and lessons of moral

[68] Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 144.
[69] Ibid., 145.
[70] Ibid., 11.

formation are how African American women begin to combat and resist the white male hegemonic normativity and oppression that plague not only history, but the present as well.

V. Conclusion

The history and continued struggle with patriarchy and oppression of non-white and non-male Christian persons in the United States is like telling *two truths and a lie*. There is some truth in what is being said, but not the full truth of why women and minorities are treated in an inferior manner. The truth is that white men were the dominant group. The truth is that they were white Christian men in this dominant group. The lie is that true Christianity would ever condone, support or perpetuate oppressive treatment to any person or groups of persons. This is not the Christianity that believes in the teachings of a historical Jesus who gave his life to save the poor, oppressed and marginalized in this world. To believe that is a lie. Jennings, Townes, and Long have explained how the controlling white culture has named black people's reality, identity and place in the world through rhetoric, religion, memory and language. This commanding mindset feeds the fantastic hegemonic imagination and makes this kind of treatment and fragmentation of cultures and peoples acceptable. However, it is not. Specifically looking at the reality, history, roles and stereotypes of black women this chapter introduces the rope that black women like Renee and Demetrice had to jump and are still jumping just to survive in this world. If survival were seen as an academic skill, there would be many more black women holding Doctoral degrees.[71] However, with these historical realities there needs to be a new recognition and

[71] Lorde, *Sister Outsider,* 112.

long-needed naming of the reality of black women's lives, struggle for survival, liberation and identity through the triune God, which happens through the work of womanism and womanist discourse.

This chapter looked specifically at womanist ethics and moral formation as sources for support, recognition, and identity re-formation. It is through these sources that black women find their invisible dignity, quiet grace, and unshouted courage to resist coerced and voluntary surrogacy and roles of Aunt Jemima, welfare queen, tragic mulatto, sapphire, and pickaninny. These womanist sources offer support and strength as black women begin to know and express themselves, name themselves for themselves, and begin to tell a new empowered and embodied narrative apart from the ones that were placed on them through the language, rhetoric, memory and religion of the dominant white, western, male Christian group.

It is with this historical reality in mind that the following chapter will lay the foundation for play and the importance of play for the body and the mind, in pushing back against the fantastic hegemonic imagination, and in making theological education and churches more inclusive spaces for teaching and learning across difference.

CHAPTER TWO: PUZZLING:
Playing With The Pieces

Two rows of ten young children, hands clasped, stand parallel to each other in a local park. "Red Rover, Red Rover, send Britney right over." Britney, a young black girl, makes the choice to let go of the two other hands she is holding and runs full force toward the parallel line of kids in front of her. As she is running she is thinking about how fast she needs to run and where is the weakest link in this chain of kids in which she could run and break the hold. Britney, in this moment of play, has agency. She is making decisions about how she is choosing to act in the world. Britney must make a decision to choose to find the weakest link and take what some may consider the easy way out or to find the strongest link in the chain and try her best to break it. Regardless of her decision, it is Britney's choice to make as this game of red rover gives Britney agency in a world where young black girls have little to none in other arenas.

Britney takes this agency with her and as she grows into adulthood. She is faced with more difficult decisions about school, work, relationships, and family. She continues to wrestle with the questions she faced in that game of red rover; does she look for the weakest link or the strongest point and work hard to break it? How does she determine what is the weakest link, the strongest point, and her best? How does she make meaning of strategy and preparation? Regardless of her decision, it is Britney's choice to make as she continues to allow herself agency that she learned as a child from Red Rover.

As she continues to grow Britney finds herself playing in new ways. She finishes shuffling the deck of cards and begins to deal as she says "joker, joker, deuce, ace." As Britney begins this game of spades with her partner Jada and two other friends, she lays out the parameters for this game. She says that the highest cards are the big joker, the little joker (the card with the joker at the top and all the writing at the bottom) the two of spades and then the ace of spades. After she makes this declaration the game has begun. In this game all players have agency. All players decide how they want to act in the world. Each player decides what moves they will make in hopes of winning the game. This game offers another dynamic of team play that affects the decisions that one player makes. Since Britney knows that Jada is her partner she will take more care in what she plays and how she chooses to act.

Britney must also be a team player in other areas of her life like work, family, and relationships. The same decisions she had to make in that

game of spades are the same decisions she is faced with making now on her job, in her family, in her relationships and other avenues in her life. She must still decide how she will act in the world, being conscious of her partner role within her family, romantic and friend relationships, and her career.[72]

Just Playing

When I am building in the block room, please don't say I'm "just playing." For you see, I'm learning as I play, about balance and shapes. Who knows, I may be an architect someday.

When I'm getting all dressed up, setting the table, caring for the babies, don't get the idea I'm "just playing." For, you see, I'm learning as I play; I may be a mother or a father someday.

When you see me up to my elbows in paint or standing at an easel, or molding and shaping clay, please don't let me hear you say, "He is just playing." For, you see, I'm learning as I play. I'm expressing myself and being creative. I may be an artist or an inventor someday.

When you see me sitting in a chair "reading" to an imaginary audience, please don't laugh and think I'm "just playing." For, you see, I'm learning as I play. I may be a teacher someday.

When you see me combing the bushes for bugs, or packing my pockets with choice things I find, don't pass it off as "just play." For you see, I'm learning as I play. I may be a scientist someday.

When you see me engrossed in a puzzle or some "plaything" at my school, please don't feel the time is wasted in "play." For, you see, I'm learning as I play. I'm learning to solve problems and concentrate. I may be in business someday.

When you see me cooking or tasting foods, please don't think that because I enjoy it, it is "just play." I'm learning to follow direction and see differences. I may be a cook someday.

When you see me learning to skip, hop, run and move my body, please don't say I'm "just playing." For, you see, I'm learning as I play. I'm learning how my body works. I may be a doctor, nurse or athlete someday.

When you ask me what I've done at school today, and I say, "I just played," please don't misunderstand me. For you see, I'm learning as I play. I'm learning to enjoy and be successful in my work. I'm preparing for tomorrow. Today, I am a child and my work is play.

~Anita Wadley[73]~

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[72] This vignette is a composite based on actual experiences of the author, experiences and encounters that were witnessed, as well as anecdotes of other black women, being used with permission. All identifying details have been obscured and the quotations are not verbatim, but summaries of experiences and encounters.

[73] Anita Wadley Schlaht is a poet and writer of Children's World and Gateways to Learning Developmental Preschool. She is currently Executive Director of the Edmond Historical Society & Museum.

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked,
'who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?'
He called a child, whom he put among them, and said,
'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children,
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.
Whoever becomes humble like this child
is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.
Whoever welcomes one such child in my name
welcomes me.' Matthew 18:1-5 NRSV

I. Let's Play

Play is often viewed as childish. However, what if that were conceived as a good and desirable thing and not one to shy away from or even feel guilty about? In our society, we have come to view seriousness as an adult to be the norm that leads to success. Play is segregated to the children who have the freedom from adult responsibilities, bills, and a desire for achievement and notoriety. What if we took Jesus's words to heart? "…unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."[74] What if we gave real thought and consideration to what it means to become like a child? According to Jerome Berryman, the founder of a Montessori approach to Sunday school called *Godly Play*, Jesus's "becoming-like-a-child aphorism…shatters the hope of entering a state of perfection, which was longed for in ancient times and by all of us at some time. In contrast, Jesus said that life is neither just becoming nor just being. It is living in the continuing creativity of the kingdom."[75]

[74] Matthew 18:3, NRSV
[75] Jerome Berryman, *Becoming Like a Child: The Curiosity of Maturity beyond the Norm* (New York: Church Publishing, 2017) 23-4.

As adults we are often in the process of becoming something else, working for something more, or being complacent, but are we really living physically, intellectually, emotionally, and developmentally in the reign of God? Could we imagine being in a world where we were not striving for a "state of perfection" but "living in the continuing creativity of the kingdom?" Faithful to its biblical meaning, Berryman is referring to the kingdom of God as more than just a place but a mindset and a way of life.[76] What would it look like to be fully a child and fully an adult in action and in mentality? As scary as this thought maybe for some, just imagine how life giving it could be as well. To be fully a child and fully an adult is to have adult responsibilities and desires and yet still be open to imagination, curiosity, wonder, learning, growing and the surprises of life that childhood inspires and evokes. It is with this mindset that we can begin to learn and treat each other with more care and compassion as we relate to one another with openness, inclusivity, inquisitiveness and awe.

Play is a part of what it means to be human. It is an embodied aesthetic experience and a cultural expression, which is a unique contribution to the conversation of this dissertation. It functions as a way of knowing, being, communicating, making meaning. Play offers all who engage in it an opportunity to resist the fantastic hegemonic imagination[77] that promotes and praises the dominant white Christian male narrative. While a distinctly womanist understanding of play will be explored in the next chapter, this

[76] Jerome Berryman, *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education* (Minneapolis: Ausburg Fortress, 1991) 8.
[77] Emilie Maureen Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2006) 7. This is a reference made in chapter one. The fantastic hegemonic imagination is a type of consciousness and thinking that persists until an entire society believes that the dominant group is indeed in control and the subordinate group should be oppressed and viewed as less worthy, less human.

chapter will focus on play, how it functions, its characteristics, process, mind and body connection and my inclusive definition that is informed by my womanist consciousness. Using social sciences literature, this chapter will look at play as an embodied aesthetic experience and a cultural expression that allows for the "true self"[78] that is crucial for healthy human living. Following on from the opening parables, this chapter begins by engaging and bringing together central points and consistencies among the social sciences literature regarding play. I propose an understanding of play as a part of what it means to be human and an expression of one's culture and ontology – one's own being as it operates as a means of coming to know and make meaning.

This puzzle of play has many pieces. For the first piece of the play puzzle I draw on properties and elements of play as conceptualized by Stuart Brown, Scott Eberle, Johan Huizinga, and Courtney Goto. The second piece of the puzzle involves seeing play as an embodied aesthetic experience. To make my case for this I bring the ontology of Hans Georg Gadamer and the theological aesthetics of Alejandro Garcia Rivera into conversation. For the last piece of the play puzzle I draw on the work of Marion R. Broer, Traci Lengel, and Mike Kuczala to suggest the necessity for the connection of the mind and the body in play. Each of these components will be explained in further detail and pieced together like puzzle pieces to reveal a bigger picture of a more inclusive and holistic notion of play.

Prior to defining and offering up characteristics of play I must assert that play is truly known through felt sense and experience. Words and explanations are merely

[78] Berryman, *Godly Play,* 11.

attempts to explain a phenomenon that is ultimately beyond words. As most people would understand play, you know it when you do it and see it, often the explanation of it takes some of the joy and fun out of it. It is with this acknowledgement that I attempt to put this felt sense and experience into words for the sake of consistency, clarity and understanding throughout this work.

In this chapter play, playing and playfulness are used interchangeably. In the definition I will develop and consider play as part of our nature as human beings, an embodied aesthetic experience and a cultural expression that is part of one's ontology and epistemology. Play functions as a medium for one to become socialized, make meaning, and enact agency to form one's identity in the world. Playing will refer to play in action while playful and playfulness will be used to describe a human trait or behavior.

After reviewing the literature, developing and laying out what play is, play's function and characteristics, this chapter will explore play as an embodied aesthetic experience and explore the importance of engaging the body and mind in the process. This chapter will conclude by reiterating my own understanding and definition of play and its usage throughout this dissertation as a cultural expression and an embodied aesthetic experience that engages the mind and body in ways that are crucial for human well-being and flourishing.

As you read I invite you to embrace this image of being "fully a child and fully an adult at the same time."[79] I invite you to be an adult who welcomes and allows wonderment and awe to infuse your life both in action and thought as you read and think about play.

[79] Berryman, *Becoming Like a Child,* 39.

II. A Puzzle Within Puzzles

In order to outline my own understanding of play and its function in bringing forth our 'true self' and contributing to one's healthy human living, I must first analyze the social science literature. This is not an exhaustive review of the literature on play, but appropriate for what is most relevant for this dissertation. Also note that there are various aspects of play that are intentionally left out, such as issues of control and contest. This is because these aspects are neither central nor consistent across the literature, a point that I will address later.

Beginning with the work of psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihayli, one is presented with the concept of flow and the intrinsic rewards involved in play. In his work, flow is understood as "the wholistic sensation present when we act with total involvement."[80] For flow to happen, there has to be complete participation and a balanced connection between the amount of challenge or action opportunity and skill or capability needed for a given activity or action.[81] This means that for one to enter a flow state the level of challenge and skill must be balanced. If one is not challenged enough or does not have enough skill to complete a task, the flow state cannot be entered. If there is not enough challenge or actionable opportunity, then the task becomes boring and the person will lose interest. If the skill level is too high then the person will become anxious and also lose

[80] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 'Play and Intrinsic Rewards.' *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 1975, 43.

[81] Csikszentmihalyi, 'Play and Intrinsic Rewards,' 56. " When action opportunities are perceived by the actor to overwhelm his capabilities, the resulting stress is experienced as anxiety. When the ratio of capabilities is higher, the experience is worry. The state of flow is felt when opportunities for action are in balance with the actor's skills. The experience is then autotelic. When skills are greater than opportunities for using them, the state of boredom results, which again fades into anxiety when the ration becomes too large."

interest. There must be the right balance of challenge and skill level. Csikszentmihayli considers play a kind of "flow experience."[82] In such an experience there must be a merging of action and awareness,[83] loss of ego,[84] rules,[85] and its "autotelic" nature. Autotelic nature means that one must be present and acting within a set of rules that allows for the release of one's ego and has a purpose in itself.[86] Play as flow experience allows individuals to be whole, creative, and free without needing any other goals or rewards other than the play-flow experience itself.

This view of play raises questions about what to do with flow experiences that do not offer an intrinsic reward because there is no balance between the amount of challenge and capability for a given action or experience. This could especially be problematic within a religious context if it "fails to provide clearly detailed activities in which the faithful can participate with the understanding that in so doing they are meeting the challenges of life."[87] It falls on the religious system to be sure to provide detailed activities in which the faithful persons can participate and make meaning of their lives within the religious community. According to Csikszentmihayli, as long as there is a balance between the amount of challenge and the amount of skill used, then there can be play.

The literature on play includes the work of psychologists and fun theorists Gina Lemp, Melinda Smith, Bernie DeKoven and Jeanne Segal. These scholars assert that humans were born to play. Play is part of our nature as human beings trying to "survive

[82] Csikszentmihalyi, 'Play and Intrinsic Rewards,' 34.
[83] Ibid. 45-47.
[84] Ibid. 49.
[85] Ibid. 48.
[86] Ibid., 53-4.
[87] Ibid., 61.

and thrive"[88] in this world. Play is considered fundamental to our very existence and is necessary as it stimulates both the body and the brain. It is through play and playing with others that trust and deep relationships can be formed. Play reveals what psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott would refer to as one's 'true self.' Winnicott notes that, "the True Self comes from the aliveness of the body tissues and the working of body-functions, including the heart's action and breathing."[89] The very nature of one's aliveness is where one's true self comes from. Berryman asserts that play,

> is a place where one can be not only with the true self but also with the true self of other. Moreover, it is a place that also includes being with the earth and with the Creator God. Godly play, then, is not just for children. It gives us at any age room to make discoveries about a whole web of relationships- with self, others, nature, and God- to nourish us all our life. The quest for this larger reality continues all life long, but the answer does not come to us as a *product* of this creativity. It comes to us as the *process* of the creating itself.[90]

Being alive and in relationship are essential for play and healthy human living as one is living into one's true self. Playing brings one back to this true self when the busyness of life might have one forget one's true self.

Evolving from the concept of play to playfulness, the work of psychologists Rene Proyer and Willibald Ruch are insightful. Their work is based on the predisposition in adults to play, also known as playfulness.[91] In their work, playfulness is associated with

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[88] G. Kemp, M. Smith, B. DeKoven, and J. Segal, 'Play, Creativity, and Lifelong Learning: Why Play Matters for Both Kids and Adult.'2011. (Update May 2009) Retrieved from: http:// helpguide.org/life/creative_play_fun_games.htm (Accessed 5 November 2015) 1.
[89] D.W. Winnicott. *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (Connecticut: International Universities Press, Inc., 1965) 148-9.
[90] Berryman, *Godly Play*, 11-12.
[91] Rene' T Proyer and Willibald Ruch, 'The Virtuousness of Adult Playfulness.' *Psychology of Well-Being: Theory, Research and Practice*, 2011,1:4, 1.

one having good character with morals and integrity and encompasses five facets: spontaneity, expressiveness, creativity, fun, and silliness.[92] These facets allow for adults to encounter and engage in life with excitement, spontaneity and energy. This type of playfulness in adult behavior is often "predicted by humor, the appreciation of beauty and excellence, low prudence, creativity, and teamwork."[93] This type of behavior is considered to bring about joy, new ideas, positive emotions, release stress and stimulate thinking and learning. According to Proyer and Ruch this notion of playfulness engenders positive behavior, learning, thinking and good character in those persons that practice it.

Lastly, I refer to organization and management specialists Mary Ann Glynn and Jane Webster's *Adult Playfulness Scale.* In this scale, playfulness is viewed as:

> an individual trait, a propensity to define (or redefine) an activity in an imaginative, nonserious or metaphoric manner so as to enhance intrinsic enjoyment, involvement, and satisfaction. Playfulness is a multidimensional construct, encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral components, which together constitute a continuum along which individuals range from low to high.[94]

Here one views playfulness, not only as a personal trait that people have and can possibly cultivate, but also as a trait that affects all aspects of learning and being. The factors on this scale are spontaneity, expressiveness, fun, creativity and silliness, as was used by Proyer and Ruch. The results of this study show that in the area of task evaluations, involvement and performance there is a positive correlation with playfulness.[95] The results also showed that individuals who are considered playful have higher cognitive creativity and

[92] Proyer and Ruch, 'The Virtuousness of Adult Playfulness,' 1.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Mary Ann Glynn and Jane Webster. 'The Adult Playfulness Scale: An initial Assessment.' *Psychological Reports*, 1992, 71, 85.
[95] Glynn and Webster, 'The Adult Playfulness Scale,' 93.

spontaneity.[96] Therefore, the results of this work suggest that playfulness has a positive correlation to cognitive learning and thinking and the carrying out and evaluating of tasks.

There are both commonalities and variations among the scholars, and one thing that all of these studies have in common is the need for more research in this area. While these studies are a great start, there is much more work to be done in looking at the effects of play in the lives of adults.

This literature offers a foundation of play by outlining and suggesting the importance of play for healthy human living. All of this work is crucial for understanding play and I find that they miss the mark when contemplating a more robust and inclusive understanding of play that would make space for a womanist consciousness. Indeed flow is a concept that is closely related to play. However, Mihaly Csikszentmihayli's focus on the balance between challenge and skill level still leaves individuals on the margins. If one does not have the skill to balance the challenge of a given activity, then they will never be able to reach a flow state. This is a problem as persons of all skill levels and abilities need to play with other persons with various skill levels and abilities in order to grow and develop. This brings forth learning and growth for the entire community, more so than finding oneself in a flow state - alone.

Lemp, Smith, DeKoven, and Segal rightly see play as part of our nature of trying to "survive and thrive"[97] in this world. Proyer and Ruch speak to playfulness and adult behavior and Glynn and Webster speak to playfulness and its impact on one's cognitive,

[96] Glynn and Webster, 'The Adult Playfulness Scale,' 98.
[97] G. Kemp, M. Smith, B. DeKoven, and J. Segal, 'Play, Creativity, and Lifelong Learning: Why Play Matters for Both Kids and Adult.'2011. (Update May 2009) Retrieved from: http:// helpguide.org/life/creative_play_fun_games.htm (Accessed 5 November 2015) 1.

developmental, and affective well-being. This is true for all human beings and these cognitive, developmental, and affective impacts on one's well being take on different meanings for those with minoritized identities. Indeed play is needed to help develop the brain and body, and yet there are those who have historically (and presently) had to hide their play or playful self in order to survive and thrive in this country. For some, their playfulness can be seen as a liability, lack of professionalism, or even naiveté'. This reality for minorities brings a new realness to what it means to "survive and thrive"[98] that these authors did not fully address in their work. This chapter provides a more robust and inclusive definition and understanding of play that takes into account the historical and present social and cultural realities of all people, especially black women.

III. What is Play?

Having reviewed various literature, analyses, and studies, I propose a definition that promotes an inclusive understanding of play that is informed by my womanist consciousness. This womanist consciousness will be discussed further in the following chapter. This definition both advances and departs from prevailing understandings of play. My definition involves three crucial pieces. The first piece of the play puzzle involves the play process and characteristics. I draw on 1) Stuart Brown's seven properties of play, 2) Scott Eberle's six elements of play, 3) Johan Huizinga's connection of culture and play, and 4) Courtney Goto's characteristics of play. Each of these pieces will be addressed in this section. The following section will address the second piece of the puzzle, which

[98] G. Kemp, M. Smith, B. DeKoven, and J. Segal, 'Play, Creativity, and Lifelong Learning,' 1.

involves seeing play as an embodied aesthetic experience. To make my case for this I bring the ontology of Hans Georg Gadamer and the theological aesthetics of Alejandro Garcia Rivera into conversation. In the next section, which is also the last piece of the play puzzle I draw on the work of Marion R. Broer, Traci Lengel, and Mike Kuczala to suggest the necessity for the connection of the mind and the body in play. Each of these three pieces will be explained in further detail showing how play, is a part of our nature as human beings, a cultural expression and embodied aesthetic experience. Each of these pieces will also explore the many ways in which play can function such as: a way of knowing, communicating, meaning making, understanding God, self and the other. Play functions as a way to build trust, relationships, and community, bring forth the true self, and contribute to one's cognitive and affective well-being. Play functions as a source of renewal and rejuvenation, a space for the enacting of agency and moral and ethical formation. Play can function as an act of liberation.

My definition of play is like a puzzle with each of the ideas, concepts, and scholars offering a piece of that puzzle. Each of the pieces is needed in order to see and understand the bigger picture or image. This definition requires aspects of psychiatry and internal/clinical research, culture, history, behavior, ontology, aesthetics, body, and mind in order to substantiate a more inclusive understanding of play that makes space for a womanist consciousness, as one has yet to be provided.

A. Play Properties

Stuart Brown, psychiatrist and founder of the National Institute for Play, states, "when we play, we are engaged in the purest expression of our humanity, the truest

expression of our individuality."[99] He asserts, and I agree, that play is at the very core of our being and one of the ways in which we express our truth and our very personhood. In order to explain what makes play so integral to our humanity Brown offers seven properties of play; apparently purposeless, voluntary, inherent attraction, freedom from time, diminished consciousness of self, improvisational potential, and continuation desire.[100] These properties illustrate how Brown views play as a process that evokes truth and is a necessity of life.[101]

In analyzing Brown's seven properties we begin with his first property of *apparent purposelessness*. This is often how play is viewed, without any particular purpose, which is why many adults view play as a waste of time. However, upon further reflection Brown notes how play is not purposeless after all and aids in stimulating the body and the brain. He also reveals how play can serve as "practice for skills in the future."[102] This is similar to the story of Britney in the opening of this chapter. Britney practiced and learned team and relationship skills in Red Rover and spades that became important for her life and career that involved being a partner and a team player. Similarly in her poem, Anita Wadley explains how one learns through play for future careers and life as an adult.

The second property Brown mentions is that play is *voluntary*. This means that play is not an obligation that is forced, but an act that is done freely. In order to communicate what is at one's core, it cannot be forced or required, but must happen organically when one chooses to do so – also known as enacting agency. The third property is *inherent*

[99] Stuart Brown, *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul* (New York: Penguin Group, 2009) 5.
[100] Brown, *Play,* 17.
[101] Ibid., 5 &12.
[102] Ibid., 31.

attraction. Play is fun, exciting, and something that is very attractive to engage in. It makes one excited because it can physically, mentally, and emotionally increase one's mood, thought process, and productivity.

The fourth property is *freedom from time*. Freedom from time is that moment when one becomes so immersed in play that the passing of time is not even noticed, only the experience of playing. Play engulfs the person within the experience of playing. It is during this time that one encounters the fifth play property: *diminished consciousness of self*. In this state one no longer worries about what they look like or whether they are intelligent or ignorant. We "stop thinking about the fact that we are thinking"[103] and we just play. One can find one's self in the zone or what Csikszentmihayli calls a "flow state."

Once one is in this zone or flow state one encounters the sixth property of play, *improvisational potential*. This property is what allows the play space to be 'brave'[104] as it invites flexibility, improvisation and spontaneity. As psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott declares, "The spontaneous gesture is the True Self in action. Only the True Self can be creative and only the True Self can feel real."[105] It is in this improvisational space that one "stumbles upon new behaviors, thoughts, strategies, movements, or ways of being."[106] This property of play allows one to feel more comfortable, to take risks and try something new,

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[103] Brown, *Play*, 37.

[104] Here, and throughout the dissertation, I utilize the phrase 'brave.' I use this phrase in recognition that for many minorities and those on the margins there will never be a space that is truly safe since many of these spaces where never intended for minorities. There is always the possibility of being hurt, stereotyped, labeled, or experiencing various micro or macro aggressions. It is my hope to make environments 'brave.' To be 'brave' is the realization that although one can never truly be safe, one can commit to being open and vulnerable enough to take a risk to listen, support, disagree with, and challenge one another in life-giving ways that lead to challenging systems of oppression and personal and communal transformation.

[105] Winnicott, *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, 148.

[106] Brown, *Play*, 18

allowing their cognitive and affective ways of being and thinking to be expanded and stretched in new and creative ways.

The last play property is *continuation of desire,* which is the desire to keep the play experience going. Playing invites more playing. When experiencing play there is a sense of wanting that experience to continue. This desire to continue play invites creativity and innovation in order to keep the play going in the face of something that might try to end it. These seven properties allow play to bring out one's inner core truth and make play the essence of freedom.

A1. Competition and Rules

Play is natural to all human beings and should be part of our everyday living that allows for people to have quality relationships and to be more well-rounded, healthy, and productive human beings. My understanding and definition of play, stemming from my womanist understanding, is a more inclusive type of play that promotes unity over unhealthy competition and strives for the betterment not just of the person, but also of the entire community. This unity and caring for community is one of the tenets of womanism that will be discussed further in the following chapter. It is through this unity in play and playing with others that trust and deep relationships can be formed. Both trust and relationships can be dismantled by unhealthy competition. Therefore, an inclusive understanding of play used in this work cannot include unhealthy competition. Unhealthy competition is the kind of competition that is not facilitated by rules and can descent into angry anarchy. This unhealthy competition can be unsafe and potentially incite violence and division instead of the unity that is desired. While healthy competition that has rules such as Britney playing a competitive game of spades, also has the potential to lead to

unwanted outcomes; it is less likely to happen when the rules are fair and enforced to protect players and the game.

Rules and boundaries are a necessity for healthy competition and learning. Theologian Lincoln Harvey considers play an expression of freedom within a set of rules.[107] It is because of fair rules that unhealthy competition can be prevented and individuals can feel more willing to risk and play because they know they are doing it within a set of boundaries that provide a level of safety. Historian Johan Huizinga concurs that it is within a rules framework that true play can take place.[108]He attests that, "within that scaffolding of agreed conventions, improvisation and creativity can be free to roam. Play is held therefore in a careful balance of freedom and restraint."[109] It may seem almost contradictory that boundaries make a space more freeing, but in this case they are imperative.

