Background: Who is the black colonial?

This research explores how implementing decolonizing pedagogies on campus and in curricula can liberate black female master’s students’ learning experiences in the Graduate School of Education and Human Development (GSEHD) whose slogan claims that, “Transformation Begins Here”. Black women have not only found ways to maneuver a rigged educational system that intentionally aims to omit them, but have mastered the colonial archetype. As a means of survival, we submit, but at what cost? This institution profited and was built on the legacy of black enslavement. University archival records reveal that enslaved people had a sustained presence on campus working as servants or laborers. In what ways have those roles changed? Or have they simply morphed into concealed norms? George Washington, after whom the institution is named, became a slave-owner at 11 years old through his father’s inheritance. Over his lifetime, he and his wife, Martha, owned over 300 slaves. Oney “Oney” Judge was the only female slave to successfully escape in 1976. She is a testament to the length it takes for black women to claim their freedom. This thesis is not an attempt to seek validation from occupiers of the Center. Instead, it aims to make visible the invisible. It acknowledges the lived experiences of groups historically diluted from the discourse--black women, in this case--as living primary sources. It acknowledges the importance of self-definition in the academy’s limited perspective on black women. As a formal act of resistance, this thesis embraces the decolonizing practice of “making the intellectual space” (Pollard and Welch, 2006, p.40) and honors self-valuation as a part of that praxis.

5 Steps to Decolonizing Your Mind

- Know thyself
- Solidarity is love is power
- Create the space
- Write yourself into the academy
- Don’t suffer in silence

Methodology

- This research does not commit to one methodological practice but will engage multiple including: qualitative data that relies on primary and secondary sources, interviews and photos.
- 3 GSEHD master’s candidates who identify as black and female and are between the ages of 23 and 29 were intentionally chosen to be interviewed for this study. The students have been enrolled at GSEHD for a minimum of two semesters and live in the DC metro area. They were asked targeted questions that explored identity, representation, and transformation at GSEHD.
- This research relies on Decolonizing The Mind (DTM) and Feminist Standpoint theoretical frameworks. It also emphasizes the importance of self-definition in research from the center to margins by utilizing narrative inquiry and hermeneutic phenomenology.

Key Findings

- Isolation was a common experience for each student interviewed at various stages of the program.
- In-depth classroom dialogue is challenging because peers have limited cultural competency resulting in labor-intensive “friendships” that are unidirectional.
- The students interviewed frequently wrestled with the ‘angry black woman’ complex and internally navigated the consequences of black excellence.
- Self-advocacy is not an option, but a prerequisite. While the sample size does not reflect the entire population, all respondents indicated that their presence as black women in academia is always a performance and that self-reliance is a coping mechanism.
- Respondents acknowledged the authority of whiteness in academia is always a performance and that self-reliance is a coping mechanism.
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Research Questions

- What does decolonization of the mind look like?
- Will double consciousness ever be rectified for the African diaspora?
- What needs to happen for closure to manifest?

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References are available upon request