There is similar reasoning for rules in play as with people's need for routine in the classroom and at home. One would assume that spontaneity would encourage creativity, but it is often the opposite. Educators encourage creativity and development by taking away as many extraneous variables as possible so that the student is not distracted by the multiplicity of choices and can spend their energy exploring and learning within the parameters provided. Such space offers necessary boundaries and rules, which "hold the space together"[110] so that people can feel, think, reflect and then act. Specifically looking

[107] Lincoln Harvey, *A Brief Theology of Sport* (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014) 64.
[108] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1950) 28.
[109] Robin Stockitt, *Imagination and the Playfulness of God* (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2011) 102.
[110] Alice Y. Kolb and David A. Kolb, 'Learning to Play, Playing to Learn. A Case Study of a Ludic Learning Space.' *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 2010, 23:1, 45.

at the ludic learning space, "a holistic model that views play and learning as a unified and integral process of human learning and development,"[111] play is given the freedom to create deep learning - physically, mentally, spiritually and morally within adults. This type of experience stimulates the brain and the body, as persons begin to see this as a way of coming to know who they are and how they are in relationship with the other. Play builds trust and relationships through unity and teamwork that engenders questions of ethics and morality of how to play and be in community.

Organizational behaviorists Alice Y. Kolb and David A. Kolb provide us with an example of an intramural softball league that started on a University campus.[112] The league started as a very competitive league, but everyone did not agree with or enjoy playing in such a competitive and aggressive manner. As a result they decided to form their own league where anyone could come and go as they pleased and play for the fun of the game. This brought to the surface people's ethical values and ideals of fair play. Kolb and Kolb quote Huizinga when he states that this league "puts to the test the player's ethical values of courage, resilience, and most importantly, 'fairness.'[113] They had a set day and time that they would play every week and they would play with whoever showed up. This gave their play boundaries. They learned to express themselves and their feelings, build community, play fair, temper their sense of aggression and competition, and enjoy a shared experience with a group of people.

[111] Kolb and Kolb, 'Learning to Play, Playing to Learn,' 27.
[112] Ibid., 31.
[113] Ibid., 43.

Many of the players confirmed that they had grown and learned a great deal about themselves and each other since the start of the league. One person even commented that in this team he found his "family."[114] Play offers this type of learning, growing, relationship building, and developing that aid in individual's cognitive and affective well being in a playful way. Play offers this type of experience for all who choose to play within boundaries, without unhealthy competition and aggressive agendas.

B. The Play Process

Given the properties of play that Brown has provided one might find oneself going through a particular process in order to benefit from all the various properties that play entails. The Vice President for Play Studies and editor of *The American Journal of Play*, Scott Eberle provides a six-step play process that is voluntary and driven by "pleasure that yet strengthens our muscles, instructs our social skills, tempers and deepens our positive emotions, and enables a state of balance that leaves us poised."[115] Such play makes us better cognitively and affectively as we play through various situations and issues that arise. Not every player goes through every step of this process, but these are the elements that are involved when one plays. Eberle uses these six elements: anticipation, surprise, pleasure, understanding, strength and poise[116] as components within the process of play. Eberle provides a chart[117] that shows each of these six elements in its various dimensions. Although the chart seems linear, the process of play and reaching various dimensions

[114] Kolb and Kolb, 'Learning to Play, Playing to Learn,' 42.
[115] Scott G. Eberle, 'The Elements of Play.' *Journal of Play*, 2014, 6:2, 231.
[116] Eberle, 'The Elements of Play,' 222.
[117] See Figure 1 for Scott Eberle's Play Chart

within the elements of play is a fluid one that encompasses much ebb and flow, reflecting Brown's play properties.

One element of play is *anticipation*. Because one is never sure what will happen when one plays, there is a level of uncertainty and risk that is involved so that one awaits with curiosity, expectation and even sometimes anxiety. As Eberle states, anticipation is "an imaginative, predictive, pleasurable tension."[118] This is the delightful giddiness that one feels, not knowing what will happen but looking forward to the possibilities. Interest and wonderment are two aspects that Eberle gives in his chart for anticipation.[119] Anticipation can lead to s*urprise*. Play leads to discovery with new ideas and thoughts that are unpredictable. These new perspectives and shifts in thought are often surprising to encounter. While this element may start with surprise, the more one plays, the more one begins to experience appreciation and even astonishment.[120]

The surprise of play can produce another element; *pleasure*. One receives pleasure in the surprises that play brings. One feels joy, happiness and a sense of excitement and positivity while playing, which is often pleasurable. One experiences this pleasure at different levels, depending on one's participation in the play. Eberle gives satisfaction and fun as happenings during the onset of play and pleasure as an outcome of extended playing.[121] Pleasure is motivation to continue playing because it is a desirable feeling to experience. This can engender *understanding*.

[118] Eberle, 'The Elements of Play,' 222.
[119] Ibid., 221.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Eberle, 'The Elements of Play,' 221.

During play one discovers various ways of thinking and knowing with a potential shift in perspective. Play unlocks various modes of creativity that "delivers emotional and intellectual bonuses-enlarging both our talent for empathy and our capacity for insight."[122] Play allows one to grow cognitively as one begins to think differently and understand various insights in new ways. Eberle gives tolerance as a starting place with mastery coming with more time, understanding and experience playing.[123] Understanding during play can develop *strength* – both physical and emotional. This strength comes from knowing and understanding more about oneself, others and the world. Strength here refers to both strength of mind and body.[124] This strength comes through the form of controlling and mastering a particular skill or task. This involves endurance and innovation. Eberle offers stamina as the starting place with creativity being a possible outcome with more time playing.[125] The benefit of having understanding and strength is *poise*. Poise involves a balanced level of fulfillment that is a reward to the player who encounters these elements and engages in this process.

If we think of this process as a wheel, each element is ready to begin once another element has been reached. It is important to remember that this is a fluid and dynamic play process that ebbs and flows between these elements at any given time; a player should not feel that they must complete them in sequence, for they will organically happen.

[122] Eberle, 'The Elements of Play,' 224.
[123] Ibid., 221.
[124] Ibid., 225.
[125] Ibid., 221.

C. Culture and Play Connection

One of the unique contributions of this dissertation is the view of play as a cultural expression and yet culture has not been mentioned. In order to encompass a more inclusive and womanist idea of play culture must be a part of it. While many mention the importance and link between play and culture, this dissertation is making the claim that play is indeed a cultural expression, which will be discussed further in the following chapter. It is also important to note that play properties and the elements of the play process will vary among cultures. Different cultures play differently as a matter of their own historical realities, resources and learned behavior as a cultural group. Cultural historian Johan Huizinga proposes that cultures have evolved through various forms of play, and therefore play should be viewed as culturally particular.[126] I agree that there is a cultural dimension to play since each person is born into a culture that affects how they view themselves, their world and how they play. I will discuss the specifics of play as cultural expression through womanism in the following chapter.

Huizinga asserts that human beings should not only be seen as *Homo Sapiens* but also *Homo Ludens* or "human who plays," since play is a large part of what makes us human.[127] Huizinga believes that play is a way in which to live life and make meaning of life.[128] I concur with Huizinga's thoughts around culture and play. As play is a way in which one has being and lives out one's core and religious morals, values and truths, this might look differently and be affected by ones cultural history and experience. History,

[126] Huizinga, *Homo Ludens,* forward.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.

gender, class, social location, ability, geographic location, and other variables affect one's culture, community, and experience – and thus our play.

For example, because of the experience of slavery and oppression of African Americans, their idea of play will differ from that of an Anglo-Saxon male whose culture owned slaves, and these differing perspectives endure across later generations. Originally, the Anglo-Saxon male may have had more access to various toys, trinkets, paintbrushes, and other play instruments, than the African American woman. She might identify more with bodily play as she is aware of her body since she uses it frequently to plow fields and to work hard with her hands and body. This African American woman may experience bodily play in the form of dance as she expresses her very being and ways of knowing through the movement of her body. This does not place importance of one over the other; it simply means their methods and elements in the play process may look different for these two individuals from differing cultures. This does not mean that play is not equally important because it looks different; it just means that one has to consider culture during play and when playing with others.

To think even further about what this might look like within a particular context, I turn to religious educator Courtney Goto, who has developed Local Practical Theological Aesthetics (LPTA). LPTA "speaks of and to the community by appealing to people's particular sensual preferences, their context, and their way of being in the world."[129] It helps one consider how faith communities such as churches or theological classrooms look different depending on one's community, context and culture. She mentions how one's

[129] Courtney T. Goto, *The Grace of Playing: Pedagogies for Learning Into God's New Creation* (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2016) 109.

"faith community impacts how teaching is experienced in the body and how what is taught conveys meanings that go beyond words."[130] Since play is relational and often involves others, playing does not just impact one single person, but it ripples like a rock hitting the water. When the rock hits the water, it flows out for a distance. Just as when one person is affected, those within closest proximity feel it and it moves outward into the community. The opposite is also true as the community and culture that a person is from affects the person. It is a reciprocal relationship that enriches, teaches, and challenges the person, community, and culture.

D. Play Characteristics

Play and playing are tools of the mind and the body that allow for agency and liberation. Play is fun, voluntary, transcendent, exciting, creative, humorous, joyful, and surprising. Play instructs our social skills, deepens our emotions, enhances our cognitive functioning, brings joy, and encourages moral formation. Religious educator Courtney Goto offers three specific characteristics of play: "finding and losing oneself; acting and believing 'as if;' and entering a world of possibilities."[131] She explains her notion of 'losing and finding' oneself as:

> important to the meanings of playing by bringing to mind a familiar experience…A player can lose herself in the experience of playing, yet strangely she can emerge with the sense of being 'found.'…Something hidden comes to light… one can experience transcendence while playing, in the sense of finding oneself in the midst of something larger than oneself.[132]

[130] Goto, *The Grace of Playing*, 108.
[131] Ibid., 16.
[132] Ibid.

Here one is brought back to the works of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyl and Stuart Brown as they both noted the importance of the experience of losing time or entering a flow state while experiencing play. This sense of timelessness and experiencing transcendence while playing is one of its gifts and key characteristics.

Goto's second play characteristic is entering a world of possibilities. In this world "playing ignites the senses and imagination as possibilities emerge, fall away, are reborn, and change – sometimes quixotically moment by moment, other times with subtlety, strategy, or deliberation."[133] This characteristic is important as it makes space for creativity, imagination, and embodiment. This characteristic of play allows for agency as one can create something new and imagine something more than what there might be in the current moment. This can often be revelatory in life and faith.

Goto's third characteristic, goes hand in hand with the second through acting and believing 'as if.' Goto asserts that acting and believing 'as if,'

> allows a person to sense what is authentic or real by inviting the player to enter a fictive world. Acting or believing 'as if' entails setting aside enough disbelief, appearances, or literal ways of thinking to shift temporarily into another way of engaging reality and one another.[134]

This allows one to see another perspective, think outside one's self and truly begin to see the other. This refers back to the work of Jerome Berryman and D.W. Winnicott about the 'true self.' For Goto and Berryman it is this experience of acting and believing 'as if' that "is a place where one can be with one's true self and the true self of others."[135] In this space

[133] Goto, *The Grace of Playing*, 17.
[134] Ibid., 16.
[135] Berryman, *Godly Play*, 11.

one can be oneself, without judgment of what society might think or say. This place of truth and trust is integral during play.

E. Four Components: Summation

Stuart Brown was trained in psychiatry, general medicine and clinical research. His perspective looks to the design of human beings by nature, with play being a part of the human design he sees throughout one's life. As his training might suggest, Brown does this through clinical trials and evidence from both animals and humans. Although a more theological language would refer to being created by God over designed by nature, his point regarding play being a part of our human nature is vital.

Both Scott Eberle and Johan Huizinga provide an important historical aspect to this work. Eberle brings an American intellectual history that is a reality, but can neglect the importance of culture within that history. Huizinga adds this cultural history piece, which allows for a more robust and balanced glimpse of how the history of play has shaped and continues shaping cultures in this country. In writing deliberately as a religious educator and practical theologian, Courtney Goto takes this into theological education by looking at the aesthetic of play in teaching and learning in light of God.

One must start with one's human nature, reflect on the culture and history, apply it to the teaching and learning sphere and then finally reflect on that in light of who God is and what that means to us. Each piece is needed in order to complete this puzzle of a more inclusive understanding of play that is part of our nature as human beings. Each piece explains how play is a cultural expression and an embodied aesthetic experience that

functions as a way of knowing, a means for communication and meaning making, and is essential for one's living and flourishing.

IV. Theology & Play

The first piece of my own play puzzle is understanding the characteristics of play, the properties and the process of it. For the second piece I now turn to the relationship between theology and play and support my claims of play being an embodied aesthetic experience. Is there a relationship between theology and play? Have you danced or played and felt something more that was beyond what words could explain? There is something spiritual behind that aesthetic experience.

This section begins by drawing on Hans-Georg Gadamer's ontological nature of play, the nature of play as self-representation and the importance of the "to-and-fro"[136] nature of play. The relationship among meaning making, knowing through experience, and being will be proposed here. I will then connect aesthetic experience as an aspect of theological anthropology. I offer definitions of both theological anthropology and aesthetic experience. The work of M. Shawn Copeland is crucial in looking at theological anthropology, as the work of Alejandro Garcia-Rivera is essential in defining aesthetic experience. I will link in the divine/human relationship through the divine dance of perichoresis which play makes space for as an embodied aesthetic experience.

[136] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 1975) 105.

A. Gadamer's Ontological Nature of Play

In Hans Georg Gadamer's seminal work, *Truth and Method*, he writes of "the ontology of the work of art and its hermeneutic significance." Gadamer believes play to be a mode of existing and being in the world, affirming my prior assertions by Brown and others that play is a part of human nature. As Gadamer asserts, play is "the mode of being of the work of art itself."[137] For Gadamer, play gives clues to ontological explanation in that play is completely experience based. "It becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it."[138] Part of what makes play play, is experiencing it. One begins to see play as its own entity with structure and order that can take over and engulf a person through the experience of finding and losing oneself. This experience can engulf a person because it is a natural process that is part of "pure self-presentation."[139] For Gadamer play is a way of being, of presenting oneself, and existing in the world. Using Gadamer's definition, play involves, but is not exclusive to art, games, drama, sports, music, dance, Double-Dutch, etc. These types of play involve what Gadamer calls movement of "backward and forward."[140] This movement is exactly as it sounds, the movement of moving one's body and mind forward and the movement of moving one's body and mind backward. It is the continual back and forth one is moving, playing, and dancing with ideas, possibilities, and concepts. This movement is essential in exploring oneself, the world, and the divine. This movement of going back and then moving forward, or moving forward and then moving backward, allows one to experience agency, and decide their own

[137] Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 102.
[138] Ibid., 103.
[139] Ibid., 105.
[140] Ibid., 104.

behaviors, morals, and values which are incorporated in moving forward and backward. In this back and forth one is renewed as play "renews itself in constant repetition."[141]

B. Aesthetic Experience as an Aspect of Theological Anthropology.

Aesthetic experience as an aspect of theological anthropology begins by defining theological anthropology and aesthetic experience**.** I must clarify that in this work there is a preference to theological aesthetics. Theological anthropology looks at the human person as it relates to God and the divine**.** Echoing the first biblical account of creation, theologian Sallie McFague declares that human beings are made in the image of God and can use language to speak of this divine-human relationship.[142] This divine-human relationship further conceptualized through the work of theologian M. Shawn Copeland. Copeland asserts that, "theological anthropology seeks to understand the meaning and purpose of existence within the context of divine revelation."[143] Copeland gives three central convictions for a theological anthropology that comes from a Christian interpretation: "(1) that human beings, created in the image and likeness of God (imago Dei), have a distinct capacity for communion with God; (2) that human beings have a unique place in the cosmos God created; and (3) that human beings are made for communion with other living beings."[144] Being made in the image of God, having a unique place in this world, and being

[141] Gadamer, *Truth and Method, 104.*
[142] Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982) 146-7.
[143] M. Shawn. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010) 23.
[144] Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom,* 24.

relational beings leads to the question of how one experiences and lives out these realities. This question of how invites the definition of aesthetic experience.

Aesthetic experience is an experience of a different quality than the average everyday experience. It is often desirable and pleasurable as it involves the senses and gives life meaning. It is a semiotics or a meaning making through sign processes, experience and meaningful communication. It asks the question that Alejandro Garcia-Rivera posed, "what moves the human heart?" In the asking, it explores the variety of theological methods of interpretation as the Spirit moves freely and the Divine breathes in the movement. It allow one's imagination to take one outside of oneself to a place where there is hope that in the beautiful and the ugly, transformation and transcendence can still be found, where truth resides, where interpretations and meaning can be made and where life is worth living.

This definition starts with the work of late scientist, Pastor, and theologian, Alejandro Garcia-Rivera of Havana, Cuba. He was the first to think about aesthetics and theology in the form of the question; "what moves the human heart?"[145] Asking this question "brings us closer to the mysterious experience of the truly beautiful, an experience that transcends geological space and prehistoric time, an experience that holds the most persuasive claim to being what has become an aporia in our day, the real universal."[146] While I must assert that what elicits aesthetic experience is not always universal, his claim is provocative. When was the last time we thought about what moves our hearts, or given ourselves permission to let our heart be moved? There is something powerful, mysterious

[145] Alejandro Garcia-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful: A Theological Aesthetics* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999) 9.
[146] Garcia-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful*, 9.

and honest in a heart being moved and I believe this is the key to aesthetic experience and what play can provide. Garcia-Rivera pulls from the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar, when he claims, "theological aesthetics recognizes in the experience of the truly beautiful a religious dimension."[147] He speaks of a beauty that is transcendent and begins in God's Own Self and a "divine initiation" of love and we get the free choice to respond.[148] There is not only an action but also a response, much like that of salvation. There is to-and-fro, just as Gadamer described. God is pouring out love and one has the choice to respond to it or not. It is in the freedom that one's hearts can be moved, knowing that one is not forced, but one chooses it from a place of liberation. Garcia-Rivera puts it quite beautifully:

> Theological aesthetics attempts to make clear once again the connection between Beauty and the beautiful, between Beauty's divine origins and its appropriation by the human heart…Human life has a worth and a dignity which only Beauty can reveal through the beautiful. Without the language and experience of Beauty and the beautiful, the Church will find difficult the expression of her faith, much less her conviction of the dignity of the human person, and, even less, be a sacrament to the world.[149]

It is like a conversation where the whole world is important, worthy and full of dignity and truth. It is in this mysterious and precious place that one can be free enough to let one's heart be moved. Religion professor, Steven Guthrie, states that, "the words *ruach* and *pneuma* mean not only 'spirit,' but also 'breathe' or 'wind.' Spirit, then, is a word that suggests movement and movement of an organic sort…it is most intimately connected to us; we could not survive apart from it, yet we cannot dictate its arrival or cessation."[150] Therefore, if one is allowing one's heart to be moved, one is allowing the spirit to move,

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[147] Garcia-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful*, 9.
[148] Ibid., 10.
[149] Ibid., 11.
[150] Steven R. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011) 8.

the divine to breathe through him/her, and in this allowance or human response there is freedom of the movement that is mysterious and unknown. This movement allows one to "speak languages beyond language and know truths beyond knowing."[151] It allows one the space to explore and to know one's true self.

One comes to know that what is experienced is understood and known. Gadamer believes that play is a way or mode of being in the world and it becomes known and understood through artistic creativity and liberation. Play, then, is an aesthetic experience or a way in which one can ask and let their heart be moved. Play is an aesthetic experience as it involves the senses and can provides meaning to life. Play is an aesthetic experience as it can function as a way of meaning making through experience and meaningful communication. In this way, play can form, inform and then transform individuals and communities. It can operate as a way of knowing, being, and making meaning in the world. Play allows one to make meaning of what is real in their lives, including one's given horizons and values as well as the unknown, mysterious, and the divine. This type of play induces shared meaning with others and often engenders more play. Play, as an aesthetic experience, allows for communication as a way in which we experience, come to know, have our being in the world and find shared meaning with the other.

This type of experience and movement is like dancing. Dancing is Gadamer's to-and-fro moving backward and forward, making meaning, coming to knowing, and being with self, one another and the divine. In this dance all human partners are equal and interdependent and moving freely between and among each other. This is much like the

[151] Guthrie, *Creator Spirit*, 8.

"divine dance"[152] that feminist Catholic Theologian Catherine Mowry LaCugna mentions in her book *God For Us*. In this book LaCugna speaks of the inner life of our One and Triune God as perichoresis, "mutually permeating one another,"[153] "being-in-one-another, permeation without confusion[154]…the three divine persons mutually inhere in one another, draw life from one another, 'are' what they are by relation to one another."[155] To think of the three divine persons in mutual harmony with one another in community, equality and freedom is a beautiful vision that all persons are meant to live out and be mirrors of as beings made in imago Dei.

We are each made to dance this dance as well. We are made to be beings that dance in the perpetual to-and-fro, in the dynamic and creative energy of the creator and this world. We are made to dance with all of humanity as our "beloved partners."[156] Play is one way to dance this dance. Play involves the dance movement of going backward and forward, that Gadamer explained. Play involves making meaning of this mutuality, community and freedom among us. Play is living out - movement and dance (both metaphorically and literally), it is an embodied aesthetic experience that not only functions as a way we begin to make meaning in the world, begin to known, but can become a way we live out our being and knowing in the world.

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[152] Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity & Christian Life* (New York: HarperOne, 1991) 271.
[153] LaCugna, *God For Us*, 72.
[154] Ibid., 271.
[155] Ibid., 270.
[156] Ibid., 274.

V. Mind and Body Connection in Play

I now present the third and final piece of my play puzzle in this section. Everything that has been mentioned thus far that play is and engenders would not be possible without both the mind and the body. The mind is essential as it sends information to the rest of the body to move and to do various things. The body is vital within the work of play as it is what the mind moves in various ways that create emotions, fun, energy, moral formation, agency, and cognitive development. It is often one's body that is engaged in the play process - through movement. There is a science to the movement of the body that must be addressed here. Kinesiology, deriving from the Greek words kinein - to move, and *kinesis* – movement, is the study of the function and mechanics of body movement or human motion. It "is based on a knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of the neuromusculoskeleal system and the physical laws of force, motion, and gravity."[157]

In order for play to happen, there must be an equal partnership – a dance - of the mind and body, not the dualism or hierarchy of the two that is rampant in the academy. The mind needs the body and the body needs the mind. When trying to move or play, it is the brain that must make the decision about which muscles need to contract in order to get a particular part of the body to do a particular thing. Simultaneously, the brain must also try to estimate how much force or resistance is needed to hold, pickup or drop a particular object. Then, there is also the consideration of external factors like the weather when doing the movement or the material of a particular object. For example, if someone is throwing a basketball to a friend her brain has to send messages to the muscles in her body that would

[157] Marion R. Broer, *An Introduction to Kinesiology*, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968.) vii.

be involved in throwing the ball. Her arms, elbows and wrists would need to be involved to throw a ball. However, if she is throwing the ball a long distance to someone who is much taller than her, she might need to move her legs and abdomen in order to be able to push the ball out with greater force. Her mind, specifically her primary motor cortex, is responsible for generating the neural impulses or "signals that control the execution of movement."[158]

The mind sends signals to make the body move, but what motivates the neural impulses and signals? Marion R. Broer shares the motivation:

> …to understand human movement, one must understand not only the ways in which the body can move or be moved and the laws that govern efficient movement, but also the ways in which the human being is motivated to move and the effects this motion has on the total person-his body (mechanically and physiologically), his emotions, and his concepts concerning himself and his environment.[159]

To reiterate what Broer is saying, movement is a cyclical total person experience. The body feels sensations and emotions through movement and motion that are sent to the brain. The brain is then motivated by those sensations, thoughts, and emotions to send signals that move the body in particular ways. Health and physical education teacher Traci L. Lengel and director of instructing for the Regional Training Center, Mike Kuczala state it well when they say that the body and the brain "have been mistakenly assumed as separate entities. The fact is that they flow to and through each other, as an extension and a reflection

[158] Eric Jensen, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, 2nd, Ed. (Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2005).
[159] Broer, *An Introduction to Kinesiology*, 1.

of the other's will."[160] They need each other and are reflections of each other, all wrapped up in a beautiful blood and skin package.

The brain and body connection is important in this work as I am specifically advocating for play in the church and theological classroom. I am advocating for this kind of holistic teaching and learning that involves the entire person – mind and body. The mind is often valued and praised over the body within the academy. However, Lengel and Kuczala use Harvard associate clinical professor of psychiatry, John Ratey's description of movement and exercise as "Miracle-Gro" for brain development.[161] Lengel and Kuczala lay out what movement does for a person in the classroom. Movement allows a break or rest period in order for individuals to refocus and come back with new thoughts, ideas and perspectives. [162] Movement allows for more implicit learning to take place. This learning goes beyond what one may consciously be aware of in the moment. Take for example, riding a bike. Once one learns the movements of riding a bike it becomes like second nature – happening without even thinking about it. [163] Movement improves the function in the brain by allowing and creating a space or environment for neurogenesis –creation of new neuron and brain cells- to occur, which engenders new learning. [164] These new connections in the mind and the body explain things like muscle memory when riding the bike or driving home from work physically without even remembering it. Our bodies hold these memories

[160] Traci Lengel and Mike Kuczala, *The Kinesthetic Classroom: Teaching and Learning Through Movement* (California: Corwin A SAGE Company, 2010) 16.
[161] Lengel and Kuczala, *The Kinesthetic Classroom,* 17.
[162] Ibid., 23.
[163] Ibid., 23-4
[164] Ibid., 25-6

and knowledge within them that the mind needs. These are just a few of the benefits of the mind and body connection that are developed and lived out through play.

Play allows for what Marilyn Patterson calls the "bodymind."

> The mind plays a major role in the health of the body, and the body, in turn, helps determine how effectively the mind works. Many scientists are now beginning to think in terms of the "bodymind," a unity that many traditional cultures have never lost. Serving as a bridge between the body and mind, the kinesthetic aspect of the bodily kinesthetic intelligence lets us receive and interpret the millions of signals, both internal and external, that keep us alive.[165]

Our entire person needs every part of us to play, to think and to be in this world. One cannot play without the mind just as one cannot think without the body. Therefore all movement is also a sensorimotor experience, which means that the physical movement of the body affects the cognitive and affective happenings and development of the brain and vise versa.[166] It is this kind of "bodymind" connection that play engenders. Play functions as a method or tool for cognitive and affective development, moral and ethical formation, problem solving, exploration, team building and space to enact agency and push for liberation.

VI. Conclusion

Theological educator Jaco J. Hamman states that, "to grow in play-fullness is almost always an act of reclamation and restoration, reclaiming a part of our lives that we lost somewhere along the road of life. Play-fullness rehumanizes us."[167] It seems wrong to

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[165] Marilyn Nikimaa Patterson, *Every Body Can Learn: Engaging the Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence in the Everyday Classroom* (Arizona: Zephyr Press, 1997) 4.
[166] Broer, *An Introduction to Kinesiology*, 8.
[167] Jaco J. Hamman, *A Play-Full Life: Slowing Down & Seeking Peace* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2011) 17.

not take this moment, in this chapter on play, to actually invite you, the reader, to play. So let us take a moment to reclaim, restore and rehumanize through remembering. Remember a time when you experienced play. Take a moment to think back and remember it.

Where were you?

What were you doing?

What was the space like that invited the play?

Who were your play partners?

What emotions, attitudes or behaviors did it engender?

How did you feel before, during and after the playing?

What did you learn from the play?

Does your experience resonant with some of what was presented and discussed in this chapter? Why or why not?

This chapter began by stating that play is often viewed as purposeless or childish. However, it is my hope that through the analysis and discussion of the social sciences literature, play process and elements, ontology, aesthetic experience and bodymind connection that one can begin to see the role of play in healthy human living and flourishing. In conversation with Stuart Brown's seven play properties, Scott Eberle's six elements of play, Johan Huizinga's connection of culture and play, Courtney Goto's characteristics of play, Hans Georg Gadamer's ontology and Alejandra Garcia Rivera's notion of aesthetics, and Lengel and Kuczala's mind and body connection I offered an inclusive, welcoming, and holistic understanding of play.

My Definition of Play

I define play as *an embodied aesthetic experience and a cultural expression that are a part of what it means to be human. This play functions as a way of knowing, being, and making meaning in the world.* Play is a part of our human nature. Play is an aesthetic experience that involves the bodymind and is therefore embodied, making play an embodied aesthetic experience. We understand play to be both of these things, but what makes this work unique is the claim that play is also a cultural expression that functions as a way of expressing one's identity and very being in the world. Because play is a cultural expression and an embodied aesthetic experience that is part of our ontology, epistemology it functions as a way of knowing and a means for communication and meaning making. My definition of play is marked by apparent purposelessness, volunteering, attraction, freedom from time, diminished consciousness of self, improvisational potential and continuation of desire while also maintaining a sense of unity, boundaries and fairness. Play is constituted by anticipation, surprise, pleasure, understanding, strength and poise while recognizing that these may vary among different cultures and communities. Play involves finding and losing self within the many possibilities of life as we are coming to know, understand and experience our own being in the world. Play invites us into the mysterious, beautiful, ugly and the divine as an aesthetic experience using both our mind and our body in order to expression our cultural and social realities. Play invites us to practice agency and critical engagement in the world.

Play brings out our core truth or true self as well as aiding in both cognitive and affective development. Play informs us about who we want to be, then actually forms us through the practice of it, and ultimately it transforms us into persons that can

communicate, cultivate relationships and make meaning across difference. Play allows us to become socialized, make meaning, and enact agency to form our identity in the world, in light of our cultural histories and present realities. Play is not only pleasurable, voluntary, purposeful, surprising, creative, and exciting but it also allows for agency and liberation through freedom and unity with fair rules. Play provides the space for each of us to think beyond what is present to the 'as if' and a world of possibilities that can deepen our emotions and enhance our cognitive functioning which encourages moral and ethical formation through fair play. Play and the action of playing are capacities of the mind and the body that allow for agency and liberation. Play is fun, voluntary, transcendent, exciting, creative, humorous, joyful, and surprising. Play instructs our social skills, deepens our emotions, enhances our cognitive functioning, brings joy, encourages moral formation and engenders balance by providing a space that aids in integrating the body, mind and spirit in a brave way that invites exploration and risk.

In the next Chapter I will take up the task of defining womanism, womanist theology, womanist ethics, and womanist theological anthropology as I further explain my understanding of play in light of my womanist understanding of play.

CHAPTER THREE: MOTHER MAY I?:
Entering the World of Womanism

Dear Diary,

Today was another rough day. I know that I should be thrilled that I got into seminary, but it is more difficult than I anticipated. I feel so out of place, no one gets me, and I am so tired of constantly having to explain myself and worry about how I look and represent all black people. Why don't they get it? I mean we are all in ministry in one way or another so how are folks not more inclusive and sensitive to the needs and concerns of others? For example, today my young white female History of Christianity professor was talking about MLK, the civil rights movement, the power of love and God's love when she looked at me and asked me the same question about black people she asks me almost every other week. Same question, just a different context depending on what we are discussing. She asked me, "do black people feel that racism is over since Obama was elected for President twice?" I told her, what I tell her every time she asks, that I couldn't speak for all black people, only myself and my experience and the fact that she asked me so often, as if my race was a monolithic group, that was a sign that race was indeed still an issue. Then she got defensive because she felt I was calling her a racist, which I was not. She said that my tone and body language seemed very aggressive and that I was making her nervous with my accusations and she didn't appreciate it. Is she kidding? I was just sitting at my desk talking normally. How was my body language aggressive? What, because my body is black? So because she chose to innocently, yet ignorantly ask me a question and my response threw her off, now she was hurt and I was being aggressive? Seriously?

So, of course I had to apologize to her before she would move on. I am so sick of having to apologize for speaking my truth. It's like I have to constantly apologize for the ignorance of other people as if me being black is the problem and it is so ridiculous. I mean, seriously, she teaches the History of Christianity and it's like she doesn't even recognize the effects of Christianity in slavery, how the history of slavery still affects people in the U.S. and how racism is more than just saying the N-word or wearing a white hood.

Then it just got worse in the afternoon. Everyday at lunch I meet with a running group. We call ourselves the "righteous runners." We run together for an hour around lunchtime. Usually this is one of the highlights of my day as I get to physically release my tension from the day, I feel the endorphins from running and the community of runners is great with life

changing conversations. However, that was not the case today. Today a German male classmate, James, made another comment about my hair as he attempted to touch it AGAIN!!! It is not difficult to understand why I don't like people putting their hands in my hair. I mean he is studying to be a pastor, how does he not have more awareness and cultural sensitivity? It honestly makes me wonder how he is with his parishioners. It is like my body is just an object for them to touch, analyze and comment on and its not! He said he preferred the straight hair I had last week to my nappy afro. Then he asked if I put weave in it to make it straight. Then he asked how I even combed my nappy hair as he tried to run his fingers through it. I immediately slapped his hand away and told him to stop being such an ignorant ass. It is so frustrating because this is not the first time. The first time he tried I gave him the benefit of the doubt. I explained why it was not okay to just touch my hair. I explained how it was personal and intimate and that my body was not an object or on this earth for his amusement. I even mentioned how this is even more important because he might have parishioners in his congregation who are African American women and he needs to understand the history and importance of her body, her hair and her entire personhood.

After that I had no more patience for him because now he knew better and was making a conscious choice to continue to act this way. I hated that he felt he had the right to touch my hair and comment on it. I felt so objectified. When I told a black male seminarian and fellow "righteous runner" about it he said it was just fun banter and that I shouldn't take it so personally. He also told me not to be "that girl…you know…the angry black girl." He said if I became the angry girl I might not be able to run with the group anymore because I would make people uncomfortable with my race and anger issues. WHAT THE HELL! Why was my anger a problem? I was angry because of how I was being treated, why couldn't he see that? But it was my anger, not James' actions that would affect our running group? Seriously? And what did he mean that I would be "the angry black woman?" I hate the stupid labels that are placed upon me for showing any kind of emotion. This sucks.

What a horrible day. I just don't understand why people feel that my body, my words, my experience and my very being don't matter or is a threat to them. It's just ridiculous to me and is so frustrating. Days like these I really wonder where God is in all of this. XOXO, Sheena[168]

[168] This vignette is a composite based on actual experiences of the author, experiences and encounters that were witnessed, as well as anecdotes of other black women, being used with

My Pledge of Allegiance to Me

There's more to me than the human eye can see.
I'm a woman of purpose and destiny.

A perfect design, I'm special and unique.
I won't be identified by the parts that make
up my physique.

My beauty is not defined by my skin or my hair
and my soul has more value
than the clothes that I wear.

I'm not a symbol of pleasure or sex appeal;
I have the natural ability to comfort
and the power to heal.

When God made me, He created a gem
because He fashioned me in the likeness of Him.

I refuse to do anything that will put God to shame.
I deserve to be treated with reverence
and called by my name.

I can't be purchased or sold at any price
because I've already been bought and paid
for by the precious blood of Christ!
~ Letitia L. Hodge[169] ~

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
You knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Psalm 139: 13-14 NRSV

permission. All identifying details have been obscured and the quotations are not verbatim, but summaries of experiences and encounters.

[169] African American woman poet and author.

I. Yes, You May

Chapter one described the reality of black people in the United States with a special emphasis on the history and experience of black women. I deployed the metaphor of jumping rope within the academy and the need to do Double-Dutch with the additional rope of womanism. Chapter two provided grounding and support for play as a necessity for healthy human living and flourishing. In chapter two I offered up a more inclusive understanding of play as a cultural expression and an embodied aesthetic experience that is part of the fabric of being human. I explained that play functions as a way of knowing, communicating and making meaning in the world that forms, informs, and then transforms[170] as we express, embody, and encounter God.[171] My articulation of this inclusive definition of play is influenced by my womanist consciousness.

My womanist consciousness has been formed and inspired by womanism, womanist theology, womanist ethics, and a womanist theological anthropology. This chapter will explore the significance of play in the lives of black women, explain exactly what is meant by womanism, womanist theology, womanist ethics and womanist theological anthropology and then discuss the importance of the black woman's body in the world. Play, as a cultural expression and an embodied aesthetic experience, not only functions as a way of meaning making, but also a means of renewal and healing for black women. This chapter will explain and reveal how powerful womanism can be as an

[170] This phrase is named and used by Thomas Groome in his work *Sharing Faith*, in which he mentions how shared Christian praxis forms, informs, and then transforms. While it is not quoted verbatim, it is used with similar intentions of explaining how this work forms, informs and then transforms the person.
[171] James Evans Jr., *Playing* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010) xviii.

additional rope within the academy as it can create ludic learning spaces of radical inclusivity and transformation.

II. A Womanist Understanding of Play

The previous chapter reviewed literature and studies of play. There, I provided a more comprehensive definition of play informed by a wide array of relevant scholarly literature and drew on womanist thought. I define play as *an embodied aesthetic experience and a cultural expression that are a part of what it means to be human. This play functions as a way of knowing, being, and making meaning in the world.* This definition denotes play as an inclusive experience that provides a distinctly womanist conception of cultural expression that both advances and departs from prevailing notions of play. Given womanist's commitment to inclusion, cultural histories and realities, intersectionality of knowing, being, and embodiment, I sought to offer a definition of play that was equally inclusive and aware of cultural histories and realities.

Some black women have had to become critically aware in order to survive in the world in an attempt to challenge and push back against the dominant racist and sexist narrative and social formation. Play as a part of human nature functions as a means of creating one's own meaning, allowing its players to be and become radically aware and to practice and eventually enact ways in which to challenge the dominant narrative.

Some black women believe in the power of their community and the necessity of everyone making it together. They believe in helping each other, being accountable for one another, and standing in solidarity, hand-in-hand, against injustices. This belief allows for the pooling of resources to help the greater community at large. Play as a cultural

expression engenders this kind of community and remembering of one's culture and community, while also engaging and coming to know and understand another's culture and community through play.

Some black women have had a narrative of being worthless sexual objects forced upon them. Self-worth and self-love are not just desires for black women, but necessities in order to not just survive but to thrive in the world. Play as an embodied aesthetic experience allows space for ownership and appreciation of one's body, beauty, dignity, and faith in God. It allows space for one to get to know themselves, their bodies and to come to truly see and know who they are. Play can engender self-worth, dignity and love.

Some black women were raised not to engage the world for fear of being misunderstood or being treated as having a lack of intelligence, or even the threat of violent death. Play provides a space to negotiate what is happening with the world and oneself in light of one's own beliefs and ideas, hopes and dreams. Play can operate as a space for negotiating meaning and trying things out. This experience can create a critical engagement with things happening in the world and bring to the surface many feelings and emotions that were under the surface – thus unaware. The experience of play can build confidence and agency that leads to enacting change toward justice for all. In this sense play functions as an act of liberation in which persons are able to embrace part of their human nature, express their cultural histories and realities, and experience themselves and God in their bodies and the world. This inclusive and distinctly womanist kind of play is an experience and expression by which all persons can be formed and informed, and through a ready medium that can lead to change and transformation.

A. Cultural Expression

Culture and cultural expression are key aspects in womanist theory and practice, womanist theology, ethics, and theological anthropology; moreover, culture and cultural expression are pertinent and unique to my definition of play. Therefore, it is important to clarify what is meant by culture and cultural expression in this dissertation. Culture refers to that community and ethos into which one was born, within which one is raised and lives and by which one is formed in identity and meaning-making, and which serves as a principle context from which one relates to the world. There are many intersectional layers to one's cultural reality that includes gender, religion, race, class, social location, nationality, geographic location, ethnicity, orientation, and many other aspects. Culture is not just one stagnant thing, but the fluidity and convergence of many influences and sources.

Different cultures play differently as a matter of their own historical realities, resources and learned behavior as a cultural group. Cultural historian, Johan Huizinga, suggests, and I concur, that since, cultures have evolved through various forms of play, play should be viewed as culturally particular.[172] As play functions in a way in which people express core and religious morals, one's values and truth's look and are affected by one's cultural history and experience.

People's play is a reflection and expression of their culture and identity-community – whether they want it to be or not. For example, playing house could look different for persons from different cultural groups. Many black girls may have grown up getting their

[172] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in* Culture (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1950) forward.

hair straightened with a hot comb.[173] Once hot it would be run through the hair in order to straighten out all of the curls. During this there was often laughter, burning, and conversation. A woman from India might not share this experience; therefore, when the young black girl attempts to straighten the Indian girls hair during playing house, she might have to explain exactly what she is doing. In this way they are both learning about themselves and another culture through the play. It is through this inclusive play that we can learn and begin to appreciate and understand one's own culture and the culture of others. Play invites others into the community as each player expresses themselves and their culture and each player learns how to negotiate, communicate and make cultural meaning with other players.

It is with diversity in mind that a conversation with theologian Kathryn Tanner becomes helpful. In her work, Tanner contrasts a modern and postmodern understanding of culture and advocates for the latter, as applied within theology and anthropology. First, she lists nine basic elements of a modern meaning. For Tanner, modern culture is: 1) a human universal, 2) highlights human diversity, 3) varies with social group, 4) is seen as an entire way of life, 5) is associated with social consensus, 6) constructs human nature, 7) is a human construction, 8) is contingent to its context, 9) and advances social determinism.[174] She then dissects this into six parts to describe a more postmodern and porous understanding of culture.

[173] The hot comb is a heavy metal comb that is warmed on the stove. The hot metal is then combed through the hair in order to straighten in.
[174] Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997) 26-9.

In her postmodern shift of culture, Tanner recognizes, first, the inattention to history and the historical struggle.[175] This is particularly important for this dissertation, given the historical reality of black women in the U.S. Second, this reconstructed culture is against viewing cultures as wholes, since bits and pieces of culture become present at any particular time, given that particular situation, circumstance, and the people involved.[176] Third, this postmodern culture is also against consensus as it doesn't give voice to conflict and the ways in which "different senses are given to cultural elements."[177] Fourth, postmodern culture is against culture as a principle of social order, which can often idealize a culture into one set of beliefs and values. Every member of a culture may or may not genuinely hold a certain value or belief. While values and beliefs of a particular culture often shape the actions that follow, one would be remiss to attribute that solely to a social order and not think of various historical realities that might affect each person differently.[178] "What is reactionary in one context may be subversive in another."[179]

A fifth aspect of this reconstruction of culture is being against cultural stability. Culture itself has "principles of change" that are fluid and loosely connected allowing them to be "ordered and reordered" throughout time and circumstance.[180] Lastly this reconstructed postmodern culture is against cultures as self-contained units with sharp boundaries. The postmodern idea of culture without sharp boundaries makes space for

[175] Tanner, *Theories of Culture, 40-42.*
[176] Ibid., *42-45.*
[177] Ibid., *45-47.*
[178] Ibid., *47-51*
[179] Ibid., *49.*
[180] Ibid., *51-3.*

conflict and change, which no longer allows the political and historical realities of inequality to remain unaddressed.[181]

This postmodern reconstruction of cultural expression takes into account historical reality by not viewing cultures as a whole social order with consensus, stability and sharp boundaries, but one that is fluid and ebbs and flows through conflict and change as life happens. This notion of cultural expression acknowledges differences among and within cultures and the need for ordering and reordering in light of circumstances and the realization of inequality –wherever they occur. It is this notion of cultural expression that makes a space for an inclusive and welcoming womanist understanding of play.

To understand play as a cultural expression suggests that in play one acknowledges the historical realities of groups, spaces, and places in which persons were born, raised and currently live. It also recognizes that groups borrow and repurpose cultural elements, tools, rules, etc. rather than inventing them solely for the purpose of the game. The fluidity that exists makes play more relevant to "real life," since one must learn to change and adapt to any given situation. Play allows one to order and then reorder as life experiences, cultural realities, and world circumstances see fit. Play isn't a fringe, irrelevant thing but a core piece of who one is in the world and operates in a way that allows one to make meaning within that world. Therefore, whether one wants it to or not, play is and will always be a cultural expression that acknowledges the many cultural histories and realities into which one is born, raised, and currently lives.

[181] Tanner, *Theories of Culture, 53-56.*

III. Play in the lives of Black Women

We all play. Whether you play Red Rover or spades like Britney, build sand castles at the beach, jump rope, do Double-Dutch, hopscotch, dance, play house, paint, write poetry, tell jokes or do theatre- you play. This might have happened more during childhood than as an adult, but playing was and still is a vital part of life that must be actively engaged, regardless of age or station in life. Play operates as a means of communication and making meaning of the world that begins in early childhood and can and should continue through adulthood. In play there are various cultural understandings and meanings that surpass words or even prove more effective than the words that were often historically prostituted to benefit the white male Western Christian group in power. In this vein play is a cultural expression that functions as way in which black women communicate, seek, and negotiate meaning in the world. Play is a space where black women have taken and named themselves for themselves and tell a new empowered narrative through language and embodied expression. Instead of play being seen as useless and frivolous, it can now be seen as a vehicle for representing one's culture, providing agency and renewal, a means of communication and creating meaning, a means of resisting oppression and injustice, and a medium of moral and identity formation.

Reflecting on play in the lives of black women brings to mind the work of Zora Neale Hurston. In 1935 Hurston collected and wrote an autoethnographical collection of African American folklore entitled *Mules and Men*. In this work she explores a number of stories that she had collected on trips to New Orleans and to Eatonville and Polk County, Florida. She combines her own revisiting of her childhood and the stories she was told with various traditions and stories that came up in her anthropological work during her visits.

Through her work, one is given a glimpse into the lives of the southern negro in the late 1930s.

In these stories one finds counter environments and learning spaces of play, growth and freedom. One encounters joy and hope during times of hurt and oppression. This was done by these southern folks finding and losing themselves, acting and believing 'as if,' and entering a world of possibilities.[182] They did this through dance, song, cooking and eating, games, joking, and storytelling, to name a few. It was in this ludic learning space that black people shared traditions and life lessons that were learned, and personal, theological, and moral issues were discussed. Let us review an excerpt from her work here:

> Know how it happened? After God got thru makin' de world and de varmints and de folks, he made up a great big bundle and let it down in de middle of de road. It laid dere for thousands of years, then Old Missus said to Ole Massa: "Go pick up dat box, Ah want to see whut's in it." Ole Massa looks at debox and it look so heavy dat he says to de nigger, "Go fetch me dat big ole box out dere in de road." De nigger been stumblin' over de box a long time so he tell his wife:
>
> "'Oman, go git dat box." So de nigger 'oman she runned to git de box. She says:
>
> "Ah always lak to open up a big box 'cause there's nearly always something good in great big boxes." So she run and grabbed a-hold of de box and opened it up and it was full of hard work.
>
> Dat's de reason de sister in black works harder than any body else in de world. De white man tells de nigger to work and he takes and tells his wife.[183]

Looking at this selection one can see the story that was told about why black women work so hard: "Dat's de reason de sister in black works harder than any body else in de world.

[182] Courtney Goto, *The Grace of Playing: Pedagogies for Leaning Into God's New Creation* (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2016) 16.
[183] Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008) 74.

De white man tells de nigger to work and he takes and tells his wife."[184] While this might appear as comical and humorous, there is tragic truth in there as well. There is a truth about white men making slaves and black men doing the work. There is a truth about black women having to work hardest of all. There is a truth about black and white men succeeding and living off of the work of black women. While they are playing through humor and fun in the telling of the stories, they are laced with personal, theological, and moral truths that are passed down. Through playing they expressed their cultural histories and realities while building relationships and trust with one another as they were able to express there true self and experience the true self of the other.

It was through documenting, living and playing with these southern folks that Hurston found herself in a counter environment were she was able to think beyond the norms of anthropology, autobiography, folklore, and ethnography and imagined something that was not yet created; autoethnography. She was able to break boundaries and literary genres with this work, which combined anthropology and ethnography with folklore in a way that created a counter environment within itself, allowing its readers to go beyond, to enter a world of possibilities, to act and believe as if, and to find and lose themselves in the stories & the experiences of play.

Playing was one of the ways in which black people not only survived, but also thrived during a time when they were not seen as equals or even full human beings. Playing was one medium that added to the creation of the counter environment that allowed them to de-center oppression and racism and re-center themselves, their families, their stories

[184] Hurston. *Mules and Men*, 74.

and their joy and hope. Playing was a medium in which they were able to develop and live into their 'true self.'

A. Play as Healing and Rejuvenating

Play in the lives of black women functions as a medium for healing and rejuvenating. Theologian Stephanie Mitchem would consider play a type of folk healing and part of one's African cognitive orientation[185] or connection that African American's have regardless of location. No matter where a person is transplanted, they are still able to play. Mitchem gives eight reasons for keeping and continuing this folk healing of illness. Her eight reasons are:

> (1) social marginalization of black Americans, which makes access to institutional medicine difficult; (2) cultural hybridity, which incorporates the remedies of other cultures; (3) racism in institutional medicine, which denies the humanity of black bodies; (4) availability of practices based on the availability of materials in new environments; (5) development of commerce, which aids in making ingredients available if they cannot be found naturally; (6) pragmatism, which seeks the most direct line to healing; (7) efficacy, which offers a proven track record to those seeking cures; and (8) and a holistic approach, which understands the whole person, not just isolated symptoms in line with black cultural conceptualizations of wellness.[186]

Seeing that many of these reasons still ring true today black women continue to need folk healings and medicines such as play.

For many black women, playful games and activities such as hand games, spades, Double-Dutch, cooking, and kitchen table conversations were and still are places of

[185] Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *African American Folk Healing* (New York: New York University Press, 2007) 34.
[186] Mitchem, *African American Folk Healing*, 71-2.

agency, ethical development, and renewal. These forms of play have and continue to provide black women and girls with the space to explore their gender, identity, who they are as women, and to be refreshed in this awareness. As a cultural expression and an embodied aesthetic experience of making meaning and communicating, play functions as therapeutic, healing and a point of release and renewal for many people, especially black women. Play has and can continue to operate in a way that allows black women to be renewed, experience healing and be rejuvenated during times of joy and celebration, as well as times of oppression and struggle.

IV. What is Womanism?

As we explore the reality of black women and play with a womanist understanding, it becomes critical to know and comprehend exactly what womanism is. Womanism is often compared or likened to feminism. However, womanism emerged because second-wave feminism did not adequately address or include the experiences and histories of black women or other minoritized women. Womanism is a theory and movement of practice that celebrates and affirms the personhood, experience, and culture of black women. In celebrating black women, womanism seeks to disrupt systems in place that silence and oppress not only black women's voices and experiences, but also all oppressed voices and experiences. Womanism realizes and uplifts the intersectional realities of class, race and gender in which black women – like many others - live and making meaning. This term is attributed to poet and author Alice Walker. In her book *In Search of our Mother's Garden,* Walker offers a four-part definition of what a womanist is:

> 1. From womanish (Opp. Of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "you acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "you trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. *Serious*.
>
> 2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter) and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white beige, and black?" Ans.: "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time."
>
> 3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves moon. Loves the spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*.
>
> 4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.[187]

This definition has functioned as a springboard from which black women ethicists, exegetes, theologians, and scholars jump and continue to revisit. The first part of Walker's definition focuses on a womanist being "a black feminist or feminist of color" who is "acting grown up," "in charge" and "serious."[188] This reflects the determination, leadership, focus, and perseverance that many black women possess because of their historical realities and experiences. This is the section with which most people are familiar, but when the aforementioned characteristics are applied to the behavior or reactions of

[187] Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1983) xi-xii.
[188] Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, xi.

many black women, these women are often labeled as bossy and/or bitchy. Many of the stereotypes from chapter one such as mammy and sapphire come to mind here. This happens most often when these attributes of being "in charge" and "serious" are seen on their own, and are not contextually placed within the experience and history of the lives of black women.

The second part of Walker's definition sheds light on a womanist being a lover of women and women's strength as well as being "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female."[189] This part highlights black women's aspiration for community and deep desire for universal wholeness and flourishing regardless of difference. The third part focuses on what womanists love. It mentions how a womanist loves dancing and music, the moon and the spirit…"Regardless."[190] An important piece of this third part is the notion of a womanist loving their very being, culture, and the many ways they express their culture such as dancing and music. Dancing and being musical are forms of play along with spades, Double-Dutch and hand games. Here Walker is stating that part of being a womanist is to have love for the body and love for play.

The fourth part of Walker's definition provides insight into the relationship of womanist to feminist, which is analogous to the relationship that purple has to lavender. Womanism is not a completely different entity than feminism, but is a more inclusive umbrella that looks at race, class, and gender. Feminism is a part of womanism just as purple is a vivid and dynamic color that encompasses lavender. This definition gave birth to womanist theology, womanist ethics, and a womanist theological anthropology.

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[189] Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens,* xi.
[190] Ibid.

A. Womanist Theology

"Womanist theology is critical reflection upon black women's place in the world that God has created and takes seriously black women's experience as human beings who are made in the image of God."[191] Given the history and reality of black women, it is important to remember and be reminded that black women were not an accident or a mistake, but created in God's very image and likeness.[192] This means that black women are not the stereotypes or roles forced upon them by the fantastic hegemonic imagination[193] or the dominant group in power. This means that black women are not the over sexualized and objectified objects that they are often made out to be. This means that black women are not property but beautiful and beloved creations of God.

Womanist theology developed from black women theologians and ethicists taking a closer look at Walker's work. Walker's description became a springboard for womanist pioneers to jump into the pool of womanism and create subsequent waves of womanism in various fields that continue to travel and transfer energy among other rising womanists. These waves were created by trailblazing womanist scholars; Katie G. Cannon, Jacquelyn Grant, and Delores Williams. These three women all created critical awakenings through their scholarship and theological discourse such as; Katie G. Cannon's *Black Womanist Ethics*, Jacquelyn Grant's *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus*, and Delores Williams *Sisters in the Wilderness*. All these womanist scholars take on the definition of

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[191] Linda E. Thomas, *"Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm." Cross Currents*, vol. 48, no. 4, Summer 1998.
[192] Gen. 1:26. NRSV
[193] Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 21.

womanism and what it means for the academy and our society at large. Theologian Delores Williams's states:

> womanist theology emerged from what many of us saw as characteristic of black women's experiences of relation, loss, gain, faith, hope, celebration and defiance…womanist theology attempts to help black women see, affirm and have confidence in the importance of their experience and faith for determining the character of the Christian religion in the African-American community. Womanist theology challenges all oppressive forces impeding black women's struggle for survival and for the development of a positive, productive quality of life conducive to women's and the family's freedom and well-being. Womanist theology opposes all oppression based on race, sex, class, sexual preference, physical disability and caste.[194]

Williams states that womanism and womanist theology push back against oppression in all forms that might hinder one's freedom and flourishing. She also notes that womanist theology gives black women an arena in and through which to share their stories, experiences and culture and to have those stories and experiences affirmed and lifted up as important. I propose that part of the story, experience and culture of black women are "womanish"[195] modes of play that began in childhood and continued into adulthood. Womanish modes of play connote the various forms, ways, mediums, and types of play particular, but not exclusive, to the life and experience of black girls and women. These modes of play include Double-Dutch, spades, dancing, cooking, singing, back porch conversations, painting and many others. Many black girls and women do not see play as frivolous or irresponsible, but as way of communicating, making meaning, enacting agency, making decisions, moral and ethical formation, expressing self, experiencing joy,

[194] Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993) xiv.
[195] From Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens,* xi-xii. Meaning opp. of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.

and a place of healing, renewal, rejuvenation, and more importantly they revel in play's function as liberative.

Some black women scholars feel the need to hide or diminish their desire to play and their actual play in order to be taken seriously and to be seen as significant in the academy. This is an example of black women attempting to jump the one white, male, western, Christian rope that has been made so very difficult to jump. Some black women are forced to deny or hide a part of who they are in order to become a member of this white, Western, Christian, male club - the academy. Many black women played as girls and that play has continued well into their lives as adults, but they are unable to openly express this play in their professional lives because of the stigma that playing is juvenile, not serious, and pointless. Due to the race, gender, and class oppression or the triple jeopardy that black women experience in our society, often the need to be taken seriously supersedes the need to share or highlight one's playful embodied cultural expressions.

However, it is play that can operate as a source of renewal, be life-giving, and offer hope and joy in the midst of racism and sexism within the academy. Play has been and continues to be an aspect of life that gives agency and a space of exploration for black girls during childhood that continues into adulthood. Womanish modes of play are ways in which black women communicate, seek and negotiate meaning in the world, specifically in the areas of ethical/moral, cognitive and affective development. Play operates as a means of exploring identity as a black girl becoming a black woman who is made in the image of God. Play offers black girls and black women the freedom and courage to explore what it means to be both black and a woman. Growing, becoming and changing are not easy, and play allows the space for the necessary grace before, during, and after this transitional time.

B. Womanist Ethics

Womanist theology strives to take the fabrics of life and faith and to holistically weave them together.[196] As lives are intricate and filled with ethical and moral dilemmas, one cannot have or define a womanist theology without also explaining womanist ethics and moral formation. As theologian Stephanie Mitchem rightly asserts, "womanist theology must be grounded by womanist ethics. Such grounding is dearly bought because it is based on the complexities of lived experiences."[197] When the lived experiences of persons and communities are involved there must be an ethical and moral foundation provided.

Womanist ethics "seeks to determine how to eradicate oppressive social structures that limit and circumscribe the agency of African American women."[198] Based on Alice Walker's definition of womanism and the works of the womanist trailblazers, scholar activist and ethicist Dr. Stacey Floyd-Thomas lays out the four tenets of womanist ethics. In her book *Mining the Motherlode* Floyd-Thomas describes radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, redemptive self-love, and critical engagement as the four tenets of womanist ethics.

She names part one of Walker's definition of womanists being serious, responsible, audacious, and in charge as "radical subjectivity."[199] Radical subjectivity is a womanist's "ability to grasp the radically subjective dimension of the 'nature vs. nurture' dialectic

[196] Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002) xi.
[197] Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology*, 58.
[198] Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*: *Methods in Womanist Ethics* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2006) 7.
[199] Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*: *Methods in Womanist Ethics,* 8.

inherent within black women's moral formation."[200] The dimension she mentions is among black women who nurture and mentor young black girls on how to navigate in a world where they must deal with racism, classism, and sexism - a triple jeopardy. This mentoring and maturing allows each woman involved to "claim her agency and have a subjective view of the world in which she is not a victim of circumstance, but rather is a responsible, serious, and in-charge woman."[201] Radical subjectivism is being aware of systems of oppression and choosing to enact one's agency by pushing back against that dominate cultural system. This pushing back can be through advocacy, legislation, protesting, educating other black women about these oppressive systems, and mentoring them through the process by showing them the rope and how they might best jump it.

In the various types of womanish modes of play black girls are introduced to the notion of nature vs. nurture[202] through mediums such as playing house, among other types of play. Through these games, black women and girls learn how their gender and their color often affect what roles that others think they should be playing in the world. When a young black girl is encouraged by her playmates to be the nanny while playing house, this effects how she views herself as a black girl. When a young black girl is encouraged, by her older black sister to be a business woman, this too effects how she views herself as a black girl, growing into a black woman. During these moments of play, black women and girls are

[200] Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*: *Methods in Womanist Ethics,* 8.
[201] Ibid.
[202] A societal argument that looks at a person's behavior as either a developmental predisposition based on one's DNA (nature) or due to life experiences and environment (nurture.) For example there is an argument that women behavior in a more caring and loving manner because they are biologically women not because they were raised in a particular environment. Womanists, however, would believe the latter, that one's experiences and environment influence their behavior.

afforded the agency to be aware of what is happening and to decide for themselves what roles they will and will not play as they become in-charge women.

The second part of Walker's definition concentrates on the wholeness of all people, which Floyd-Thomas names as "traditional communalism."[203] Traditional communalism focuses on not just caring or writing about one's own desires and concerns, but about the life of one's entire community as a whole. In this area, womanist's work "encompasses not only the personal story of individual women; it also takes into account the various gifts, identities, and concerns of black people in general in order to use every resource available to strengthen the community as a whole."[204] Within womanism, it is the beloved black community along with culture and history that keep womanist scholars supported and hold them accountable at the same time. For, this community often supports, prays for, uplifts, and sends care packages to black women while in school, in the military or just figuring out life. And once she becomes an educator, doctor, actress, or beautician she gives back to the community that supported, mentored and nurtured her to get to the place she is in. The black woman knows that she does not do her work in a vacuum, but with, for, and to her community.

During play, black women and girls are introduced to this notion of community. Just imagine a neighborhood game of tag. As folks gather from the neighborhood, there are different hues and genders that engage in play together. If someone falls they are helped up to continue playing. If someone comes late, there is always space for him or her to join in. Through this mode of play, black women and girls learn the importance of inclusion

[203] Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 9.
[204] Ibid.

and the necessity to work together for the survival of everyone. From play, black women learn traditional communalism and promote the success of everyone, regardless of their gender, class, sexuality, ability level, or color.

"Redemptive self love" forms the third part of Walker's definition, which concentrates on what womanist love.[205] Floyd-Thomas' third tenet of redemptive self-love explicates Walker's third notion in terms of "demystifying the perceptions of black women's bodies, ways, and love as vile."[206] Floyd-Thomas lifts up the idea of redeeming black women's love for themselves and others. Given the historical realities and life experiences of black women, this tenet holds particularly important. Being an enslaved surrogate sexual object does not cultivate a wealth of self-love, body-love, or self-worth. This tenet reminds black women of their worth and their dignity as beings created in the image and likeness of God. This tenet does not stereotype the body as dangerous, criminal or as an object for sexual or pornographic misuse; rather the black body was intentionally created by God as beautiful, powerful, and life-giving. This emphasis on the goodness and beauty of the body is a necessity for a group with a history of sexual oppression and abuse.

It is also important to accentuate the role that play has in this self-love and self-worth. Play provides space for agency and enacting self-love and self-worth through embodied expressions that can engender renewal and rejuvenation. So often black women's bodies are seen as vile or over sexualized, which may affect their own self worth and love. However, in playing, black girls and women learn and are reminded how to love themselves and see themselves as absolutely beautiful and powerful. Just imagine playing

[205] Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 9.
[206] Ibid.

dress-up or dancing, just imagine exercising, or making time for one's self. These are forms of play that allow black women to be reminded of their beautiful and life-giving blackness. Play is a reminder that bodies matter. In a society that values certain body types and skin colors over others, there is a need to be reminded of the beauty and strength of the black woman's body, mind and spirit.

Floyd-Thomas concludes the four womanist tenets with "critical engagement."[207] She mentions how womanism calls black women to "critically engage their world at the intersection of their oppression." It is more than sexism alone that affects black women. It is the black women's obligation to work tirelessly for "freedom, justice, and equality"[208] through critical engagement. Play offers the space to engage the world critically. When playing mock trial, debate, or trivia, one has to think critically about the problems of the world such as freedom, justice, and equality. These types of role-play and improvisation allow space for black women and girls to think about critical issues that they might not normally think about and to engage these issues in new and significant ways from the perspective of a black woman. These kinds of play prepare black girls and women in a lower stakes environment to fight for what is fair and just. This preparation gives them confidence so that when the stakes are much higher, they continue to push back against all systems of oppression in order to fight for the freedom and justice for all persons.

Alice Walker's definition of womanism along with Delores Williams, Jacquelyn Grant and Katie Cannon, womanist pioneers, paved the way for Floyd-Thomas' womanist tenets. These tenets are areas in which women identifying as womanist find themselves

[207] Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode,* 10.
[208] Ibid., 11.

engaging in and wrestling with their implementation. While these are not the only areas of engagement, they are the four that have been clearly spelled out by Floyd-Thomas. Play functions a one way in which black women and girls can signify and make meaning of their moral and ethical formation in the world. Play offers black women and girls the freedom to explore the areas of radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, redemptive self-love, and critical engagement. Womanish modes of play such as playing house, a community game of tag, sisterly make-overs, dancing and debating are only a few of the modes of play in which black women and girls can engage to explore these tenets, both in their lives and in the world. One area in which these four tenets of womanist ethics are lived out is through play. Play allows space for black women and girls to see their world anew, to learn and appreciate the community from which they come, to love themselves no matter what, and to be engaged as equals with freedom in the world around them.

C. Womanist Theological Anthropology

Theology professors Cheryl Kirk-Duggan and Andrea White, together offer a definition of a womanist theological anthropology as follows:

> Womanist theological anthropology involves an in-depth study of humanity amid the interconnectedness of biological, linguistic, and sociocultural systems as black women experience holistic life aware of oppressive systems of classism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ageism. [209] Womanist theological anthropology reflects on how moral agency is negotiated and identity constructed when autonomy and self-definition cannot be taken for granted; how human agency, relationships and actions

[209] Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, "Signifying Love and Embodied Relationality: Toward a Womanist Theological Anthropology." *Womanist and Black Feminist Responses to Tyler Perry's Productions*. Ed. LeRhonda S. Manigault-Bryant, Tamura A Lomax, and Carol B. Duncan, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 43.

> are read theologically; and what it means to say that identity and the imago Dei are understood as theological and ethical tasks.[210]

Black women not only understand the notion of double consciousness, but they live it every single day. Black women are continually aware of the contradiction of the oppressive systems that are indeed part of their lived experience. Black women's desire and need for survival and liberation through Jesus Christ arise from the constant oppressive reality of being a black woman.

During times of oppression, both current and in the past, black women found hope in Jesus and knowing that he suffers with them and yet rises to the hope of new life for all. Womanist theological anthropology takes a critical look at this reality and assesses all oppressive systems along with their personal and communal values. Womanist theological anthropology views personal and communal values as one and the same, since relationships and community engender agency, change, transformation and flourishing.[211] One is not separate from the community in which they are formed, supported, and challenged. They are also not only striving for their own liberation but for the liberation of their community and for all of God's children. [212]

Womanist theological anthropology understands and highlights the multiplicity of one's identity and formation in this world. Intersectionality[213] of identity and being is key

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[210] Andrea C. White. Course description for her "Theological Anthropology in Womanist Thought" class at Union Theological Seminary, Fall 2016.
[211] Kirk-Duggan, "Signifying Love and Embodied Relationality." 43.
[212] Ibid.
[213] This is the cross-pollination of categories such as race, class, gender, and sexuality. The over lapping of these categories often creates even more disadvantage and discrimination than what might be had with identifying with just one of these categories. This is what is meant with the metaphor of purple to lavender when thinking about womanism and feminism. While feminism looks as gender, womanism looks as the interconnectedness of gender, race, and class in regard to black women.

for womanist theology anthropology. It welcomes and lifts up the various intersections in ways of knowing, being, and embodied expression. This includes mediums such as: music, food, poetry, dance and play. These creative means engender vulnerability while valuing differences that can be salvific and liberating.[214]Womanist theological anthropology values the entirety of a person in body, mind, and spirit. Striving for justice, liberation, and empowerment, womanist theological anthropology celebrates all persons, especially the marginalized, as created in the image and likeness of God, and worth value, dignity, and freedom.[215]

> Womanist theology is the positive affirmation of the gifts, which God has given black women in the U.S.A. It is, within theological discourse, an emergent voice which advocates a holistic God-talk for all the oppressed. Though centered in the African American woman's reality and story, it also embraces and stands in solidarity with all suppressed subjects. In a word, womanist theology is a theory and practice of inclusivity, accenting gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and ecology. Because of its inclusive methodology and conceptual framework, womanist theology exemplifies reconstructed knowledge beyond the monovocal concerns of black (male) and (white) feminist theologies.[216]

Womanist theologian Linda Thomas argues that by attending carefully to the lives and experiences of black women, we are able to see God-given gifts in the midst of the injustices of racial and sexist oppression. This womanist perspective or rope brings awareness to broken systems while actively advocating for agency, change, and an inclusive solidarity that will bring freedom for all those who are suppressed and disinherited. Womanist thinking, knowing, and being does not only see black women but

[214] Kirk-Duggan, "Signifying Love and Embodied Relationality." 52.
[215] Ibid., 54-5.
[216]Linda E. Thomas, *"Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm," Cross Currents*, vol. 48, no. 4, Summer 1998.

a community of marginalized persons of various colors, sexual orientations, and genders that deserve freedom and justice as creations of a just God.[217] This type of theology, ethics and theological anthropology allow us all to view others and themselves in a more holistic way as beings with multiple identities made in the image of God. Not just the mind is made in God's image and likeness, but the heart, body, and entirety of a person.

Womanism hears and sees those who have gone unheard and unseen.

Womanism honors the stories of those who have been overlooked and forgotten. Womanism advocates for a radical inclusivity of communities to push back against injustice and to fight oppressive systems for the freedom of all of God's children.

V. Black Women's Bodies Matter

In understanding womanism and the importance of the bodymind in play, one must discuss the body. The experience of black women's bodies is colored by the history of slavery in the United States. The black woman's body has been pillaged and seen as evil, often being viewed as chattel and a commodity as described in the Chapter One. Even today the bodies of black women continue to be coerced, abused and hyper sexualized.[218] The experiences that are mentioned in Sheena's diary entry in the beginning of this chapter are not new or solitary instances, but mere samples of actual experiences of many black women. Many black women experience racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia and other types of oppression against their bodies and personhood. As theologian Cheryl Townsend

[217] Thomas, *"Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm,* 43.
[218] Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (New York: Orbis Books, 2005) 65.

Gilkes states, "for African-American women, the pain of simply being embodied-coping with others' responses to our hair, skin, and size-can overshadow the strengths and options. The pathetic dimension too often obscures the heroic possibilities."[219] The very being of black women brings unsolicited responses, attacks, and degradation. Being black is an obstacle by itself in the academy. Being a woman is an obstacle by itself in the academy. By merely being a black woman, one already begins jumping this rope with two huge obstacles. These realities are reasons why the rope of womanism is needed to be critical of and push back against these oppressive and unjust systems.

Womanism, womanist theology, womanist ethics, and womanist theological anthropology affirm the beauty of black woman, black women's experiences, black women's bodies, and also affirms black women as made in the image and likeness of God, and therefore holding dignity and honor. Womanism, womanist theology, womanist ethics, and womanist theological anthropology affirm a particular marginalized group, and by doing so highlight the personhood of all people by bringing awareness, recognition and dismantling all systems of oppression that exist within the interconnectedness of the lives of people.

The history of the enslavement of black women is a reality. The need to resist the fantastic hegemonic imagination that runs rampant in our country is also a reality. Play as a cultural expression provides the space to actively resist by and becomes a medium for meaning making, identity formation and a medium for renewal and rejuvenation. In addition, play as an embodied aesthetic expression uniquely offers a physical, bodily

[219] Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, *If It Wasn't for the Women* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001) 188.

release to persons who have been marginalized, oppressed, and subjugate. Play as an embodied aesthetic experience and cultural expression offers hope for minds and bodies that have been through so much suffering and oppression. Theologian Phillis Isabella Shepard states that "our [black women] bodies, rather than experienced as good, pleasurable, and integral to who we are-to ourselves but also to each other-have become the scapegoats for internalized black body ambivalence."[220] This black body ambivalence has come as a result of years of enslavement, abuse, objectification, and coercion. These bodies that have taken so much and need a release and play offers that. These bodies that have encountered experiences of abuse, pain, and suffering need to be free and play as embodied aesthetic experience and cultural expression allows an avenue for that freedom. This play can operate in a way that gives people freedom to be who they are and to experience themselves, for themselves. This kind of ontological space to be oneself and to come to know for oneself is necessary for reclaiming one's bruised and hurt body, for self-love, for body-love, for self-worth and for encountering God in our bodiliness.

This section puts theologian M. Shawn Copeland's five basic convictions about the body in conversation with Eboni Marshall Turman's analysis of 'in the flesh' and what happens to the flesh during these embodied aesthetic experiences. In this light the body becomes a medium for doing the work of God that will lead one to envisioning the reign of God's justice through renunciation, inclusivity, and responsibility with theologian Kelly Brown Douglas. This includes using play as an embodied aesthetic experience and cultural

[220] Phillis Isabella Sheppard, *Self, Culture, and Others in Womanist Practical Theology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 48.

expression to combat oppression, take back one's body and to fight for the justice of God and the liberation of all people.

As beings created in God's image, black women, and all people for that matter, are called by God to make moral decisions to fight and struggle for the justice of God which is "a restoration of the sacred dignity of all people."[221] All bodies are sacred and holy as they are created in *imago Dei* and this includes the bodies of black women. The bodies of black women can become sites of resistance against oppression and injustice, especially in this North American context that still experiences the legacy of racism and slavery. Play as an embodied aesthetic experience and cultural expression is one space where black women can begin to create ontological[222] and/free space[223] and make one's body a playful site of resistance against the oppression and injustices. This resistance has renewed urgency in the United States today.

A. In the Flesh

The black woman's body has been coerced, abused and hyper sexualized, often being viewed as chattel and a commodity. During the antebellum period, black women served as surrogates while fighting for survival and quality of life. Black women had two kinds of social roles of surrogacy that affected them negatively: "coerced surrogacy and voluntary surrogacy."[224] The coerced surrogacy "was a condition in which people and systems more powerful than black people forced black women to function in roles that

[221] Douglas, *Stand Your Ground,* 197.
[222] Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 18.
[223] Ibid., 153.
[224] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 60.

ordinarily would have been filled by someone else."[225] Black women were forced into roles of sexually pleasuring white slave owners, and playing the role of mammies. Their bodies, lives, and decisions were not their own. Following emancipation, the black women had to uplift their black men through voluntary surrogacy. This type of surrogacy came from the social pressures involved "to choose to substitute their energy and power for male energy and power in the area of farm labor in postbellum America."[226] Women's bodies and lives still continued not to be their own. The experiences of these women went unseen as if all the suffering and pain they experienced was invisible. [227]

Slavery stripped away the joy of embodied aesthetic experience and movement as well as the dignity, honor, and bodies of many people, including black women. Theologian M. Shawn Copeland speaks of this passionately: "Slavery rendered black women's bodies objects of property, of production, of reproduction, of sexual violence." In the centuries since then, "black female bodies have continually been defiled, used, and discarded, quite literally, as refuse—simply because they are female and black, black and female."[228] Just turn on the television to view how Hollywood portrays black women as mistresses, sluts, bitches, amazing professionals with their personal lives in tatters, and harlots incapable of healthy sexual and familial relationships. Black women are still often viewed, as we learn from the experiences of Sheena, as mouthy, overly complicated, suspicious, dysfunctional, and as sexual or bodily objects of desire, pleasure, and entertainment. Black women are still viewed as incomplete and segmented beings with a brilliant mind here, an impressive

[225] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* 60.
[226] Ibid.,, 73.
[227] Ibid., 149.
[228] Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom,* 1 and 29.

vertical jump there, great eyes, and big hair. But rarely are black women seen as complete persons. Because they are black and female, black women are dismembered, exploited and often not viewed as whole human beings.

However, one can begin to address systematic oppression by not only looking at the body 'in the flesh' but by also looking at what happens to the flesh of the body as well. This begins by first looking at the incarnation of God in Jesus. This is the enfleshment of God in Jesus Christ, who was both divine and human. Womanist ethicist Eboni Marshall Turman explains that when one looks at the incarnation one must not only remember what "occurs en sarki, 'in the flesh,' but also what occurs kata sarka, or 'according to the flesh.'"[229] The incarnation is what happened *in* the flesh of Jesus Christ. God became flesh[230] *in* the human body of Jesus Christ. Thereafter all human flesh is made holy, of God. This includes the flesh of the marginalized and oppressed bodies. For black women the moving of the Holy Spirit is what is happening *in* the flesh of each person.

However, thankfully, the story of the body does not end there with the birthing but continues on to the dying and rising of Christ. The passion and resurrection is what happened *to* Jesus's body. His body was abused and beaten to death, just as many black women's bodies were and continue to be beaten and abused. These are things that happened *to* the body. These happenings to the body were outward manifestations of oppression. It is only when what happens in the body and what happens to the body are held together that one can begin to understand the importance of the future coming or parousia of Christ and

[229] Eboni Marshall Turman, *Toward a Womanist Ethic of Incarnation: Black Bodies, the Black Church, and the Council of Chalcedon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) 43.
[230] John 1:14.NRSV.

most importantly - hope.[231] We have hope "because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence."[232] The fact that God raised up Jesus' body gives hope now to all beaten bodies just as Jesus' rising also raises up all who have been beaten down to "walk in newness of life."[233] It is in the realization that both what happens *in* and *to* the body matter. That the hope in the birthing, dying, and rising of Jesus – and the justice and freedom he stood for during his public life with his preaching of the reign of God are needed for any attempt of justice, liberation and transformation. Turman asserts that,

> This innovative politics of incarnation, rather the deployment of incarnational logic recognizes the potentiality of black women's bodies as the image of the broken body of Christ in the world, and thus, black women as the very incarnation (enfleshment) of hope.[234]

Here Turman draws a link between what happened to the broken body of Christ and the broken bodies of many black women. She uses incarnational logic to assert that the experiences that happen to the bodies of both Jesus and many black women allow the potential to see parallels in their bodily experiences and thus offer something more for life after being broken and beaten. The birthing, living, dying and rising of Jesus offers hope. A hope that sustains through being beaten and bruised. A hope that endures through oppression, subjugation and surrogacy. A hope that recognizes the beauty and necessity of the body along with the soul. A hope that challenges systems of oppression that would seek to dismember, beat and abused the body. A hope that gives life after.

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[231] Turman, *Toward a Womanist Ethic of Incarnation*, 42.
[232] 2 Cor. 4:14. NRSV.
[233] Romans 6:4. NRSV.
[234] Turman, *Toward a Womanist Ethic of Incarnation*, 49.

B. Bodies as Playful Sites of Resistance

Some may not understand the incarnational logic of Turman nor see the value in the body, especially the bodies of black women. Even today the bodies of black women continue to be coerced, abused and hyper sexualized.[235] Now, there is an addition of black women's bodies being seen as dangerous,[236] guilty,[237] and criminal,[238] merely because of their brown and black hues. Black women and black women's bodies have a long history of not being their own and continue to be places of contention. These continued instances of oppression raise the question of God and where God is in these injustices. Womanism, womanist theology, womanist ethics, and womanist theological anthropology affirm the beauty, experiences, and bodies of black women. While affirming black women they proclaim them as uniquely made in the image of God, and further affirmed by God becoming flesh in Jesus – affirming all flesh - and therefore deserving of dignity and honor. As beings created in God's image and likeness, black women, and all people for that matter, are called by God to make moral decisions to fight and struggle for the justice of God. "God's justice means a restoration of the sacred dignity of all people."[239] The body of black women can become a site of resistance against oppression and injustice. Theologian M. Shawn Copeland offers five basic convictions that must ground this conversation about God and the body. She asserts,

> The body is a site and mediation of divine revelation; that the body shapes human existence as relational and social; that the creativity of the Triune

[235] Douglas, *Stand Your Ground,* 65.
[236] Ibid., 68.
[237] Ibid., 48.
[238] Ibid., 77.
[239] Ibid.,, 197.

> God is manifested in differences of gender, race, and sexuality; that solidarity is a set of body practices; and that the Eucharist orders and transforms our bodies as the body of Christ.[240]

This connection with Christ and the black body are united because, in using the incarnational logic of Turman, "in his suffering and crucifixion, Jesus embraces and proleptically unites the real suffering of black bodies to his own."[241] In solidarity and love with the other, one becomes re-made.[242] In this remaking "we are all transformed in Christ: we are his very own flesh."[243] In thinking about the black body in this way we begin to view the black body as a "site of divine revelation."[244] The body becomes a medium for doing the work of God, including combating oppression and fighting for the justice of God and the liberation of all people.

If we truly adhere to both White's and Kick-Duggan's notions of a theological anthropology that is distinctly womanist, then one must believe that each person was uniquely created by God. This means one must honor and respect each person's difference to bring about an inclusivity that does more than tolerate or overcome but truly respects difference. One must come to a place of unity where everyone is responsible for living out their faith by being moral agents of change and correcting injustices.[245] This involves not only considering what is happening *in* the body but also what happens *to* the body as well.

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[240] Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom,* 2.
[241] Ibid., 5.
[242] Ibid., 83.
[243] Ibid., 82.
[244] Ibid., 24.
[245] Riggs, *Awake, Arise, & Act*, 93-7.

The body is sacred and holy as it is uniquely created in imago Dei. It is with this body that one can begin to create ontological[246]/ free space[247] and make one's body a site of resistance to the oppression and injustices in the world. One can proclaim as poet Letitia Hodge does:

> There's more to me than the human eye can see.
> I'm a woman of purpose and destiny.
>
> A perfect design, I'm special and unique.
> I won't be identified by the parts that make
> up my physique.

It is with the body that black women can practice renouncing, inclusivity, and responsibility by seeing the dignity and humanity in everyone by fighting for liberation and the justice of God in the world.

American activist and filmmaker, Brittany "Bree" Newsome from Charlotte, North Carolina is a prime example of how the body can be a source of social justice for womanist liberation. In the midst of national unrest around the history, nature, racist culture and symbolism of the confederate flag, on June 27, 2015, Brittany made a decision to stand against this injustice. She went to the South Carolina state house grounds, climbed up the flagpole and removed the confederate flag. Brittany used her body as a site of resistance against the racist nature and history that the confederate flag symbolized by removing it from a place of power. She was arrested for this act, and in doing so she stirred more unrest and put pressure on state officials. This act resulted in the confederate flag being

[246] Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom,* 18.
[247] Douglas, *Stand Your Ground,* 153.

permanently removed from the South Carolina state house, as of July 10, 2015. Brittany's body and actions fought for social justice and liberation, and won.

VI. Ludic Learning Space for Transformation

Womanish modes of play form, inform, and transform persons and communities in ways that allows for cognitive and affective growth through the integration of mind, body, and spirit for deep learning and change. These modes of play are beneficial to the church and theological educational classroom as they can provide a counter environment or a ludic learning space. Alice Y. Kolb and David A. Kolb define a ludic learning space as a:

> holistic model that views play and learning as a unified and integral process of human learning and development…where learners achieve deep learning through the integration of intellectual, physical, moral, and spiritual values in a free and safe space that provides the opportunity for individuals to play with their potentials and ultimately commit themselves to learn, develop and grow.[248]

By providing a space where individuals can feel brave to be themselves and play, learn, and grow according to what suits them best, there is freedom. This space is also what Jurgen Moltmann names and Courtney Goto elaborates on as an "experience of a counter-environment, where learners feel, see, and know newness from the living of it."[249] It is this kind of environment that allows for the de-centering of the mind over body dualism that often breeds the fantastic hegemonic imagination and praises the dominant cultural narrative. It re-centers a more holistic and inclusive form of community, awareness, self-

[248] Alice Y Kolb and David A. Kolb, "Learning to Play, Playing to Learn, A Case Study of a Ludic Learning Space," *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 2010, 23:1, 27.
[249] Goto, *The Grace of Playing*, 46 & Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Play* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972.)

love, critical learning and engagement with play being one of many mediums in which to express one's self.

I suggest that play is a cultural expression that functions in a way that allows one to become socialized, make meaning, and form one's identity in the world. It allows one to become more aware of themselves, their community and the world. It is a space that allows not only for agency through imagination and creativity but also for the de-centering of many white Western male norms and the re-centering of a more holistic understanding of humanity that acknowledges that people are intersectional and come to know and be in many ways.

Play is essential to the development of the 'true self' and the flourishing of black women and all persons. Play offers adults the freedom to create deep learning - physically, mentally, spiritually and morally - within themselves and in community. This space offers necessary boundaries and rules, which "hold the space together"[250] so that people can feel, think, reflect and then act. This type of experience stimulates the brain and the body, as persons begin to see this as a way of coming to know who they are and how they are in relationship with each other. Play operates as a means to build trust and relationship through unity and teamwork that engenders questions of ethics and morality of how to play and be in community. It allows one to hold the other lightly in times of suffering and tension as well as times of great joy and celebration. "Holding lightly" is engaging the other with openness to what is happening in the moment with special attention to freely creating in the moment. This must include having care and respect for the other.

[250] Kolb and Kolb, "Learning to Play, Playing to Learn," 45.

Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter, founders of *InterPlay*, an educational philosophy and social movement that draws on improvisation and movement to unlock the wisdom that lies within one's body, introduced this idea of 'holding lightly.' They teach that one can't freely create if one is holding onto something too tightly. In practicing holding lightly and being held lightly one must commit to resisting the temptation to judge, reject, or misuse the other. Everyone needs to both hold and be held lightly. Womanism and a more inclusive and distinctly womanist understanding of play-as a cultural expression and an embodied aesthetic experience that functions as a vehicle for meaning making and communication, do just this. Play provides a counter environment of ludic learning space in which one is held lightly so that they might take the time to explore their own subjectivity and awareness of themselves, their community, the world.

VII. Conclusion

Play is not the answer to all of the problems black women face, but it can aid them in taking back their black bodies from society's claim of ownership. Black women can embrace their bodies as their own, and more significantly, as bodies uniquely created in *imago Dei*, that is, in the image of a free, creative, and wonderful Creator. Through play, black women can begin to see their bodies not only as sites of theological reflection, but resistance as well. This requires the internalization of the words of M. Shawn Copeland, who writes, "The body is the medium through which the person as essential freedom achieves and realizes selfhood through communion with other embodied selves." Through play as an embodied aesthetic experience and cultural expression one is better able to

embrace their beautiful blackness and to encourage others to embrace themselves as beings uniquely created imago Dei as well. As Copeland states so powerfully,

> To declare "black is beautiful!" states a disregarded theological truth, nourishes and restores bruised interiority, prompts memory, encourages discovery and recovery, stimulates creativity and acknowledges and reverences the wholly Other. To assert, "beauty is black" exorcises the "ontological curse" that consigns the black body to the execrable, and claims ontological space: space to be, space to realize one's humanity authentically. I am black and beautiful.[251]

The assertion of one's beauty and body requires space. This space has to be one in which historical realities are known and individuals are free to be themselves and to explore their identities apart from the one's that were placed on them by the dominant group. The theological classroom and churches can begin to provide this ludic learning space that allows for the celebration of all identities, while still recognizing and holding accountable systems of oppression that would prevent certain persons from embracing and expressing their bodily identities.

This embodiment needs an outlet that happens during play. This embodiment allows for reflection not just of what is happening in the body but also what is happening to the body. Reflection and meditation brings awareness of the systems of oppression and engenders a desire to respect difference, strive for an authentic unity and hold each other responsible for living out faith by combating injustices when and wherever they arise. One way of combating injustices is by making the body a site of resistance. One means of engaging the body as a site of resistance is through various modes of play that are embodied aesthetic experiences and cultural experiences, like climbing a flag pole, dancing,

[251] Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 18 and 24.

protesting, singing and using the body in various ways to resist oppressive systems and fight for the liberation of all people.

In the ensuing Chapter, I will take up the task of creating these ludic learning environments using a womanist pedagogy of educating in faith.

CHAPTER FOUR: 20 QUESTIONS:
Toward a Womanist Approach to Educating in Faith

Yolanda was beyond eager to be starting her junior year of college. Although she was a biology major, she was incredibly excited about the Introduction to Womanism elective class offered through the Religious Studies department. She had heard from some of her friends that the class talked about amazing black women and she desperately wanted to learn more about her culture and heritage as a black woman.

Yolanda sat in class eager and excited as the teacher facilitated introductions, walked through the syllabus, and then explained their last assignment. The last assignment was entitled "Tilling the Soil" based on Alice Walker's book In Search of Their Mother's Gardens. This assignment involved asking probing questions, stirring one's soul, and digging deeper into ones family history…tilling the soil of one's life in preparation for planting later. This involved research, experience, interviews, and conversations with ancestors to record the oral history that had been passed down from generation to generation. Yolanda was particularly interested in this assignment as it involved digging into her family tree, which she had never done before. Although her great grandmother had died several years ago, she was excited about talking to her mother, aunts, and grandmother about their lives, experiences, family histories, and their hopes and dreams.

During the course of this assignment Yolanda found herself so immersed in research and stories that she was getting very little sleep at night. She was discovering things about her family that both made her proud and angry. She listened as the family talked about issues of rape, domestic violence, miscarriage and even slavery. Her grandmother told her stories about how her great, great grandmother picked sugar cane in Louisiana. This shocked Yolanda as she had only read and heard about the picking of cotton. There were also stories of great courage and joy in the midst of these various adversities. Yolanda heard stories of love, jumping the room, birthing of the next generation, dancing, spirituals, and how Jesus was always there to help them make a way out of no way. She heard stories of strength and resistance. She never knew how rich her soil was and felt grateful for this assignment on so many levels. Not only was she learning about her family history, but the history of this country. She was also learning about herself. She realized that if she had this strength, courage, and resilience running in her veins, then she too could be just as strong and courageous.

As a result of this assignment Yolanda found herself growing closer to God, spending more time talking with her Grandmother and other elders and taking risks, being courageous and speaking up for herself in new and unexpected ways in all areas of her life. She was beginning to live into what she called her #bestwomanishlife. All empowered by the story of her people, now her story. [252]

Schools are a reflection of the society that created them, Nobody is going to give you the education you need to overthrow them. Nobody is going to teach you your true history, teach you your true heroes, if they know that that knowledge will help set you free.
~Assata Shakur[253]~

Watch for the opportune time, and beware of evil,
and do not be ashamed to be yourself.
For there is a shame that leads to sin,
and there is a shame that is glory and favor.
Do not show partiality, to your own harm,
or deference, to your downfall.
Do not refrain from speaking at the proper moment
and do not hide your wisdom.
For wisdom becomes known through speech,
and education through the words of the tongue.
Never speak against the truth,
but be ashamed of your ignorance.
Sirach 4:20-31 NRSV

[252] This vignette is a composite based on actual experiences of the author, experiences and encounters that were witnessed, as well as anecdotes of other black women, being used with permission. All identifying details have been obscured and the quotations are not verbatim, but summaries of experiences and encounters.
[253] Assata Shakur is a former member of the Black Liberation Army who was convicted of first-degree murder in 1977. In 1979 she escaped prison and fled to Cuba where she was granted political asylum.

I. Let's Talk Pedagogy

How does one create the ludic learning environment, described in the previous chapter, in a church or theological classroom? I believe that one way a person can create these kinds of playful environments is by using a womanist pedagogy of educating in faith. To make educating in faith a practice of freedom and transformation there must be examination of the what, how, and why of the teaching and pedagogical choices. In many ways, for education it all comes down to the mode of teaching; that's what makes the difference- for freedom or for enslavement. This chapter will do this by asking questions of womanism in order to move toward a womanist approach to educating in faith. In doing this I could easily describe the groundbreaking work around freedom of movement, observing with reverent love, and the importance of the teaching environment of Italian physician and educator Maria Montessori. This chapter could also, easily layout the foundational critical pedagogy that highlights the necessity of praxis and critical reflection as a primary way of knowing of Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire. Many, including myself and some of the black women I will name, have been shaped by the work of both of these trailblazing religious educators, both of them steeped in their Christian faith. However, the work of bringing black women's voices, experiences, and scholarship to the forefront, while not always easy, is the task that I have given myself in this dissertation.

While honoring the foundational voices in religious education, I would like to move towards a womanist approach of educating in faith. In order to do this I must go back to the importance of history and heritage in the lives and experience of black women. If you

recall from the first chapter we are all subjects of history. History shapes who we are, how we are seen in the world and how we see/interpret ourselves. As an African American woman with a passion for religious education, I found it appalling that I could count the number of African American women religious educators that I knew on one hand. That did not even include the first black woman in the United States to obtain a doctorate in religious education. Therefore, I knew that I needed to both learn and share about the history of African American women in religious education in order to move towards a true womanist approach to educating in faith. Moreover, as a womanist religious educator, I personally needed to honor and uplift the shoulders that I stand on and the women that have paved the way for me to even be writing this dissertation.

Although there are more than three African American women religious educators, this chapter will focus on the work and pedagogy of Olivia Pearl Stokes, Anne Streaty Wimberly, and bell hooks. I will begin by investigating the work of Olivia Pearl Stokes and her use of experience as a primary source of educating in faith. I will then discuss the work of Anne Streaty Wimberly highlighting her use of the story-linking model to educate in faith. I will them analyze the work of bell hooks and her understanding of education with attention to engagement through presence and community, looking specifically at her work in re-conceptualizing knowledge, linking theory and practice, and incorporating passion and excitement. All such resources will contribute well to a womanist pedagogy.

I will close this chapter by making connections with the work of these black women educators and the work of explicitly womanist educator Katie Cannon in order to move toward a womanist approach to educating in faith. My intent here is to highlight a particular method of teaching to create ludic learning spaces and support my claim that womanish

modes of play can aid in both cognitive and affective well-being and in learning and educating in faith across difference.

II. Experiencing with Olivia Pearl Stokes

Olivia Pearl Stokes was born January 11, 1916 and grew up in Middlesex, North Carolina. Her family valued human dignity and education. Her life revolved around school and church where she became an ordained Baptist minister. She later became director of the Department of Education for the Massachusetts Council of Churches as well as held other leadership roles in the area of church and religious education. She was so moved by the need for religious education and leadership in the church that she obtained a doctorate in religious education from the Columbia University Teachers College in New York in 1952, becoming the first black woman in the United States to accomplish such a feat. She was affected by social events such as: Jim Crow, civil rights, and the social and artistic center of Harlem. These events further cultivated her passion in religious education and specifically for the leadership training and development of young African Americans.

Stokes was deeply shaped by her experiences and discussions while traveling for work and leisure and she wanted to share and instill this in young African Americans through education and teaching. "This passion for teaching inspired her to explore a variety of teaching methods and techniques that would help persons to build relationships with others while increasing their knowledge." [254] "She believed that religious education should

[254] Y.Y. Smith and M.E. Moore, "Olivia Pearl Stokes: A Living Testimony of Faith." B. Keely, Ed. *Faith of Our Foremothers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997) 109.

provide a variety of experiences and include a global focus."[255] With this global focus in mind, her pedagogy involved experience[256] and discussion from travelling, engaging with the black church and black community, and exposing students to African and African American heritage and culture.

Stokes was a huge proponent of travelling. She believed that traveling allowed for global and much needed experiences and discussions that would then shape and mold a person. She stated that, "travel is an effective mode of education…a wonderful way to learn about cultures and people."[257] She believed that when a person can see and experience how another lives and makes meaning in the world they can begin to realize and become aware of their own morals and values and how they live them out. On one of her many trips to Ethiopia she noted a tradition that she witnessed in an Ethiopian church.

> When a child is blessed in the Ethiopian church, the father takes it to the altar, not the mother, and the mother is in a back room looking on…on the side all the fathers take the child to the altar. Today when we're in the midst of this liberated sexual behavior, which is neither love nor good sex, kids are having children and leaving the responsibility to mothers, sometimes to the grandmothers. And it's really a tragic thing, and you would wish that the fathers were called to the altar by the mothers and the church, so that they would assume more responsibility. When people tell me, 'that child doesn't have a father,' I said, 'every child had a father, maybe he's not responsible, but he's a parent.[258]

Here we see a prime example of how experiencing the culture of another brings about an assessment and analyzing of one's own culture and way of doing things. Experiencing

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[255] Smith and Moore, "Olivia Pearl Stokes: A Living Testimony of Faith." B. Keely, Ed. *Faith of Our Foremothers*, 110.
[256] It is important to note that Stokes' focus on experience was heavily influenced by John Dewey's work around experience at what highly praised at the Teacher's College at that time.
[257] Smith and Moore, "Olivia Pearl Stokes: A Living Testimony of Faith," 110.
[258] *Black Women Oral History Project.* Interview with Olivia Pearl Stokes on September 25, 1979. (Schlesinger Library: Radcliffe College, 1981.) 39.

brings about consciousness and awareness. Stokes believed in the need to fully immerse oneself in cultures through experiences and reflection upon the experience, and in conversation whenever possible. Discussion aided in this global focus as it encouraged further and more open dialogue with other cultures, genders, races, etc. [259] She often sought out these intercultural experiences and "gravitated toward international people who were different than all those around in the community where I lived."[260] She felt that these different experiences, discussions, and perspectives made her better and more aware not only of the other but of herself as well and she believed that all students and persons need these experiences and conversations to grow and learn.

As an African American ordained minister, Stokes also saw the necessity to engage the black church in religious education. She felt folks needed to connect and be trained within the black church since it was the center for the black community.

> You see, the black church has always been three things to the black people, and this was true at Stokes Chapel. It was the center for all the social life, and launching all the talent in the congregation, membership, community and receiving people…it was, secondly, the center for the movement for freedom, for civic rights activity. So it was always there that we were political…the third thing the church was…it was the spiritual center you know, in a sense, the black church has been the psychiatrist for black people. They could come, and it was all right to give in to your feelings when you'd been hurt by the white man on the outside.[261]

She believed that religious education would have to engage and stem from the black church as it was clearly the center of social life, activism and civil rights, as well as the spiritual nexus of the black community. The black church was every thing to the black community

[259] Smith and Moore, "Olivia Pearl Stokes: A Living Testimony of Faith." B. Keely, Ed. *Faith of Our Foremothers*, 109.
[260] *Black Women Oral History Project,* Interview with Olivia Pearl Stokes, 48.
[261] Ibid., 11.

and the religious educating needed to come out of and flow back into the black church in order to maintain and engage the black community. She found engaging the black community particularly important because she believed that American materialism was destroying their values and turning black people into "rugged individualists and no longer the community of people, remembering that their heritage was out of Africa, or their heritage was out of the struggle to survive during the days of slavery."[262] So in order to engage the black community she recognized that she had to go through the black church.

In thinking of pedagogy it is always crucial to be aware of context and community. Stokes was very aware of both as she not only engaged black church leaders, but also provided a service that would highlight, teach, and expose students and congregants to African and African American heritage and culture. Honoring this desire for culture and world learning Stokes advocated for Saturday Ethnic school, which was designed as a celebration of the values, art, and contributions of African and African American people.[263] The offerings of the school would be as follows:

> Saturday Ethnic School would offer a curriculum centered on black history, black church history and contemporary issues viewed from the Black perspective. The school's major thrust would be to celebrate the genius of the Black experience, as expressed in the life of the individual, the Black family and the Black Christian community. It would aim to develop creativity within its members, to express their religious insights through drama, music, dance, painting, poetry and creative writing.[264]

Note well the emphasis on play as integral to the curriculum of the Saturday Ethnic School. This was how it would become a resource center for African culture and African American

[262] *Black Women Oral History Project,* Interview with Olivia Pearl Stokes, 31.
[263] Ibid., 105.
[264] *Ibid.,* 107.

heritage for African Americans. This would be a space where black people could learn about their history, culture and themselves. It would promote self-awareness, self-development, and critical consciousness within the black community that was often lacking in religious education.

Stokes believed that pedagogy should broaden the horizons and introduce individuals to new cultures. Stokes affirmed that education "is a holistic process, involving the entire person…experience was essential to the learning process, and she encouraged people to share with one another and to experience others' worlds. In her view, people need to experience the world because education is more than an intellectual exercise."[265] Using Stokes' pedagogy of highlighting experience and discussion through travel, engagement with the black church and the black community, and highlighting African and African American culture and heritage through Saturday Ethnic school, educating in faith becomes a liberating act. This liberating education can begin to "transform structures so that persons become beings for themselves, not instruments manageable by others and by structures to which they have to conform."[266] It acknowledges that black people, while often oppressed, are also persons made in the image and likeness of God and deserving of dignity, worth, and religious education that also speaks to their experience, heritage, and culture. This liberating religious education allows persons of all races and ethnicities to become more aware not only of the importance of back heritage and culture but of other cultures as well. "The world that we're living in, and the world that young people are going to be living in,

[265] *Black Women Oral History Project,* Interview with Olivia Pearl Stokes, 114.
[266] Olivia Pearl Stokes, "Education in the Black Church: Design for Change." John H. Westerhoff, Ed. *Who Are We?: The Quest for a Religious Education (*Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1978) 231.

is going to be multi-cultured, multi-ethnic, and multi-ideological. We've got to have all these ideologies understood, appreciated, respected—pluralism is the word."[267] According to Stokes some of the ways to prepare and make space for this multicultural, multiethnic, and ecumenical world is through traveling in order to experience and reflect upon culture and rituals in order to gain consciousness and become more aware of one's own culture, values and morals. Another way is through involving the black church in order to engage the black community –as a community- to give them opportunities to learn, explore and be exposed to their own history and heritage along with that of those who are different from them as well.

III. Story-Linking with Anne Streaty Wimberly

Anne Streaty Wimberly was born in Anderson, Indiana on June 10, 1936. Her father was a Minister in the Methodist church for thirty years and her mother was a homemaker. Growing up her church worked hard to stand in the gap for the children through helping and equipping them for the future. This preparation included aiding youth, like Wimberly to cultivate and nurture their gifts. This inspired her to nurture gifts in other black youth as the Executive Director of the Youth Hope-Builders Academy at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia where she is currently serving and teaching as their Professor Emerita of Christian Education.

Wimberly was shaped by the nurturing and story sharing that occurred in her childhood, and she has carried this with her into her teaching. The core of her pedagogy to

[267] *Black Women Oral History Project,* Interview with Olivia Pearl Stokes, 62-3.

educate in faith is through story-linking. Story-linking is a narrative based process that invites participants to connect the stories of their lives with the stories of their ancestors in Christian faith and the stories of the scriptures.[268] Wimberly states it more thoroughly,

> participants link with Bible stories/texts by using them as a mirror through which they reflect critically on the liberation and vocation they are seeking or have already found. The purpose of this linkage is to help persons be aware of the liberating activity of God and God's call to vocation- living in the image of Jesus Christ- in both biblical and present times.[269]

This model aids in clarifying vocation and discernment as well as opening a space for individuals to use the Bible stories as mirrors to critically reflect on their own lives, where they have already been liberated and where they need wisdom and guidance for ongoing liberation. It allows for individuals to "recover the central role of story and storytelling for the liberating wisdom and hope-building vocation."[270] This process of story-linking involves four phases: "(1) engaging everyday story, (2) engaging the Christian faith story in the Bible, (3) engaging Christian faith stories from the African American heritage, and (4) engaging in Christian ethical decision making."[271]

Phase one of the story-linking process is engaging people's everyday story. In this phase persons use their personal stories as a lens to look through as one focuses on various aspects of Christian education. Here "the intent is to acknowledge that Christian education leaders/teachers and participants already have an agenda when they come to Christian education. Our stories are the agenda we bring to our study of the Christian faith story in

[268] Anne Streaty Wimberly, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005) xi.
[269] Wimberly, *Soul Stories,* xi.
[270] Ibid., 4.
[271] Ibid., 26.

the Bible and our Christian faith heritage."[272] Everyone has a story and it is important to know that everyone colors his/her learning with their own personal stories and experiences. Each person brings their stories, their personal and cultural identities, social contexts, interpersonal relationships, life events, and life meanings with them to encounter God's word through scripture or the faith stories of their ancestors. As religious educators, one must remember that not only do educators bring all of this, but so does each student and congregant and it is the educator or minister's job to enable and encourage participants to share their own stories and draw them out into their larger community. In fact, the interpretation of the community story is enriched and increased when people deliberately bring their stories to the conversation.

Phase two of the process is engaging the Christian faith story in the Bible. In this phase the personal stories or the case studies that were shared are linked with "the Story of God and the good news of Jesus Christ found in Scripture."[273] This phase requires preparation by the religious educator. The Scripture passage that is going to be used should "already be provided as printed lesson material" in order to "engage the Scripture in the story-linking process."[274] The hope in the preparation is that "the scripture is chosen specifically because it addresses concretely the nature of God's action and provides wisdom the African American Christian seeks in her or his quest for liberation and hope-filled vocation."[275] This gives participants "direct access" to the scripture Story rather than what is mediated or interpreted by the educator or minister. Further, it deeply engages

[272] Wimberly, *Soul Stories,* 27.
[273] Ibid., 30.
[274] Ibid.
[275] Wimberly, *Soul Stories,* 31.

people's own lives with the biblical stories, encouraging them to personally encounter God's word for their lives.

Phase three of the process is engaging Christian faith stories from the African American heritage. This phase is designed to link the faith heritage of African American Christians with the everyday personal life stories. "These stories will include not only stories of African American heroes and heroines well known to most African Americans but also stories of family heroes and heroines…which bring added meaning and depth to the story-linking process."[276] This is extremely important for African Americans as it involves learning about African American history and stories of African Americans that can inspire younger African Americans. It draws upon both tradition and scripture.

The last and fourth phase of the story-linking process is engaging in Christian ethical decision making. This phase is designed to aid persons in investigating liberating options for wise and "hope-building" outcomes.[277] It is in this phase that "persons bring to bear on their life stories ideas, wise insights, and discernment from the first three phases of the story-linking process."[278] It is also in this phase that persons hopefully move toward claiming the Story of God as their own and become more responsible and energized in working to realize both personal and social liberation. The whole pedagogy, hopefully, is to result in concrete "liberating and vocational actions."[279]

[276] Wimberly, *Soul Stories,* 31.
[277] Ibid., 33.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Wimberly, *Soul Stories,* 33.

It is important to note that for this process to take place the educator must "create a nurturing space for story-sharing and compassionate listening."[280] By creating an atmosphere of compassion and openness, people will feel welcome to share and build trust.

IV. Engaging with bell hooks

Gloria Jean Watkins who is better known by her pen name bell hooks was born September 25, 1952 in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. She was educated in both racially segregated and integrated schools. However, she found learning in integrated school very difficult, and sought to change that as an educator. She was influenced by the work of Toni Morrison, who was the focus of her dissertation. Her work lies in the intersections of race, gender, oppression, and issues of class. Her work in education is greatly influenced by Paulo Freire. In her work, she explores ways in which the classroom can become a source of liberation, as opposed to the oppressive hierarchical systemic power authority that it typically is. She advocates for a more engaged pedagogy that involves presence, community, and passion. This engaged pedagogy becomes a practice of freedom when one teaches in such a way that "anyone can learn."[281] In order to do this one must re-conceptualize knowledge and how one knows, link theory and practice, empower students, encourage dialogue, and engage in multicultural education to make teaching and learning boundary crossing and transgressive. hooks' believes that critical consciousness and thinking are essential for one's epistemology.[282] By critical consciousness she meant that

[280] Wimberly, *Soul Stories,* 35.
[281] hooks, *Teaching to Transgress,* 13.
[282] Here hooks' is very influenced by the work of Paulo Freire. She is influenced by Freire's understanding of praxis as a primary way of knowing through action, critical consciousness, and dialogue.

persons must become aware of their own situatedness in the world and begin to reflect and act accordingly. When these ideas, concepts, structures, and one's situatedness within it have all been critically reflected upon become practices, education can become a practice of freedom. It can become a space where students and teachers are able to be honest, build community, dismantle hierarchical systems that seek to oppress and under represent minority cultures. By this kind of theory and practice pedagogy, sense learning and teaching can be liberating.

In investigating hook's engaged pedagogy, I understand engagement through presence and community with passion and excitement not only as a way of knowing, but as a way of re-conceptualizing knowledge altogether. Classrooms are places where hierarchy and power are manifested in ways that hooks wants to dismantle with her engaged pedagogy. In order to combat this power that permeates the classroom "through conceptualization of knowledge and the manner of transmission,"[283] hooks seeks to re-conceptualize knowledge through her pedagogy. Her pedagogy aims to "transgress conventional educational norms and practices, and to create strategies for making the teaching/learning process more dynamic, exciting, and meaningful to students."[284] These practices include re-evaluating curriculum and looking to the body as a way of knowing. She believes that the curriculum should "interrogate White supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist ideologies reflected in the notion of standardized curriculum, pedagogical orientations, and a static view of social reality."[285] This can be changed by encouraging

[283] Florence Namulundah, *bell hooks' Engaged Pedagogy: A Transgressive Education for Critical Consciousness* (London: Bergin & Garvey, 1998) 95.
[284] Namulundah, *bell hooks' Engaged Pedagogy,* 100.
[285] Ibid., 99.

critical consciousness [286] among students and educators, recognizing more cultural diversity and reflecting this diversity within the curriculum, which includes the addition of feminist, womanist, and other emancipatory voices.

Another key component in re-conceptualizing knowledge is looking at the wisdom of the body and allowing space for touch and movement in the classroom. "To make a place for touch in the classroom is to resist the closing of our ways of knowing that take us beyond words and demand we listen to the body and know ourselves as flesh."[287] While touch is quite powerful, it is also important to note that in this day and age there should be guidelines for this that do not invade privacy, become exploitive, or move to a place of sexual misconduct. As a black woman hooks' recalls the history of the experience of suffering for black people and the knowledge that was gained through the body. She affirms that, "it is a way of knowing that is often expressed through the body, what it knows, what has been deeply inscribed on it through experience. This complexity of experience can rarely be voiced and named from a distance."[288] Education praises intellectual knowledge over bodily wisdom, but here hooks brings the body back to the educational space and allows it to take its place as a way of knowing in the world.

In diversifying and changing the concept of knowledge, hooks understands the importance of linking the practice to a foundational theory. For hooks "theory provides venue for analyzing experience (practice)."[289] As an educator who values cultural studies, hooks finds linking theory and practice necessary in creating new space. She affirms that,

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[286] There must be acknowledgement that this phrase and hooks' understanding of it comes from Brazilian educator Paulo Freire.
[287] bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom (*New York: Routledge, 2010) 157.
[288] hooks, *Teaching to Transgress,* 91.
[289] Namulundah, *bell hooks' Engaged Pedagogy,* 102.

"cultural studies must combine theory and practice in order to affirm and demonstrate pedagogical practices engaged in creating a new language, rupturing disciplinary boundaries, decentering authority, and rewriting the institutional and discursive borderlands…for reasserting the relationship between agency, power, and struggle."[290] It is only when the practice links with theory that new space can be made for important issues, such as multiculturalism, interculturalism, and teaching and learning across difference.

Making space for cultural pluralism not only empowers students who are marginalized but also "helps develop collaboration and solidarity among students in school."[291] Multicultural education does more than just incorporate various cultures within class syllabi. "Multicultural education addresses issues of cultural alienation, resistance to school learning, and subsequently low academic performance in minority students."[292] It takes critical consciousness on the part of educators to realize and become aware of where one and one's classroom is situated within this system. Critical thinking and practice about multicultural education forces educators and institutions to be aware of how these issues of alienation, being under represented in school, and feeling powerless affect and shape various interactions or lack of interactions in the classroom.[293] This involves a great deal of risk and vulnerability that not only demands critical consciousness, but also incites critical consciousness in students.[294] When educators are able "to incorporate other voices and acknowledge each student's presence and to integrate subordinated cultural histories," then multicultural education is happening and the classroom becomes a more welcoming

[290] hooks, *Teaching to Transgress,* 129.
[291] Namulundah, *bell hooks' Engaged Pedagogy,* 119.
[292] Ibid., 86.
[293] Ibid., 119.
[294] Ibid., 122.

and holistic place that invites honesty and openness.[295] When students feel welcome and heard they become empowered.

Student empowerment relies on the student teacher relationship, safe space[296] and classroom community. hooks affirms that the relationship between the student and the teacher must be one of mutuality[297] that aids in creating learning communities that "avoid the trap of coercive hierarchies in empowering and respecting the contribution of both students and teachers while honoring individual differences."[298] In honoring each student's presence, voice and lived experience, this engaged pedagogy goes "beyond the mere sharing of information to a more holistic involvement with students."[299] This honoring and valuing of students presence builds community through "creating a sense that there is shared commitment and a common good that binds us."[300] This type of experience brings about solidarity and a beloved community that allows for the educator to embrace, incorporate, and share their passion and excitement with the community that has been created.

When educators are able to dismantle the compartmentalization that is promoted by this mind/body spit in education one is able to "recover ourselves, our feelings, our passion,"[301] both inside and outside the classroom. This sharing of ones passion and excitement makes the classroom a more dynamic, energetic, fun place where

[295] Namulundah, *bell hooks' Engaged Pedagogy,* 122.
[296] hooks, *Teaching to Transgress,* 39.
[297] Namulundah, *bell hooks' Engaged Pedagogy,* 83.
[298] Ibid., 106.
[299] Ibid., 114.
[300] hooks, *Teaching to Transgress,* 40.
[301] Namulundah, *bell hooks' Engaged Pedagogy,* 126.

transformation and change become possible.[302] I would add play into this area as it is essential in building learning communities and in sharing and receiving stories that "open our minds and hearts."[303] Adding play and ones passion and excitement is a way of linking theory to practice to the religious educational experience that not only honors the cognitive but also the affective ways of knowing that are essential for a more holistic education – so demanded by the very nature of Christian faith.

While, there are many others I could have utilized in this chapter, I focus on these three black women because their models and ideas of story-linking, community, mutuality, excitement, travel, experience, and disrupting oppressive and unjust systems coincide with that of womanism. It is with these concepts, models and ideas that I move toward a womanist approach to educating in faith.

V. Toward a Womanist Pedagogy for Educating in Faith

In moving toward a womanist pedagogy of educating in faith, one must take the history and heritage of Olivia Pearl Stokes' use of experience, along with Anne Streaty Wimberly's story-linking model, and bell hook's engaged pedagogy to heart. The experiences and methods of these black women, and the other black women who are not named explicitly in this dissertation, must be considered. The work of these black women must be considered because a womanist pedagogy must emerge from the actual experiences and understandings of black women and be likely to engage and empower this resource of knowing. While the hope is that the pedagogy will aid in learning and teaching

[302] Namulundah, *bell hooks' Engaged Pedagogy,* 125.
[303] hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking,* 51-2.

for persons of all races, ethnicities, genders, etc., what makes womanist pedagogy, womanist, is that it emerges distinctly from the experience of struggle, oppression, and survival of black women. Since it does emerge from the real life experiences of survival of black women it has a way of challenging and deconstructing conventional, oppressive and patriarchal theologies, ideologies and systems that are in place and in turn offers up more holistic, engaged, embodied, and inclusive educational methods and practices- especially for educating in faith. [304]

Womanist educator and ethicist, Katie Cannon describes womanist pedagogy as:

> …the process by which we bring this kind of knowing about African American women into relation with a justice-praxis for members of our species and the wider environment in which we are situated in order to resist conditions that thwart life, arriving at new understandings of our doing, knowing, and being…Our womanist work is to draw on the rugged endurance of Black folks in America who outwit, outmaneuver, and outscheme social systems and structures that maim and stifle mental, emotional, and spiritual growth.[305]

In other words not only does a womanist pedagogy need to emerge from a black woman's experience, but it must also make space for the various ways in which black women come to know, to be, and to take part in making meaning and living in the world- their cultural reality. This must involved disrupting oppressive systems that do not make space for the creative and embodied realities of not just black women, but all people. In order to do this effectively Cannon offers two methods. The first method is metalogues or, what Cannon

[304] Katie Geneva Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community.* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1995) 137.
[305] Cannon, *Katie's Canon,* 135 & 141.

refers to as concentric circles,[306] and the second is doing the "dance of redemption."[307] Both methods must go hand in hand, just as doing Double-Dutch requires both ropes to turn at the same time. While this provides another level of difficultly it is necessary and should be disruptive and liberating work.

The first method of metalogues/concentric circles involves the interconnecting of disciplines. As Cannon defines it, metalogues are "highly organized or specialized forms of logic, designating new but related disciplines that can deal critically with the nature, structure, or behavior of the original discourse, talk, performance, or recital."[308] In other words these metalogues are ways of thinking that critically analyze not only a problematic issue or behavior, but the structures and systems in place that have allowed, made space for, and/or encouraged the problematic issue or behavior. So in order to talk effectively about a womanist pedagogy of educating in faith there must be concentric circles of discourse which reflect not only on the problem but the systems that created it and allowed the problem to persist, as well in order to effectively provide inclusive and disruptive womanist work.

The first wheel in the concentric circles is much like that of the beginning jump rope. It is one filled with traditional European male thinking, language, knowing, and understanding. It is this wheel "whose very language of objective universality masks our existence, forces us to persist in binary oppositions, and looks at Black women as

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[306] Concentric circles are with a common center. Picture a bullseye or target in which there is a center and circles that extend and circle outward.
[307] Katie Canon adapted feminist ethicist Beverly Wildung Harrison's "dance of redemption." This model describes the process of recognizing oppression and forming ethical decisions and moral stances in relation to it.
[308] Cannon, *Katie's Canon,* 136.

superfluous appendages, saddled with odd concerns about race, sex, and class oppression."[309] This is by far the biggest and most well known wheel and the one that must be addressed and have its oppressive and unjust systems and beliefs disrupted. This is along the lines of the work that bell hooks seeks to do in her engaged pedagogy. Within this first wheel is a second wheel that specifically addresses the culture, history, beliefs and experiences of Afro-Christians and members of the Black church community.[310] This is where oral histories, stories, and cultures are passed down among generations to continue the lineage that the dominant European discourse often fails to mention. This would incorporate the story-linking of Anne Streaty Wimberly and experience through travelling of Olivia Pearl Stokes.

The third and smallest wheel inside both of these wheels that must be lifted up in order to have a true womanist pedagogy is the wheel of black women's experiences, texts, oral histories and interpretations, much like Yolanda from the beginning vignette had to do and experience in her class. This would involve engaging black women authors, poets, artists, choreographers, etc. Any pedagogy that seeks to engage a womanist consciousness must begin with the larger circle, but always with a hermeneutics of suspicion and desire for disruption as it moves inward.

While cultivating a pedagogy that uses the concentric circles one must also do the dance of redemption.[311] This dance involves the acknowledgement of oppression and injustice and the formulation of moral and ethical decisions in response to that

[309] Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, 138.
[310] Ibid.
[311] Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, 140.

acknowledgement. This dance is a free style dance with no particular entry point or choreography to follow, just dancing as one acknowledges, discovers, and responds. The parts of the dance are: conscientization, emancipatory historiography, theological resources, norms clarification, strategic options, annunciation and celebration, and re-reflection/strategic action. [312]

Conscientization involves the kind of critical social and historical analysis of causes and consequences throughout history that lead to the realization that what is normative and what is reality are not always synonymous. This can even lead to cognitive dissonance when realizing that the two do not matchup because of various oppressions or injustices. Emancipatory historiography is the critical awareness and reflection upon one's social cultural history with the fantastic hegemonic imagination and the systems that hold various structures of oppression and injustice in place. Theological resources require critical awareness and reflection upon one's theological disciplines and spiritual community and the ways in which these theological resources liberate or hold on to various structures of oppression. Norm clarifications involve critical awareness and asking questions in reference to values, accountability, and where one stands in light of the awareness of various systems of oppression and injustice in the world and in one's community. Strategic options are when one begins to act upon one's critical awareness and reflection by asking how one can utilize their new knowledge and what might the consequences be for utilizing or not utilizing that knowledge to aid in liberating or upholding oppressive structures. Annunciation and celebration is the realization that all persons are relational beings who

[312]Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, 140.

cannot do this work by oneself alone. One must remember that together all persons can celebrate, lament, challenge and turn surviving into thriving. Re-reflection and strategic action is the beginning of this dance again with new insights gained from critical reflection and awareness of new oppressive and unjust systems that are not liberative for everyone.

This dance involves critical thinking and reflection on every aspect of life from the personal to the institutional as well as the historical and looking at the various systems in place that are oppressive. As one begins to understand these new systemic, historic, and personal realizations this dance continues through reflection, learning, and growing.

VI. Asking the Questions

In thinking about the necessary concentric circles and the dance of redemption that womanist pedagogy requires, it is important to ask the appropriate and effective questions. Asking the questions encourages information and critical awareness that can provide further understanding or critical consciousness. These questions are usually the who, what, why, and how of a socio-cultural reality. Since a womanist consciousness and pedagogy are not the dominant narratives and have not traditionally been valued and lifted up, one must research and ask the questions in order to learn, grow and gain understanding. Therefore, this section will ask the who, why, and how of a socio-cultural reality for some womanist scholars. Some of these answers were received from reading and research while others were done in the true womanist fashion of oral tradition through dialogue, conversation, during play, and at kitchen tables.[313] This was done in an attempt to highlight

[313] Many of these conversations took place at the Religious Educators Association Meeting in St. Louis, MO and the American Academy of Religion meeting in Boston, MA in November of 2017.

the experiences, understandings, work, and dancing that are involved in the implementation of a womanist pedagogy by a womanist. While these are specific for some black women scholars, the need to understand and be critically aware of the systems that are in place that have not and continue to fail to uplift this kind of inclusive and holistic pedagogy should be called into question. As one gleans more information, and becomes more aware and critically conscious of a womanist pedagogy of educating in faith it is important to consider these questions from a womanist perspective.

It is important to note two things before proceeding. The first is that none of what follows applies to every single black woman. Black women and womanists are not monoliths and therefore everything that is said may be true for some, but not all black women, womanists, students or faculty. The second important note is that, while women from all institutions were present, I will limit the responses here for only those black women who do not teach or study in one of the 101 Historically Black Colleges or University's in the United States. The latter contests would lead to different experiences and sets of answers to the questions below that are not within the scope of this dissertation.

A. Who Womanists Teach

According to the U.S. Department of Education and its National Center for Education Statistics, in 2015 there were 52% of fulltime faculty and 48% part time faculty at degree-

These conversations involved black women who were tenured faculty, faculty on their way to tenure, newly hired faculty, doctoral students, and doctoral candidates. No an attempt to protect those who have requested anonymity these answers will be based on actual experiences of the author, experiences and encounters that were witnessed, as well as anecdotes of other black women, being used with permission. All identifying details have been obscured and the quotations are not verbatim, but summaries of experiences and encounters.

granting postsecondary institutions.[314] Among the 52% of fulltime faculty, black women and black men represented only 3%.[315] However, they are teaching to an undergraduate full and part time student body at a public four year institution, which is 60% white.[316] This often means that a portion of black women are teaching to white students who do not look like them, share their culture, understand their embodied ways of knowing and being, or often know their history. In addition, at some institutions the black woman professor may be the only black, the only woman, or the only black woman on faculty and thus students and faculty can find themselves challenged by the foreign black woman's body itself. It creates a cultural shock or cognitive dissonance for some that is difficult to understand and teach or learn through. This cognitive dissonance can come out in many forms. Some black women professors have experienced extreme disrespect and disregard in the classroom due to the cultural shock of their black bodies, experiences, and teaching styles. Some students and other faculty repeatedly demand validation of their credentials to verify their intellectual capacity to teach. However, this same validation is not demanded of their white male colleagues.

A portion of black women theological educators have also experienced backlash from some students and faculty for teaching and being ordained. Some students and faculty feel that women should not be in the pulpit or in the theological classroom. Black, women,

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[314] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2017). *The Condition of Education 2017* (NCES 2017-144), Characteristics of Postsecondary Faculty. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_csc.asp.
[315] Ibid.
[316] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2016, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016,* table 306.50.

and especially Black women faculty experience these realities at every staff meeting, walking across campus, in student meetings and interactions, and every class they teach. This is the reality of being the 3% of African American teachers, teaching to the 60% white student body.

B. What Womanists Teach

In using womanist pedagogy it is imperative to use the concentric circles and do the dance of redemption in order to teach the dominant narrative and the narrative of the marginalized as well. Womanists teach about the systems in place that have created such a dichotomy in order to call out injustice while also exposing students to other ideas, experiences, and realities. Womanists seek to cultivate character and enlarge ones capacity in the areas of scholarship, leadership, inclusion, and citizenship and therefore offer and teach a range of courses.[317] These courses seek to disrupt the dominant narrative while developing imagination, identity formation and intellectual rigor and courage.

Womanists teach the curriculum while explaining and highlighting the hidden curriculum that undergirds it. Womanists not only teach the material but also about the systems that have made this particular material superior. In doing this womanists are not just teachers but political activists who seek to highlight, disrupt, and deconstruct the systems of injustice in place that preference one dominant narrative, when there are in fact many.

[317] Stacey Floyd-Thomas, "Cultivating a Pedagogy of Possibility: A Womanist Christian Social Ethicist's Teaching Philosophy." Teaching Philosophy while Associate Professor of Ethics and Director of Black Church Studies at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas.

C. Why Womanists Teach

Womanists teach for many reasons. Among those reasons, for those who teach Christian education or theology, is to be a part of the transformation of people into disciples of Jesus and catalysts and agents of change and social transformation toward justice and liberation in the world. Womanists teach in order to empower, educate, and liberate. Womanists teach to help people understand the important link between praxis and theory. The link that helps one understand "why people do what they do in order to figure out what ought to be done." [318]

Womanists teach in order to engage the person and their lived realities and experiences so that what they learn can be applicable for their life. Womanists seek to meet students where they are while offering hope for the future as students see that education goes beyond the classroom and lasts long after the classroom experience has taken place. Womanists teach because they often seek to bring social justice to the people who view justice as impossible and unattainable. Womanists teach because the world needs to hear and learn from another narrative.

D. How Womanists Teach

How womanists educate in faith is one of the most distinctive aspects about this dissertation and what I will carry into the next chapter. In order for womanists to educate in faith they must do Double-Dutch. They must first learn how to jump the one white, male,

[318] Floyd-Thomas, "Cultivating a Pedagogy of Possibility," Texas.

Christian rope and then do the difficult work of incorporating a womanist rope, in addition to that first rope.

Womanist can do this Double-Dutch by using the concentric circles and doing the dance of redemption. Womanists must strategize in order to meet the demands of both "critical reflection and accountability whether it be personal, social, or institutional."[319] Womanists navigate both affirming all of who students are and what they bring into the classroom space while also encouraging and raising questions about human existence, moral responsibility, freedom of choice, character, and conscientization.

To add an additional layer, womanist do all of this while being the 3% of African American faculty teaching to a 60% white student body. Womanist do this while being unapologetically who they are regardless of those telling them to be more Anglo Saxon. They persist, regardless of students and faculty that continuously demand their credentials. They persist, regardless of those that objectify them and make them simply a black female body. Womanists educate in faith from a place of experience and lived reality that often pushes back against who they are and their engaged and embodied epistemologies and pedagogies, and yet they persist. They persist because of the black women that have come before them. They persist because of the black women that are yet to come. They persist because they must…they must continue to tell another narrative and teach a pedagogy of love, embodiment, inclusion, hope, possibility, and liberation for all beings made in the image and likeness of God – which is everyone.

[319] Floyd-Thomas, "Cultivating a Pedagogy of Possibility," Texas.

VII. Conclusion

Black women have a unique lived experience, perspective, and understanding of the world. Because of the struggle and oppression that many black women have experienced they have gained a wealth of wisdom in how to educate the entire person in faith. Black women know struggle and the power of their own fortitude and faith and hope in Jesus Christ to make a way out of no way. Black women understand what it feels like to be objectified and to have their minds and bodies separated. Therefore, they recognize that they must bridge this dualism to educate the whole person in faith. This includes listening and linking stories to the biblical story and that of the ancestors as Anne Streaty Wimberly suggests. This includes traveling and engaging in experiences within church communities to better understand cultures and practices that Olivia Pearl Stokes points us to. This includes the combination of theory and practice, excitement, inclusion of all, and disrupting systems of oppression and injustice that bell hooks pushes us towards. This includes the concentric circles and dance of redemption that Katie G. Cannon outlines for us. Together these concepts, models, tools, and ideas move us toward a womanist pedagogy of educating in faith. A womanist pedagogy that takes seriously the black women's experience, wisdom, voice, creativity and imagination while striving for the betterment and wholeness of all people as beings made in the image and likeness of God.

When moving toward this womanist pedagogy it is essential to begin with the critical consciousness of the educator to realize their own situatedness in the classroom, the church, the institution, and the world at large. This involves critical reflection on one's self, one's history, one's socio-cultural context, and one's biases in order to assess how they implicitly and explicitly bring all of who they are into the classroom space. Critical

reflection includes reflection on all that one brings as well as where that is located within the world and what or who is causing things to be the way they are. This might mean challenging and pushing back against hierarchical, racist, patriarchal systems that preference the educator as the expert without a sense of mutuality, multi-cultural experiences, or shared commitment with students in the classroom space. Once the educator is able to engage in critical reflection and praxis, then the students can be empowered to do the same.

Engaging community and culture is another essential component toward a womanist pedagogy. Engaging the community and culture invites and uplifts multiple ways of knowing and being in the world. This moves past just the work of the mind to a more holistic education that involves the whole person, including the body. Another component that is necessary is using passion, excitement and movement, such as play to invite more ways of knowing and being. This passion and play function in such a way that engender students to bring all of who they are into the space and feel welcome. Another essential component toward a womanist pedagogy is the prepared environment. It is essential that the educator consider learning styles, learning spaces and how they might value the presence and experience of each student while sharing a commitment to the classroom through solidarity and community. This can be done by preparing the environment in a radically hospitable and brave manner that allows for persons to think, dialogue, reflect and act critically while engaging with community and culture as they use their passion, excitement, and play to not only see each other, but to be in community with one another.

Over time all of this has come together beautifully through the combination of the concentric circles and the dance of redemption. These push and challenge one to see things

beyond what is there. It encourages one to disrupt and to ask questions. It calls one to dance with God, themselves, and the other in new ways that bring about understanding, care, forgiveness, accountability, history, and hope.

When these theories that have been critically reflected on become practices, education can become a practice of freedom. It can become a space where students and teachers are able to be honest, build community, dismantle hierarchical systems that seek to oppress and under represent minority cultures. Through such pedagogy learning can be liberating.

I believe that theological education has the unique opportunity to be prophetic in highlighting the educative potential of womanist pedagogy and womanish modes of play as they encompass the whole person. This can bring about transformation and liberation for all persons involved. While these pedagogical tools and methods are not the only one's, they are creative one's that can aid in making educating in faith a practice of freedom and transformation through teaching and learning across difference. A womanist pedagogy or approach invites, not just womanists, but all people to begin to do Double-Dutch…together.

In the following chapter I will deepen and give practical examples of the ways in which womanist pedagogy can be a way of teaching to transgress, to liberate, and to free. This involves making the classroom a ludic learning space where womanish modes of play can be done in order to aid in both cognitive and affective well-being and in learning and teaching across difference**.**

CHAPTER FIVE: FOLLOW THE LEADER:
Playful Ideas for Implementing Womanist Pedagogy

Granny: Alright now Janae, get up on that stepper. Today we are making Peach cobbler!
Janae: Ouuu, I love your peach cobbler granny. It is so delicious, especially when its' hot next to cold vanilla ice cream!
Granny: (in a whisper) You wanna know my secret?
Janae: (in a whisper looking over her shoulder) Yes ma'am.
Granny: You gotta put a little of yourself into it. You know your love, your joy, your hurt, your pain…all of you. Then you gotta share it with everyone who wants a piece.
Janae: I can do that Granny.
Granny: We are gonna see. Alright, did you put your apron on, pull your hair back, and wash your hands?
Janae: Yes, yes, and yes.
Granny: Alright then, grab that pan over there, the sugar, the flour, the baking powder, the milk, a couple sticks of butter, cinnamon and those peaches I cut and peeled yesterday. And remember to organize them the way I taught you, separating the dry things from the wet things.
Janae: Yes ma'am. I got everything.
Granny: Ok great. Let's get started.
Janae: Ok, where is the recipe so I can follow it.
Granny: Oh no baby, you don't get your peach cobbler to taste like mine by following a strict recipe. You gotta use what you know and mix and move what you feel. You gotta dance, baby
Janae: Ok…I can try.
Granny: So, what goes first?
Janae: Well I know how important a good foundation is so I want to start making the crust first, right?
Granny: Right indeed. You have to start with a foundation and build from there. If you don't have a solid foundation then everything else has no where to go, it just falls through the cracks, seeps out, or makes everything a big 'ole soggy mess. Just like in life…if you don't have a strong foundation and know who you are you become a big 'ole soggy mess.
Janae: Yes ma'am. I need the flour, sugar, baking powder, and the milk to mix together and make the foundation. How did making peach cobbler become about life?
Granny: Yes those are the right ingredients. Everything is a reflection of life, especially cooking. I learned many life lessons while cooking.

Janae: Really? Like what? Oh, how much of each thing do I put in?
Granny: Just start pouring and then be sure your even things out and taste as you go along. Which is also like life. You never know how much of anything you will have or receive, but you sometimes have to make do with what you have and figure it out along the way. Here, let me put on some music for you to help you dance with the ingredients.
Janae: Ok Granny, I will try. That kinda reminds me of the project I was working on for class. We had to create something, but we didn't have much and didn't have the extra money to go out and buy new things. So, I just made do with what we had around the house. I used the toilet paper rolls and everything. It turned out nice and I got an A.
Granny: See, I told you cooking teaches you lessons. I call it Kitchen Livin'.
Janae: Ha, that's nice Granny. Hey Granny, who is that on the radio. I don't know who they are but they have a nice voice.
Granny: That's Nina Simone baby.
Janae: Oh Granny she just cursed. What is she so upset about?
Granny: Oh Mississippi Goddam!
Janae: Granny you just cursed!
Granny: I can curse 'cause I'm the Granny, but don't let me hear you say that, it's a grown up word. But why was she upset? Well you know how they tell you about civil rights in school? About how they set dogs on people that look like us, put some in jail for trying to eat where the white folks eat and just did mean awful things to people that look like us just because of the color of our skin
Janae: yes ma'am. All we wanted was equality like Dr. King's dream right?
Granny: Yes baby, that's right. But the fight to get there was a hard one and she is upset about how hard the fight is, how we keep getting beat and killed, and all the craziness we have to go through. That is what she is singing about.
Janae: Granny did people ever say or do things to you because of your skin color.
Granny: Yes, baby they did. I been called names, spit on, pushed, kicked, and many other things too
Janae: But Granny, you are light skinned. I thought they just did those things to dark skinned people. What did you do to those people?
Granny: Oh honey it didn't matter if you were dark or light, if you had a drop of color in your skin you were not white and not considered a full

person. What did I do…nothing. I just had to keep marching and keep on sitting and keep on keeping on.
Janae: but why? How? Where did you find the strength? I don't know if I could have done it. I get so mad when I see the stuff on the news and when people say things at school…I just wanna go punch them in the face.
Granny: Oh I know that feeling, I do. But I knew what I was doing was bigger than me. I did it for you baby!
Janae: For me? But I didn't even exist yet.
Granny: But I had hope and faith baby. I prayed for you and for a better world and a better way for you. So that you wouldn't have to get spit on, kicked, and called names[320]*…*

Being alive & being a woman & being colored is a metaphysical dilemma/ I haven't conquered yet/ do you see the point my spirit is too ancient to understand the separation of soul & gender/ my love is too delicate to have thrown back on my face
My love is too delicate to have thrown back on my face
My love is too beautiful to have thrown back on my face
My love is too sanctified to have thrown back on my face
My love is too magic to have thrown back on my face
My love is too Saturday nite to have thrown back on my face
My love is too complicated to have thrown back on my face
My love is too music to have thrown back on my face.[321]
~Ntozake Shange~

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do,
do everything for the glory of God.
Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God.
Just as I try to please everyone in everything I do,
not seeking my own advantage, but that of many,
so that they may be saved."
1 Corinthians 10: 31-33 NRSV

[320] This vignette is a composite based on actual experiences of the author, experiences and encounters that were witnessed, as well as anecdotes of other black women, being used with permission. All identifying details have been obscured and the quotations are not verbatim, but summaries of experiences and encounters.
[321] Ntozake Shange, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow is Enuf: A Choreopoem.* (New York: MacMillian, 1977) 46-7.

I. Moving Toward the Practice of Womanist Pedagogy

In this chapter I take up the task of naming a few of these playful pedagogies and practices that are informed by womanist thought and consciousness. I have termed them "womanish modes of play." In sharing these womanish modes of play I am offering ideas and approaches for practical implementation within the theological classroom and Christian education in churches alike. I use my definition of play and the womanist concepts and theories of those black women mentioned in the last chapter, who have come before me, of experience, story-linking, engagement through presence and community, passion and excitement, the dance of redemption, critical consciousness, and concentric circles. All of these can provide womanish modes of play that can bring about transformation, connection, liberation, and fun for all involved. Womanish modes of play can create ludic learning spaces and aid in teaching for liberation and transformation.

Theological education has an opportunity to place a spotlight on the educative potential of womanish play as an embodiment of varied ways of knowing and being, and a celebration of cultural diversity, radical inclusivity, and liberative passion and excitement. Through womanist thought, values and convictions of the wholeness of a person and a community are uplifted. It is through bringing these womanish modes of play into a theological or church curriculum that theologians and ministers can educate the whole person in the love and grace of the divine and the other, while cultivating community and caring for one's cognitive and affective well-being.

This section lays out the practical application of the work of womanism to theological and religious education and suggests modes of play, practices and ideas to be used in the classroom and in the church to not only aid in identity formation and meaning

making for black women, but for all people. I will draw upon the four sections of Alice Walkers' definition of womanism, Stacy Floyd-Thomas's womanist ethical tenets, my definition of play and then provide pedagogical practices that would reflect each part. In each section I begin with the words of both Walker and Floyd-Thomas. I then provide my interpretation of these words, offering ways, ideas and practices that I have termed womanish modes of play that involve conscious questioning, critical remembering, creative and collaborative imagining, and emancipatory hope that are embodied aesthetic experiences and cultural expressions. All of this is in order to begin to embrace self, embody God's love, engage in culture and community and enkindle the world. I describe each item in detail and offer a brief example of some. For theological and church educators, this chapter can best be utilized by taking time to learn from and begin to understand womanist history, culture and values along with my inclusive definition of play and then consider what might fit within one's own context adjusting accordingly.

Womanish modes of play are not the only form of pedagogy but a resource and methodology that is set within a broader approach by which one also teaches the Christian story as well as bring people along by using play as a tool to tell their own stories and re-storying. In each of these four parts the Christian story is necessary to move toward liberation. Persons must utilize the Bible texts and stories to aid in their critical reflection and just actions. In doing so persons become better able to understand God's liberating activity in the world through scripture and live out God's call for justice and liberation through their own lives and vocational calls.

It is important to note that these modes of play, while specific to some African American women's culture and experiences are also practiced by various other cultures.

While other cultures may practice some of these modes of play, they are also distinct to womanist's consciousness, ethics, culture and experiences. I intend to highlight the importance of these modes of play, particularly from the perspective and experience of black women and the benefits they can provide to all persons who engage in them.

Since this work is intended to aid persons from all cultures, not just African American women, it is crucial to be aware of and avoid cultural appropriation when engaging this work. When I say cultural appropriation I am referring to the point when borrowing or gleaning from another culture is not cited or referenced properly and/or borrowing becomes exploitive of that particular culture. In order to aid in this one should take time to sit with, try to understand and respect the words, experiences, bodies, and play of that particular culture, and then modify within one's own particular context and culture, being sure to give credit to the original idea or source.

II. Embrace Self

> From womanish (Opp. Of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "you acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "you trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. *Serious*.[322]
>
> Like a girl child, a womanist is radical because she claims her agency and has a subjective view of the world in which she is not a victim of circumstance, but rather is a responsible, serious, and in-charge woman. Thus, the intergenerational lesson of radical subjectivity is to wrest one's

[322] Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens,* xi-xii.

> sense of identity out of the hold of hegemonic normativity, as womanist ethicists show in their work can be done.[323]

Here is one part of the womanist definition and one ethical tenet of womanism from Alice Walker and Stacey Floyd-Thomas. Note the focus on the self and the actions, behaviors and agency of self. The beginning step and nucleus of womanish modes of play is self-identity and claiming or re-claiming ones true self and agency in the world. It is imperative that the person begins with the authentic self. One must look within and evaluate, assess, deliberately question, and honestly examine and critique one's motives, intentions and biases to better understand where one currently is in order to learn, grow and make the necessary changes to move forward. Every person is a product of their environment and has been conditioned in various ways by society- hence why play is a cultural expression whether one wants it to be or not. Thus, everyone has some type of bias that needs to be acknowledged, questioned, and worked through. People must start inward in order to move outward into the world in an authentic way that is real and true to who they are, their context, their culture, and their community. While this is focusing on the personal self, this works similarly within a community. Together a community must evaluate, assess, and deliberately question where they are in order to plan and anticipate how and where they might grow and move into the future.

In examining oneself it is crucial to look at and critically remember one's history, heritage, the happenings and persons that have led to one's being in the space and place they are in. This includes asking hard consciousness-raising questions while looking at

[323] Stacey Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics.* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2006), 8.

one's genealogy, heritage and ancestry in order to know and understand one's lineage and hereditary patterns. For a womanist, acknowledgement that one is here because of those who have come before her and because of God is crucial. Therefore, in order for one to truly know one's self, one must know and understand their own history, culture and the shoulder's upon which they stand, while also placing their own story and history within the Christian story. This applies similarly within a community. There must be research and a genealogy made from within the community. There needs to be critical remembering and conscious questioning about how and why the community came to be. Who was involved and why? Who had the power, who did not, and why? Who made the decisions and why? Who was left on the margins and why? Where is God moving in the midst?

These practices of embracing self involve going deeper and beyond what is already known to what is unknown and possibly even hidden or masked and asking what, why, how, when, where, and who was involved, all in the interest of coming into personal agency and freedom. These practices can be, but are not limited to creating a family/church tree, 20 questions, and storytelling. An educator or minister can utilize anyone of these to bring about introspection, self-discovery and examination for individuals and for a community while having embodied aesthetic experiences and cultural expressions. These womanish modes of play invite participants to get to know themselves, those who have formed them into the person(s) they are and God while having fun, inviting humor, and allowing for improvisation. This includes both the good and the bad experiences. The educator or minister can invite participants to ask themselves and their family social consciousness questions to dig deeper. Questions such as: Where did that person come from and why? What was happening in that geographic area during the time of their birth, life, and death?

How did that person get there? What were the circumstances and why were those the particular circumstances? Did they have a spouse or partner and how was that person chosen? What might a typical day in the life of that person look like? What might that person have done that lead to you being here today? Who was "in charge" of their lives, making decision; who benefitted, who suffered? Where was God in all of this?

These practices and questions bring persons face to face with who they are and how they got to be who they are in order to embrace themselves more fully and to re-story their identity as needed in an exciting, inclusive, and inviting way. One cannot begin to re-story or to tell a new and more life-giving narrative if they do not first know the dominant narrative that they are currently told and why. Once they know the defining narrative and its origins they can become more empowered to embrace themselves, their history, their narrative and enact agency to re-story what is needed to change for their own emancipation through play.

These modes of play can serve as fun and illuminating reminders of what each person brings with them into every space they enter and how others might be doing the same. These practices highlight the importance of knowing self in order to practice inclusivity and to reach out to the other. Just as we are all aware that we bring our stories with us, we need to make that same space for the stories of the other. This might include making space for the need to re-story and begin to tell a new narrative that is more life-giving and emancipatory for self and others.

A. Essentials and Suggestions

Each womanish mode of play stems from a womanist consciousness, culture and experience. They allow for participants to remember, question, and claim their identity while exploring their heritage, their history, and the Christian story in order to further enrich who they are and their communities. They are also embodied aesthetic experiences and cultural expressions that are fun and require imagination while inviting possibility. I have discovered that many participants have not done a genealogy or explored their heritage further than their immediate grandparents, which makes these practices very revelatory. They also bring into focus some various traits or behaviors that might have been passed down through generations along with history or events that have been intentionally forgotten or misremembered along the way.

As has been mentioned previously, there is a dominant Christian narrative that is told, one in which women and persons of color are inferior and not valuable or important. This narrative must be critically reflected on in light of the just actions of Jesus Christ, in order to push back against this dominant narrative and live into justice and liberation. What embracing the self through conscious questioning and critical remembering does is allows one to see oneself and this dominant narrative more objectively. When this happens one is able to untether their identity from the one forced or placed upon them. It allows one to resist and push back against the fantastic hegemonic imagination that continues a dominant patriarchal narrative forward.

These self-embracing womanish modes of play bring about conscientization and emancipatory historiography, essential parts of the dance of redemption. These practices encourage critical reflection and questioning about this country's history, the Christian

story and the realization and awareness that what is normative and what is true are not one and the same. When acknowledging these differences one begins to acknowledge the various oppressions and injustices that are taking place. When people know more about where they have come from, they are better able to know and understand themselves and therefore claim their identity and agency in real, fun and liberating ways personally and within their community. The following practices are examples of practical playful ways in which persons can enact their agency as they come to a realization about the history of this country and their families/communities. They do this while also being agents of change in using creative and collaborative imagination to push forward a new narrative of liberation and hope.

The important key to these modes of play is for not only the educator or minister to ask participants conscious questions and to critically remember, but to encourage participants to ask these things of each other. These questions and remembering should invite reflection about the social influences and dominant narratives that may have led to their ancestors or community being demeaned or discriminated against. This should be followed by a large conversation about those particular social influence and dominant narratives, how they came into existence and why. This also means the Biblical text and scriptures are needed for reflection in order to aid in the understanding of God's liberating activity in the word and God's desire for liberation for all persons. The combination of reading scripture and asking conscious questions playfully are vital so that persons can come to a place of conscientization where their histories can be emancipating.

Pedagogically these self-embracing modes of play invite persons to start from within and critically reflect on their own story in light of the Christian story. Then one can

come to new awareness or realization about this country, God, their families and communities, and themselves. This will allow one a radically objective lens in which to see the world and one's self in order to enact their own God-given agency in playful and liberative ways. This agency will empower one to bring awareness and understanding into their own communities, churches, and classrooms. These playful practices teach radical objectivity and social consciousness that rejects the normative and dominant narrative, not only with history, but also with self and the other. It allows for a more neutral ground on which to meet the other and begin to learn across difference so that one can see the other as they are and not as one might have previously thought or desired them to be.

Each of these practices should begin with and be informed by the Christian story. Starting with one of the numerous genealogies in the Bible[324] and allowing participants to read it and understand the levels of connection aid in the placing of themselves within the larger Christian narrative while also aiding in understanding the importance of their own rich and deep familial roots. This can happen in the beginning of the practice, in the middle, or at the end. The important thing to note is that all participants know and understand their own narrative as a part of God's larger narrative.

[324] Genesis chapter 5 & 11 provide robust genealogies

A1. Family/Church tree

A family/church tree is similar to a genogram.[325] This practice can be as fun and playful as the participants make it. Participants can use brown paper and cut out trees to represent their family/church tree trunk. Then they can use other colors to make leaves to represent various people within their family tree. They can use yarn as branches to connect the leaves. This can be an in class activity or a take home project.

This can also be done in the form of concentric circles that participants make themselves. In the center circle they should list things about themselves to raise more self-awareness and claim their identity. In the second circle they should list those who have been closest to them and have helped them on their life journey and any formative experiences, both the good and the bad experiences should be mentioned. The third circle is for those who may not have played a central role, but still played an important part in the person's life journey. As some experiences or persons mentioned might bring up past trauma or difficult experiences the educator or minister should be sure to cultivate a space of confidentiality and trust and provide a list of local counseling resources, should persons need them.

Within the African American community the family tree is treasured. A family tree is what links families together and tells their true narrative, not the one

[325] A genogram is a detailed visual representation of a family tree. This representation provides information on the various relationships among persons in the family such as marriage/partnership and children that are produced from the marriage/partnership. This is helpful in allowing persons to noticed things that may be hereditary or happen across relationships. For more information and helpful images go to www.genopro.com/genogram/.

that is often placed or forced upon them by those in power. The family tree is often the true account, when paperwork was lost or non-existent from the days of enslavement. During a time when blacks were not even seen as full human beings, a family tree was one of the ways in which African Americans resisted and told their narrative anyway. It was how they conveyed they many ways that God aided them in making a way out of no way. This family tree can often be found in the beginning of the family Bible that has been passed down from generation to generation along with faith and trust in God's mercy, grace and liberating power.

A2. 20 Questions

20 questions is a game and practice in which one person is the answerer and one or more persons can be the questioner(s). The questioners chose a theme, idea or object. All the questioners take turns asking questions about that particular theme, idea, or object which can be answered simply and quickly. The educator or minister can invite participants to do this in groups around a particular theme of their lives or their heritage.

In the asking of multiple questions persons must think critically and creatively in order to answer the questions. This will require work on the part of both the answerer and the questioner(s.) The questioners must ask thought provoking questions while the answerer must be prepared to dig deeper and think critically in order to answer the questions. These questions can be: "do you know your parents," "who are your grandparents," "what is your racial and ethnic make-up," etc.

This playful practice of asking 20 questions, for black girls and women, was one of the ways in which they were considered to be being womanish or grown-up, by learning more information then they might have needed to know- also known as being nosey. This practice can be revelatory about one's history and heritage, and what one does and does not know, when that is the theme of the questions. This playful practice invites persons to think more critically and reflect more spontaneously.

A3. Story-telling

Story-telling is the practice of sharing stories or narratives. This should be done with theatrics, improvisation, comedy, and/or various props. Narratives are often shared in order to educate, entertain, preserve culture, and dispense moral and ethical values. The educator or minister can invite participants to tell their story around a particular generative theme of their lives.

Again, this has particular significance for black women as many of their stories have not been told. Stories have been told for, given to, or placed upon black women. Having space to actually tell one's own story or re-story is a crucial way in which black women enact and take back their agency in a world that has not deemed them or their stories as important.

Practical example of embracing self through womanish modes of play:

While teaching a class I wanted to give the students a chance to get to know each other before we embarked on our class journey together. In order to do this I had them pair

up and tell their stories. I first invited them to tell their favorite Biblical parable, the one that has stuck with them the most. I asked them to discuss why their parables stuck with them and what they felt it did for them in their lives. Once they began to see their story as a part of the Christian story, and they felt a bit more open to story-telling, I invited them to tell a story with a partner about a time when they were formed or educated in the Christian faith. I invited them to critically remember and reflect on their own stories by giving them a list of conscious raising questions to consider. The list of questions asked about the form, structure, and the process in which their formation happened. The list asked whether it was effective or ineffective. It continued by asking who was present, who held power and authority and why. The list asked questions about the history that is known and why along with questions about the dominant narrative that is told, what it does to other narratives, and why. I then gave them time to critically remember and reflect on these questions and their experiences of being formed in the Christian faith.

Then in pairs I invited them to share their stories. They did this through dramatic and improvisational storytelling with props, humor, creativity and imagination. It create a fun ludic learning space that lead to further exploration and sharing. The sharing was followed by vital discussion and reflection on the similarities and differences in both stories and experiences, while being as theatrical and creative as they were comfortable with. I invited them to ask more conscious questions of one another. This really got them involved and thinking critically about what formation and Christian Education meant to them as well as the history and happenings that brought them to where they are. For some this included the parables mentioned and finding where their stories connected to the Christian story. This also aided in helping students get to know each other and some of their experiences.

They no longer had solely their own stereotypes, biases, or past experiences upon which to assess or attribute to a given person. Now, they had actual stories and experiences in which they could see and understand the other in new ways. With this knowledge persons no longer had to rely on the dominant narrative since they now had a new narrative that was known in a real and experiential way.

Having a new narrative that resists and pushes back against the dominant oppressive and unjust narrative aids in all persons being able to see and understand the other in a way that allows everyone to learn across difference using new socially conscious methods. The womanish mode of play of story-telling with critical remembering and conscious questioning allowed my students to embrace themselves and each other as part of the larger Christian narrative in new and liberating ways.

III. Embody God's Love

> Loves music. Loves dance. Loves moon. Loves the spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the folk. Loves herself. Regardless.[326]

> By demystifying the perceptions of black women's bodies, ways, and loves as vile, the intentionality with which black women writers reconcile black women back to their truer selves is invaluable in the formation of womanist ethics…womanist theologian Michele Jacques notes that Walker's "call to love herself 'regardless' is one of the most foundationally holistic and revolutionary political actions African-American women can take," a call that is the hallmark of the womanist tradition.[327]

Here we have another part of the womanist definition and ethical tenet of womanism from Alice Walker and Stacey Floyd-Thomas. There is still a focus on the self

[326] Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens,* xi-xii.
[327] Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode,* 9-10.

but in relationship to embodying God's love toward oneself, creation, God, and others. When one begins with identity, heritage, culture and history one is able to understand ones' self better. A conscious understanding of self and one's history moves one to loving self and others more fully; as God loves us. This radical kind of love involves truly embodying God's love in one's heart, mind, soul and body. This involves looking even more deeply into oneself and affirming oneself as divinely and humanly lovable. This is where womanist theological anthropology becomes essential to this work. For many black women, their bodies have not been their own, merely seen as objects or dangerous. This has translated into self-dislike, body dysmorphia, and at times body or self-hatred. Therefore, taking the step to truly see oneself as deserving and worthy of not only self love, but of God's love is a journey that takes time, honesty, and vulnerability.

Womanist theological anthropology involves taking a deep look at the interconnectedness of sociocultural systems that are oppressive and unjust and resisting and challenging these systems through negotiating one's moral agency, identity, autonomy, and defining oneself for oneself. One must look at one's self and see the hurt, pain, pride, ego, past experiences and still see the beloved person that was created in the image and likeness of God. This important step takes creative and collaborative imagination in order to re-vision, re-claim, and re-story as needed. These oppressive and unjust narratives that have pervaded much of history must be scrutinized and questioned. One must use one's imagination in order to do the dance of redemption and use theological resources to achieve norm clarification. This requires critical awareness and reflection upon one's theological disciplines and spiritual community and the ways in which these theological resources liberate or hold on to various structures of oppression. Does one's theological discipline

and/or spiritual community resist and challenge the oppressive dominant narrative and embrace God's love of all persons, regardless of difference or does it say nothing in the face of oppressive and unjust actions, beliefs and values? When evaluating, questioning and reflecting one should also question what is valued, who is accountable and why, and where one stands in light of the awareness of various systems of oppression and injustice in the world and in one's community. This kind of imagination and play leads to possible re-visioning, re-claiming and re-storying of one's oppressive and unjust narrative through liberating resistance and emancipatory hope.

Once one is able to see one's self as a person of worth, dignity, and honor then it becomes a bit easier to also see the dignity, worth, and honor in others. When one can truly embody God's love for and within one's self, one is better able to express that love to, for, and with others.

In order to aid participants in beginning the process of seeing themselves as divinely and humanly loveable the educator or minister can offer womanish modes of play that enable students to look within, wrestle with themselves to resist the dominant narrative, to embrace and enact agency and autonomy in playful ways. These womanish modes of play can be, but are not limited to mirroring and dancing, which will be explained further below. An educator or minister can utilize either of these to bring about introspection, connection, and self-discovery. These womanish modes of play encourage participants to get to know themselves and their own worth and dignity as beings made in the image and likeness of God. They invite participants to honestly reflect on themselves, the good and the bad, without blame and to resist, re-story, re-claim, and re-vision as needed. Then once they are able to name who they are they can begin to assess and know that even in the midst of

one's strengths and weaknesses one is still made in the image and likeness of God and loved unconditionally.

These modes of play allow participants to critically engage through conscious questioning and creative and collaborative imagining and re-visioning in order to reflect upon who they are through the eyes and heart of God. Hopefully, after these playful practices participants will believe, as Ntozake Shange stated "My love is too beautiful…too sanctified…too magic…too Saturday nite…too complicated…too music to have thrown back on my face."[328]

A. Essentials and Suggestions

The below modes of play (mirroring and dancing) make space for persons to embody God's love playfully with their own thoughts and feelings, while honoring and respecting the embodied thoughts and feelings of another. When persons question and reflect they realize that they are embodied and when they see or make contact with other embodied persons they treat them with more care. Persons are more inclined to set personal biases aside, offer grace, truly listen and see the other, which sometimes allows for the changing of pre-existing biases. While, this is clearly the ideal, it is hard work that takes time and takes conscious questioning and critical reflection from the educator or minister as well as the persons involved.

The practices below literally enable participants to look at themselves and the other. It brings awareness to the spaces where the world, society or even one's self has claimed

[328] Shange, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow is Enuf, 46-7.*

that they are not enough, do not deserve love, are not worthy, or are problematic in some way. These modes of play then allow for the dismantling of these "problems" by having one look at one's self and as a person made in the image and likeness of God with worth, dignity and beauty. These modes of play allow one to creatively and collaboratively imagine something more and to begin to enact agency, re-claim, re-story and resist oppressive and dominant narratives physically, cognitively, and affectively.

These practices are by no means easy and are quiet complex and challenging for all involved. There is a level of vulnerability and trust that is required that will take time to develop. This might mean they should not be done on the first day of class, but after trust has been built. In order to establish this kind of environment one needs to have a brave space in the classroom or church in which participants feel comfortable to share, be vulnerable, be silly, and handle things that are shared with care. This might look like establishing a classroom or church covenant of trust, of presence, confidentiality, or participation, being sure to make it personal and specific for the needs of the given group.

I intentionally use the term brave space over safe space here. Traditionally safe space is used, however, for many people of color there is no true safe space. There is no space where they will ever stop being a person of color or having their color seen, prior to someone getting to know them. Hence, no space is ever truly safe. Therefore, I use brave space as both an acknowledgement of the lack of fully safe spaces while also encouraging bravery and courage to still engage, share, and be present in the midst of difficult conversations. For me, brave space allows for creative tension, encourages debate and lively dialogue while demanding respect and honesty. This space also comes with the knowledge that everyone has and will make mistakes and thus grace and mercy for one

another is also necessary. This brave space does not shy away from the tense or challenging but invites conscious questions, critical remembering, creative and collaborative imagining and emancipatory hope for a difficult, honest and liberating experience for all involved.

These modes of play allow one to engage with thoughts, ideas and feelings in playful bodily ways in order to begin to think about what it means to embody God's love for self, creation, and others. When participants see other participants as embodied individuals and not floating heads, perspectives change, love is embodied and shared, humanity is seen, and transformation can happen.

A1. Mirroring

Mirroring is a mode of play that is done with two people standing in front of each other and, without words, mirror what the other person does. The educator or minister can give 30-60 seconds per person to move and be mirrors. This works well with one warm up round letting participants just have fun and get used to being a mirror with no prompting question. Then the educator or minister can ask prompting questions that go from general to more personal to invite more inward reflection. Prompting questions can be as general as: "how do you feel about x," or "what is your response to this phrase" (and say a particular phrase.) Prompting questions should become more specific and difficult as they are to begin asking conscious questions and critically reflecting on one's self and how one views oneself. The more personal prompting questions can be, "how does the world view you," "how do you feel about how the world views you," "what would you change about yourself if you could and why," "how do you believe God views you and

why," etc. The questions are what prompts participants to go deeper and to begin to reflect more intentionally on ways in which they do and do not embody God's love for themselves and for others yet, in a way that is still fun and spontaneous. While this practice is very reflective and internal, the questions aid in making it more overt and explicit in order to engage in larger discussion.

After asking questions one should be sure to give participants time and invite them to express their answers to the questions in bodily form, without words and have their partner mirror their response. After both persons have gone there should be time given to critically reflect on what took place. This is another opportunity to ask conscious questions about what took place, what the moves meant and felt like for both parties. Invite them to dig deep and to critically reflect on not just what they saw and felt, but also why they moved and felt that particular way. Invite them to engage sociocultural influences, theological disciplines, and various other systems of power and authority that might have impacted their bodily expressions to a given question.

For black women who have not been seen and heard, it is very important that they be seen, heard, and felt in their fullness. Mirroring allows for one to do just that, express one's self fully in all their realness and silliness and enables the other to experience it as well. This practice allows for one to spend a small amount of time embodying the movement, silliness and truth of another. This can be very helpful in understanding, appreciating, and becoming consciously aware of other cultures and experiences of the world and how one might feel the world views them in a playful way.

A2. Dancing

Dancing is a mode of play that is done by having a person move their body. There is no right or wrong way to dance, a person just moves as they feel. Part of the exercise is allowing creativity and improvisation as energy flows and for a person to move as they feel comfortable and confident in who they are and their body. While dancing there can be conscious questions posed that invite the dancer to think more deeply about their dance and their movement. These questions could be: “how do you feel about your movement,” “how do you feel about your body,” “how does the world want you to feel about your body?” “how does God feel about your movement and your body?” etc. This questioning and dancing should be followed up with critical reflection on the dancing and conscious questions that were raised.

Having music play during the movement and dancing it very helpful and will aid in persons feeling more comfortable to move and dance. The educator or minister might consider playing a song without lyrics, just instruments, to allow spontaneity and fluidity of their own movements and body. One will be able to express one’s self how ever they would like.

After one round of moving, dancing, and reflecting the educator or minister could then ask the participants to take a moment to read Genesis 1:26 and then creatively and collaborative imagine what they might look like in the eyes of God. After some time to imagine the participants should be invited to move and dance with music again, this time with Genesis 1:26 in mind. While dancing participants

are given the opportunity to re-claim and re-story their narratives through dance and movement.

After the second dance the educator or minister should invite participants to think about their dance and the dance of their neighbors and to critically reflect, engage in dialogue and ask conscious questions of one another's dance. After this time the educator or minister should invite the large group into discussion about the dancing asking questions about the progression of the movements and fluidity or rigidness of the dance and why. Questions of societal, familial, and personal influences that impacted their dance and potential changes in the second dance upon reflection of God's word should be asked. There should also be questions of what was imagined through the eyes of God and how participants might have re-envisioned themselves in the dance and why. There should be an invitation for participants to consider what it might mean to live into this new vision or horizon for themselves and each other each day and what their next steps might be. Please note that for some moving and dancing are very vulnerable and some may feel uncomfortable. Consider using a hula-hoop, a circular toy hoop that is spun and twirled around the body, in order to help loosen people up and get them moving in another playful and fun way.

For a group of people who were told they were not made in the image of God, but were an inferior race and gender, this practice is vital. It became essential for the survival and flourishing of black women that they know and understand that in the midst of oppression or situations of injustice they were and still are made in the image and likeness of God…regardless. Some times this connection to Jesus's

suffering and the love of God was what "made a way out of no way" for black women. This link to God is critical and necessary in understanding and viewing all people as human beings worthy of divine and human love and care. Not only does this mode of play connect to God, but also makes crucial space for the importance and beauty of the body. As has been described in previous chapters, black women's bodies have experienced much, and this practice makes a space for black women to be exactly who they are and to move exactly the way their body moves without judgment or objectification.

Practical example of embodying God's love through womanish modes of play:

While teaching a class, in order to get students to begin to embody God's love and to see the worth within themselves and their classmates, I invited my students to split up in pairs and mirror each other. I gave the prompt of the parable of Balaam and his donkey in Numbers 22:21-39. This parable often raises questions of power and authority for students in various ways.

In pairs each student took their time to move with Balaam and his donkey in mind. In the discussion period following each student's movement there was discussion of how each person depicted the story of Balaam and the donkey. One student began their movement on all fours like the donkey (which evoked much laughter), then moved to their knees, and ended on their feet. This student was moving their own personal struggles with power and authority yet, in a spontaneous and playful way that invited other classmates into a deeper discussion. They stated that as a young person they felt like donkey most of the time with older persons not seeing their worth and treating them as an animal who

needs guidance. They continued stating that they moved to their knees because as they got older they gained more confidence in who they were and what they knew, but they were still not respected or seen as valuable because they were black. The student ended on their feet in hopes that someday they will be seen as a person of worth and authority who will use their power for good to help those on the margins.

From this sharing ensued a discussion about persons of color being donkies and white persons being Balaams because of the dominant narrative and the massive discrepancy of power and authority. However, as the discussion continued I raised a conscious question, “can one person be both Balaam and donkey?” This question brought silence and critical reflection. As the students reflected and discussed, they came to a realization that there were places in their lives where they were donkey and places where they were Balaam. They realized that depending on one’s various places of intersection of race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, age, and ability in life, power and authority were seen and experienced differently and they needed to make space for all these experiences and new realities. As a result, many came to new understandings and appreciations of their own places of intersection and the worth and value they held, as well as the worth and value of their classmates and their many places of intersection.

In participating in the womanish mode of play of mirroring students had fun and were open and engaged enough to became more aware of issues of power, authority, intersectionality (in the sense of the interconnected nature of race, gender, class, anility and various other social categorize) and the deep need to embody God’s love not only for others but for themselves as well.

IV. Engage Culture & Community

> A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter) and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white beige, and black?" Ans.: "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time."[329]

> Womanist ethicists engage in scholarly compositions that hold them accountable not to their individual whims or personalized localized consciousness but rather to the collective values of black history and culture. In illustrating a spirit of traditional communalism, the work of womanist ethicists encompasses not only the personal story of individual women; it also takes into account the various gifts, identities, and concerns of black people in general in order to use every resource available to strengthen the community as a whole.[330]

This part of womanism and womanist ethics focuses on inclusivity and community. It reminds everyone that we are all intersectional persons with many gifts, experiences, and cultures that intertwine in our lives. Womanism sees these differences and various experiences as a gift to be appreciated, valued, lifted up, and loved…regardless. All of these experiences are what make up the whole person and womanism is committed to the survival and flourishing of all people, not just black women. While black women come from a unique history and experience, it is that experience of struggle and survival that pushes them to fight so hard for the inclusion and wholeness of every single person regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, political views and sexual orientation. This

[329] Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden,* xi-xii.
[330] Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode,* 9.

commitment for wholeness and flourishing leads to a level of accountability to ones community, history, and culture. This means that no person gets left behind or forgotten, but that everyone comes together. This means that people stay to help those coming behind them. This means that networks of mentorship are developed to help others. This means that everyone can win, when everyone is committed to the thriving and flourishing of all people. It must start with the knowledge that God desires liberation and flourishing for everyone. This knowledge comes from connecting with God's liberating actions in the Christian narrative through Biblical texts. Once one has read and encountered various texts of God's liberating actions in the world one can then know without a shadow of a doubt, regardless of the dominant narrative, that God desires and has acted in ways for all persons to be free.

This kind of commitment engenders a radical sense of inclusivity and community that can be difficult to cultivate, but even more difficult to dismantle. In order to make the classroom and church a radically inclusive space, educators and ministers must cultivate ways to create this kind of radical inclusion within the classroom and church community. In order to help create this kind of environment and to aid participants in the process of becoming committed to this kind of radical inclusivity and classroom or church culture and community the educator or minister can offer womanish modes of play that promote appreciative inclusion, communal accountability, and bonding. These womanish modes of play can be, but are not limited to cooking and eating together, playing card/board/hand games, and line dancing.

A. Essentials and Suggestions

Each of these womanish modes of play stems from a womanist consciousness, culture and experience. The modes of play mentioned above, cooking and eating together, playing card/board/hand games, and line dancing, invite participants to get to know each other in new and different ways, which can lead to more appreciation of diversity and create classroom and group bonding. I have come to discover that violence and micro and macro aggressions in the classroom often stem from a fear of the unknown and the different. However, the kind of inclusive classroom that involves womanish modes of play can allow for teaching and learning across difference with fewer micro aggressions and acts of violence as students begin to truly see and appreciate diversity instead of fear it.

In the Christian narrative there are many stories of liberation and of God's liberating acts. Taking time during these modes of play to connect to these stories is vital. In order to resist and push for flourishing and freedom for all, as a Christian, one must know that "doing justice"[331] and striving for flourishing and freedom are not only what God intended for us, but how we live out God's call, spread God's love, and live into God's wholeness.

Through these modes of play participants can begin to see and understand more about each other's history, heritage, culture and hopefully gain more appreciation for all that each person brings to the classroom or church space. Once participants begin to appreciate and value each other they begin to bond, care for each other, and hold each other accountable for holding space and sitting in creative tension that is welcoming, inclusive, and challenging.

[331] Micah 6:8 NRSV.

A1. Cooking and eating together

This womanish mode of play is just as is sounds: cooking and sharing a meal together. This can be done in several ways. One way is to actually have a space where participants can cook together. They can split up into groups with various recipes (from the participants) and cook their dishes, then bring them all to a table to eat together. Another way is to have participants cook a dish from their culture at home and bring it in for everyone to eat and share together. While eating there is discussion and conscious questioning about how the dish was made, why, and the history behind the dish and the culture from which it emerged. For both instances there is also critical remembering and questing about the cooking process. What was talked about while cooking, what issues did the chefs run into, what new insights did they glean from the process, what did they learn about co-participants who helped them cook or shared their dish, and does the dish taste differently knowing the history or having prepared it? There should also be reflection upon the Christian story. Inviting reflection upon a scripture text[332] when Jesus shared a meal and the community it brought would enrich this practice and aid in connecting the participant's story to the larger Christian story.

Eating and sharing food is a time-honored tradition among the black community, especially for many black women, that always brings lessons, radical hospitality and inclusion along with the sharing of history and heritage. Similar to

[332] Ruth 2; Matthew 26; Mark 14; Luke 22; John 13; Romans 16; 1 Corinthians 11; and Revelation 19 just to name a few.

the story of Janae and Granny in the beginning of this chapter, cooking allows for a type of sharing and caring for the other that many spaces do not offer. Even sharing a recipe is sacred as it is more than just ingredients on a page, but it carries a history and experiences, that hopefully the participants will share with one another while they are cooking.

A2. Line dancing

This practice is something that can be seen or witnessed at most weddings, parties, cookouts, outdoor gatherings, and times of both celebration and lament. One will know it when they hear songs such as *The Electric Slide*, *The Cupid Shuffle*, and *The Wobble* accompanied by choreography. These are songs that dances have been created for and one just needs to jump in the mix and learn the dance. All the moves are repetitive so one should be able to catch on and add their own style by the end of the song, if not, at least bonds will be made in the process.

This practice makes space for fun, relationship building, and movement. When dancing and moving participants become more comfortable and engaged, which can and hopefully will carry over into the learning space and the classroom or church community. When participants dance together they allow their guards to fall, ever so slightly to let their dance partners in. They begin to see other bodies dancing - bodies with stories and movement instead of just brains with thoughts and ideas that sit in a chair. Once participants begin to truly see and engage with other participants and participant's bodies they begin to treat each other with more care and respect as they have shared an aesthetic embodied experience together. In

reflecting upon the dancing that has happened it is importance to connect it to the dancing within the Biblical text.[333] Participants should know that dancing is a powerful part of the Christian story that can aid in connection, relationship, and liberation. This reflection, once again aids participants in connecting their dance to the dance within the larger Christian narrative.

Embodiment and taking ownership of one's body is crucial for womanism and black women as they have never been able to be disembodied and often have to deal with their bodies being objectified, demeaned, and controlled by others.

A3. Playing card/board/hand/ childhood games

Playing board games, card games, hand games, and childhood games are also, just as they sound. One can visit any store, if not one's own closet at home, to find a variety of both board and card games. One can take time to critically remember some of the hand games that were learned in child hood such as *Miss Mary Mack*, *Patty Cake*, and *Down By the River*. I would also throw other childhood games into this group such as *Hop Scotch, Red Rover,* and *Double-Dutch*. These womanish modes of play are similar to the line dancing as they cultivate classroom and group bonding, highlight the similarity and differences within cultures, and make space for agency, fun and movement.

In order to aid in the engagement the educator or minister should invite reflection upon the Biblical scripture that states, "…unless you change and become

[333] Judges 21; 1 Samuel 21, 29; 2 Samuel 6; Job 21, 41; Psalm 87, 150; Ecclesiastes 3; Song of Solomon 6; Isaiah 13; Jeremiah 31; Matthew 14; Mark 6

like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."[334] Reflection on what the scripture means and what it would mean to consider becoming like a child will be key. Bringing in the scripture and the words of Jerome Berryman, the founder of a Montessori approach to Sunday school called *Godly Play*, one can begin to imagine "living in the continuing creativity of the kingdom?" It is with this mindset that we can begin to learn to have fun and be creative and to treat each other with more compassion, openness, inclusivity, inquisitiveness and awe.

Here participants are engaging in a board, card, hand, or childhood game and they allow one's guards to fall, just enough to both enjoy and learn about the other. When their guards fall they allow themselves to have fun, be themselves and to engage other participants having fun and being themselves as well. They do not encounter the made up selves that many feel they must perform in order to maintain a certain status, but their true selves that comes out through fun, surprise, and play. Participants also learn about the similarities and differences that cross cultural boundaries with these games. Participants from different cultures may find that they can immediately play *Miss Mary Mack* and *Hop Scotch* across cultural and language barriers, but play *Monopoly* very differently.

These games allow for learning and growing across difference in a low stakes environment that will hopefully carry over into the learning and worship spaces. These practices should aid in creating inclusive, respectful, and brave

[334] Matthew 18:3, NRSV

classrooms and churches in which cross-cultural learning and transformation can take place.

Practical example of engaging culture and community through womanish modes of play:

While teaching a class, I wanted to create a brave space and engage my students in dialogue around the different contexts and cultures they embodied. It was still towards the beginning of the semester and I was not sure if participants were ready to address issues of race, identity, ethnicity, and sexuality in an honest and brave way. So I decided to surprise them one class. While they were walking in I start playing *The Cupid Shuffle*. (Thankfully I already knew it so I could start it off!) As I started moving the students happily began to jump in. Everyone began to do the dance, some learning it for the first time and others adding their own personal style, but all were laughing, teaching each other, and moving bodies *together*.

After we finished I began to reflect on the many scriptures that spoke of dance. I asked them to read and reflect on the power of dance in the scripture and what it might have in common with our dance today. This led to a discussion about dancing in times of joy and lament and how dancing brings connection and relationship. This conversation continued as students noted how each of them brought their own style and uniqueness to the dance, and how that made the space and the dance better. Several students agreed and mentioned other student's styles. I then mentioned how each of them also brought their own God-given talents and unique styles and experiences into the classroom and enriched the space. I invited them to spend a few moments creatively and collaboratively imagining

our class as the dance we just did. I invited them to think about what each of their different styles and cultures bring to the classroom space. One after another they began to dialogue with each other about what they experienced from each other. They mentioned the wisdom, energy, resistance, positivity and international perspective that different students brought into the space. They acknowledged places where they found there learning enriched and challenged by their classmates. They mentioned how even when some classmates might be doing a completely different dance than they were use to, they figured out how to appreciate it.

We continued discussion as I threw out more conscious questions about the difference between cultural appreciation, cultural understanding and cultural appropriation/ exploitation. We asked questions about appreciating diversity and what it means to honor and appreciate a culture without having to actually do their dance. We continued as we discussed cultural and community rules, morals and ethics that are both implicit and explicit and how one navigates those spaces. We realized that these differed among the students and asked questions about how to navigate that space or refuse its influence.

Through the womanish mode of play of line dancing we were able to engage the complexity of culture and community through conscious questioning and God-given creative and collaborative imagining.

V. Enkindle the World

> Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.[335]

> The fourth tenet of womanist ethics obliges black women to critically engage their world at the intersections of their oppressions since they have borne the brunt of social injustice throughout the history of the modern world. As a result, they have an unshakable belief that their survival strategies must entail more than what others have provided as an alternative…Womanist ethics mandates that for black women, true liberation necessitates no compromise, mortgage, or trade-off. What it means to be a black woman in this regard is to struggle ceaselessly to the fullest extent in search of freedom, justice, and equality.[336]

This is the last part of the womanist definition and ethical tenets of womanism from Alice Walker and Stacey Floyd-Thomas. Here there is a focus on enkindling the world by actively engaging at the intersections of oppression and injustice. In order to dismantle the various systems of oppression and injustice one must set fire to the world through a critical social consciousness that encourages emancipatory activism, legislation, and advocacy. There are many ways in which to be catalysts of change and transformation in the world and womanism lifts up this kind of critical engagement with the world. Black women were and in some spaces are still oppressed and treated unjustly. This part of the definition resists that reality by calling people to be catalysts of change and actively seeking out ways to disrupt these systems of oppression and injustice. This looks differently for each person, depending on their own gifts and talents, but when a community of people can come together to resist injustice, change is possible.

This part is not easy, but it is necessary. As mentioned previously God wants us all to be free and one cannot embrace one's self, embody God's love, engage in one's culture

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[335] Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens,* xi-xii.
[336] Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode, 10*-11.

and community and yet still allow others to be dehumanized and pushed to the margins of society. This would be against what God desires for God's people. Part of what it means to be a womanist is to be brave enough to challenge the corrupt system and to support, encourage, and stand with others who are doing the same. It means resisting by asking conscious questions, remembering critically, creatively and collaboratively imagining and living into emancipatory hope.

This kind of setting fire to the world takes honesty and courage, and is hopefully contagious. *This kind* of thinking and action in the classroom and in the church reminds participants that the world does not begin and end in the classroom or the church, but extends into the world. It reminds participants, educators and ministers alike that, as a person of faith, one is called to stand up to injustice and oppression wherever it lives and breathes. *This kind* of thinking and action builds a classroom and church community that can have fun, be creative, spontaneous, and imaginative while setting fire to the world together by disrupting it and then transforming it.

In order to aid in creating *this kind* of active classroom or church community the educator or minister can offer womanish modes of play that promote engagement and participation in dismantling distorted systems. This womanish mode of play can be, but is not limited to actively creating and addressing injustice together. This practice can ignite a sense of communal and civic responsibility, care for self, and care for those who are oppressed.

A. Essentials and Suggestions

This mode of play invites participants to actively work together for a common goal of challenging and pushing back against a form of oppression or injustice. Having participants reflect on how Jesus resisted and pushed back against injustice and oppression in the Biblical texts will aid participants in choosing an injustice to address. Once the injustice is chosen participants will then create a response to it that will enkindle the world. Participants must come together to reflect on scripture, talk about what the injustices are, think about their own gifts and talents and how they can be used to meet a need, combat an injustice, and then tangibly do so together. This will take time, negotiation, creativity, and imagination. It will build a classroom and church community bond as well as aid in engendering creative critical thinkers and activists that are creatively transforming the world for the better.

A1. Actively creating and addressing injustice together

Creating something together can be very fun and powerful for both the participants and the community. I use the term create because that involves action, hands-on participation, embodiment, and gives participants something in which they can look back and reflect on having created together. The educator or minister can give parameters for directional purposes, but should shy away from telling participants what to create in order to allow their creativity and imagination to roam free. However, just to name a few: participants can create a community mural, a community garden, a prayer wall, or a quilt. In the creation of these projects participants can actively create images or items that speak to a specific injustice or

offers solidarity and kindness to those who are disenfranchised. The key here is to be sure to actively and creatively engage the bodies of all participants together in the process, hopefully, with a tangible outcome toward dismantling a particular system of injustice or oppression that the participants have chosen.

Combating injustice is mandated of all Christians and there are many instances in scripture were Jesus resisted and pushed back against injustice and oppression.[337] Therefore, this is not only work that we should engage in, but work that all Christians must engage in together. This communal work and care for the oppressed and marginalized has always been work that the black community and more specifically black women have done. From marches to sit ins, the black community has and continues to resist oppression and injustice. It is when a community can collectively see oppression and injustice and decide to creatively imagine something more, that systems can be disrupted and demolished.

Practical example of enkindling the world through womanish modes of play:

Although I have not engaged students in this assignment, I have created an assignment for a class that engages students in actively and creatively addressing a particular injustice in the world. The prompt will start with reading and reflecting on Matthew 21:12-17 when Jesus cleansed the temple and turned over tables. Upon communal reflection of this Scripture and God's desire for liberation for all people students will be prompted to creatively and collaboratively imagine something that could tear down a

[337] Isaiah 1, 10, 58; Job 6; Ecclesiastes 3, 5; 1 Corinthians 13; Habakkuk 1; Romans 1

current oppressive system and then recreate it together. I will note that all groups should be sure to utilize the gifts of all persons in the group. In my own creativity I imagine that one group might choose to create a garden where the participants grow vegetables and herbs in order to teach people about sustainable living and to give others food that is not drenched in pesticides and chemicals. Another group might decide to create a quilt or a mural addressing a particular issue or injustice. A different group might decide to invite the entire school to pray for a particular injustice by making a photograph prayer wall and having people place photos of what they would like to pray for and having a specific time to come and pray at the wall each day.

The hope is that in creating and critically engaging together in things happening in the world more people can become conscious of corrupt and oppressive systems. In realizing the Christian mandate and example in Jesus Christ, to resist injustice and strive for the liberation of all people students will work together to become catalysts enkindling the world with their creativity, imagination, prayers, and bodies. This will lead to the survival, flourishing, and freedom of all people made in the image and likeness of God.

VI. Conclusion

The culture and experience of black women is one that is vast and rich with meaning, history, and play. While I focus specifically on black women, some of the modes of play are also practiced by other cultures as well, which only enriches the practice and history of these modes of play. In addition, some of the modes of play that have been presented, while not the experience of all black women, are part of the experience, history, and journey of many black women. Womanism commits to uplifting these experiences

and highlighting the inclusive, intersectional, and embodied nature of these modes of play that can benefit all people. This chapter has provided, but a glimpse of some of the modes of play that black women engage in that can offer theological education a pedagogical resource for teaching, learning and worshipping across difference. These embodied womanish aesthetic experiences and cultural expressions allow play to function as a way of knowing, being and making meaning in the world that can allow individuals to not only see themselves within the larger Christian narrative, but also to view the other anew, with respect, honor, and appreciation.

I have provided the four essential parts that make up womanish modes of play. Each part coming from the womanist definition given by Alice Walker and the womanist ethical tenets provided by Stacey Floyd-Thomas. One must begin with embracing self. This includes modes of play that encourage identity formation, agency, and claiming of one's history and heritage. Once one is able to know who they are, they can begin to embody God's love for themselves and spread it to others. Loving oneself is not an easy task for people who have been oppressed and marginalized, but it is necessary. Modes of play that do this effectively invite persons to see themselves through the eyes of God as persons that are divinely and humanly lovable in spontaneous, imaginative and exciting ways. Once that love is embodied one can begin to express their culture and engage in their community in real and authentic ways. This involves unashamedly living into who one is and being sure that one brings his/her community with them. This involves a level of both commitment and accountability to being sure we all get there together. Once we are there together with mutual respect and dignity we are able to enkindle the world. We do this through activism, protest, creative imagination, play and being catalysts for change and

transformation in the world. All of these pieces demand conscious questioning, critical remembering, creative and collaborative imagining, and emancipatory hope in order to effectively bring about conscientization, dismantle oppressive systems and create new playful and liberative ways of knowing, being, teaching and learning together in the world.

These are very tall orders. However, by making strides through incorporating the Christian story thorough womanish modes of play in the theological education classroom and churches alike, we begin to tear down walls, cultivate relationships, and strengthen communities. We begin to see the other anew through womanish play. We begin to embrace our bodies through womanish play. We begin to see ourselves as made in the image of God through womanish play. We begin to collectively dismantle systems of injustice within educational and religious systems through womanish play that aids in teaching, learning, and worshipping across difference and that can transform the world.

I will explore more of theses potentially transformative benefits of womanish modes of play in the concluding chapter.

CONCLUSION: Tag…You're It

This section will conclude the dissertation by not only offering up the benefits of this work, but starting to consider how to train and prepare theological educators and ministers to engage in these practices in the classroom and church. It will address the value, not only for black women, but for all persons. By utilizing womanish modes of play as pedagogical tools, one can engage and educate the whole person in transformative and liberating ways. Therefore, not only black women, but everyone can begin to tell a new narrative; one in which their playful identities are known and embraced. A new narrative in which womanish modes of play not only provide access to the Christian story but makes spaces for ones own story in the larger story and welcomes the opportunity to re-story in fun and liberating ways. A new narrative that also aids persons in becoming more critically conscious allowing for meaning making and the cognitive and affective well-being of persons with bodies that are connected with and liberated by Jesus Christ.

What?

It is a fact that jumping rope is easier than doing Double-Dutch. One can jump rope by themselves and there is only one rope involved. While it still requires a sense of rhythm and an understanding of centrifugal force, it is still focused on that one main and only rope. Double-Dutch in more difficult as another rope is added. This requires even more focus and accounting for the centrifugal force of two ropes. It requires more work, but one also gains more in learning, stamina, balance, and focus. My work is suggesting that we do the more difficult task of doing Double-Dutch together. In combining this one white, European, Christian, male rope with a Womanist rope one can begin to engage in more

inclusive, intersectional, transformative and life–giving work for all persons involved. To do this requires doing the hard work of becoming critically conscious and aware that there are other narratives than just the dominant one that is prostituted as *the* truth.

There is the narrative of Renee from my first chapter that is navigating her bi-racial identity within a white academy. She is told that she needs to write more white and save the "race stuff" for later in order to be successful. There is the narrative of Britney from my second chapter that played as a young girl and continues to find that play to be essential for enacting her agency and identity in her career, relationships, and life. There is the narrative of Sheena from my third chapter that is figuring out that being in Seminary doesn't mean everyone has arrived around issues of race or gender. She is beginning to understanding that students, faculty, and ministers alike are human and might have different understandings and ways of practicing and living out the justice of God. There is the narrative of Yolanda from my fourth chapter who is engaging in womanish practices for the first time and finding them life-changing. There is the narrative of Janae who is a young black girl being formed and shaped through the womanish mode of play of cooking with her Grandmother. There is my narrative as a hopeful and playful black woman in a white theological academy pushing for everyone to be seen as fully embodied persons with intersectional identities in both the classroom and the church. There are many more narratives that can and should be told. The beauty of doing Double-Dutch is that it makes space not just for the narrative of black women, but for everyone's voice, experience, and narrative…including yours.

Renee, Britney, Sheena, Yolanda, and Janae have all experienced the effects and consequences of living in a country where the fantastic hegemonic imagination runs

rampant. However, if we add this womanish rope to the white, male, Christian rope then we can all begin to do the difficult task of doing Double-Dutch. This involves understanding and appreciating the narratives of others which cannot be done until we make brave space to listen, see and begin valuing the intersectional identities, ways of being, ways of knowing, ways of making meaning and ways of communicating of all people. This kind of work enriches everyone when we learn from and with, instead of fear the other. We begin to see the strength in difference and diversity that allows us to not only be our embodied true selves but also makes brave space for the other to be their embodied true self as well.

While this dissertation is written from a womanist consciousness, experience, voice and theological anthropology it makes room at the table for all voices, experiences and narratives- as long as they are open to such learning and changing that leads to liberation. That is what makes womanism so very unique and fitting as the additional rope in Double-Dutch – because womanists' experience and culture has provided black women with a deep empirical knowledge and understanding of exclusion, oppression, and injustice on multiple levels. Which is why womanists can not only believe in but push for inclusion and the valuing of intersectional identities and ways of knowing and being for the flourishing of all persons.

Why?

While acknowledging a larger history and narrative, womanish modes of play also push-back against this narrative that was created from the dominant group in power to only reflect what they deemed as right. This meant the narrative of native persons, enslaved

persons, and other oppressed and marginalized persons and groups were not valued or heard. Womanish modes of play make space for the oppressed and marginalized voices, narratives, and experiences as they encourage persons to care for-not fear what is different. These embodied practices inform everyone that there is more than just one narrative, one body, one gender, and one racial group that matter. These playful practices form persons in the knowledge that all persons are beings of dignity, and value with bodies, and stories that need to be told in the world, especially in the classroom and in the church. These practices can transform the traditional and oppressive ways of knowing and doing things into more inclusive, expansive and life-giving ways of knowing and being in the world.

There needs to be a deconstruction of the dominant oppressive structure within universities and churches in order for transformative learning to happen. I believe womanish modes of play can aid in the disruption and hopeful deconstruction of the power and hierarchical structures within theological educational classrooms and churches. Incorporating critical consciousness into classrooms and churches encourages persons to come to know for themselves and begin to see their own situatedness in the world. This leads to persons working to eradicate oppression and systems of power that are in universities and religious institutions. Womanish modes of play invite both the educator and the students to push back against the dominant narrative and critically think, reflect and act using both their minds and their bodies. It invites both students and teachers to see each other and to notice where oneself and the other are not seen in the world and to begin to rectify it.

One way in which educators and ministers can rethink ways of knowing, being and expressing oneself in order to transform the classroom and the church into more liberating

and holistic places is through engaging the body in the learning process. The classroom and the church must not solely be about the teacher or minister but about the voices, expressions, stories and experiences of the student as well. Fun, excitement, and spontaneity are characteristic of play that can not only add to the classroom or church experience but they can also disrupt the various systems of oppression and offer something more wholistic in its place. Through engaging the body in the learning process difference is recognized and respected in each person and room is made for the diversity in expressions and experiences. Embodied learning and practices, such as womanish modes of play, provide ontological space for students and teachers. Ontological space for individuals to be exactly who they are and to encounter God through their preferred medium.

It is through playful practices that we begin to see each other as embodied persons with rich histories and experiences that we can all benefit and learn from – not fear. These embodied practices make space for teaching and learning across difference that aid in the cognitive and affective flourishing for all people. Womanish modes of play aid in creating ludic learning spaces that encourage brave story-telling, re-storying, and even resisting. When persons are able to freely practice embodied aesthetic experiences and express themselves culturally then they are able to make meaning, and have their being according to their own stories and realities, embrace one's self, and begin to embody God's love for the embodied selves of others. When one begins to value these other embodied selves one can engage culture and community in new critically conscious ways that will enkindle the world and disrupt these systems that allow various oppressions and injustices to occur within our theological schools and churches. Womanish modes of play can aid in igniting

this type of transformative learning, teaching and knowing that is both liberating and holistic.

How?

Having the knowledge that this work is needed and actually doing the work are very different. There is the question of how. How does one begin to train, prepare and form persons in this approach? How does one mix womanish modes of play into pedagogy? How does one promote and prepare the conversation and have theological education faculty and church ministers see the value in becoming more embodied and imaginative? I believe the how begins with vulnerability in asking deliberate questions, persists with critical consciousness and mutuality, and becomes transformative through creative and collaborative imagination and fun.

Asking deliberate questions and being vulnerable are not easy tasks. They involve the difficult work of thinking through one's own history, biases, and understandings and asking why they are what they are, how they were formed that way and why. This involves self reflection and an interrogation of self in order to move forward with critical awareness and consciousness. This includes taking the time to learn one's history in regards to racial and ethnic make-up, family ties and connections, geography, cultural realities, economic realities, and religious affiliations within the larger world. Once one learns the history they can assess and evaluate how they have been affected by the dominant narrative and how that history impacts one's own understandings and perspectives of the world. As a minister or educator it is vital that this work is done prior to engaging the embodied practices with students. One must do the work themselves in order to be prepared to walk others through

it. One should understand and be able to express the vulnerability and deliberate questioning required before asking it of others.

Once one has been vulnerable enough to interrogate their own history, understandings, and worldviews they can begin to become critically aware of their own situatedness in the world. This involves reading and engaging global literature and cultures that are different than one's own. This might look like traveling and gaining exposure and perspective, like Olivia Pearl Stokes. This could mean taking time to listen and share stories and narratives as Anne Streaty Wimberly would recommend. Once one is able to become critically conscious and aware they can then begin to see and understand how mutuality aids in the creation of brave space through allowing all persons to feel equally important. Valuing each person's presence, voice, and experience is vital for womanish modes of play. If one doesn't feel valued or that their body matters it can be very difficult for persons to engage and be vulnerable. Persons must feel equally heard and valued in order to feel brave and courageous enough to then be vulnerable and engage in embodied playful practices.

Once one has vulnerably asked deliberate questions, become critically aware enough to practice mutuality, there is then brave space for creative and collaborative imagination and fun. Engaging in embodied learning and specifically womanish modes of play involves creativity, imagination, and fun. One must be open to play. This might mean creating a daily play practice or engaging in activities that one did when he/she were a child in order to re-engage their playful and imaginative nature. Coloring in a coloring book, playing with play-dough, taking a nature walk, or using Legos to make something are just a few ways to spark creativity and imagination. One helpful thing to imagine or envision would be where one would like to be or what one would like to see happening in one's

classroom or in one's church. Imagining, visioning and hoping can aid one in working towards making the vision a reality. For example if one imagines a more inclusive classroom space one might begin reading more global voices so they can be placed on one's syllabi. This might mean creating a more brave space in one's classroom or church by having a set aside time for sharing stories and cultivating relationships at the beginning. This might mean being vulnerable enough to be silly and surprise one's self by dancing, singing, or playing a board game together. It is in the creativity that transformation and liberation become possible.

For some, this might mean bringing in a consulting group to facilitate and aid in the teaching and implementation of this work within the institution, the faculty or ministers, and the curriculum. For others, this might mean working through these womanish modes of play with faculty and ministers first, until they are able to see and understand its transformative impact. While this method or approach is not going to work for everyone, I do believe it can be effective in teaching and learning across difference and therefore, is worth trying. In this trying it will be important for each person to develop their own "play" approach according to their own comfort and ability levels. In order for this work to be effective it must begin with vulnerability in asking deliberate questions, persist with critical consciousness and mutuality, and become transformative through creative and collaborative imagination and fun.

Who?

Theological education has the unique opportunity to be prophetic in highlighting the educative potential of womanism and womanish modes of play as they encompass the

whole person. As theologians, ministers, and laypersons we care not only about education, but about educating the whole person in the love and grace of God. We take seriously the weight of sin, grace and forgiveness, therefore when violations of personhood are not only committed, but committed in our classrooms and churches, these issues compound making it difficult to see the love and grace of our Creator. When we allow our classrooms to be sites for acts of aggression both micro and macro, lack of cultural awareness and inclusion, and limited critical reflection, dialogue, and consciousness, we are perpetuating systems of domination, supremacy, violence, and the fantastic hegemonic imagination. We must no longer allow these acts to go unchallenged, but to offer something in its place.

As theological educators we are all called to a mission of creating brace spaces to learn, grow and explore that which our students feel called to. If these spaces are no longer brave and in fact cause more harmful affects then we are not effectively carrying out the mission we have been entrusted by God with. Embodied learning offers an opportunity for reconciliation of the mind and body. Womanism and womanish modes of play encourage and uplift the power of the individual voice and story and the need to embody and share God's love. Womanism and womanish modes of play recognize the importance of cultural and communal engagement and support and the courage to set the world on fire through the resisting and pushing-back against oppression and injustice. Theological education has not only a wonderful opportunity, but a responsibility to be trailblazers in this area of teaching and learning for and to the whole person through embodied practices such as womanish modes of play.

It is with all of this in mind that I offer up the rope of womanism and specifically my womanish modes of play as one of many pedagogical tools set within a broader

approach that provides access to the Christian story while welcoming fun and liberative new paths for re-storying. This pedagogical approach can be incorporated in classrooms and churches alike. While this may be new and different for some, I believe in order for change to happen things must be different and disruptive. Womanish modes of play can be a starting point not just for black women, but for all people, especially religious educators and ministers, to be brave and create ludic learning spaces in classrooms and churches. In this context, womanism and womanish modes of play become prophetic and liberative practices that can remake classrooms and churches into more holistic, transformative, and fun spaces. One can use these playful practices to critically reflect, deliberately question, and creatively and collaboratively imagine in order to live into an emancipatory hope through these embodied and liberating new ways. Womanish modes of play can reshape how one learns and teaches across difference for the just flourishing of all persons, as all of us are made in the image and likeness of God. Let's begin to do Double-Dutch together, rather than jump rope alone.

Tag…you're it!

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