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A Black Feminist Approach to Antiracist Qualitative Research Methods: Commemorating the Legacy of bell hooks

Abstract

This article commemorates the legacy of bell hooks by bringing core themes in her *oeuvre* to bear on several debates on the conceptualization and use of qualitative research methods in sociology. Despite the uptake of qualitative research methods in sociology as a launching point for critical inquiry with analytical and political overtones, they have been fragmented threefold by debates about their politics (whether to humanize research subjects), practice (whether to intervene in field research), and epistemology (procedural, craft, and bricolage orientations). Reflecting on the legacy of bell hooks, this article articulates a Black feminist approach by unearthing methodological and epistemological themes underwritten in hooks' work (inclusive pedagogy, creative dialogue, and reflexive accountability) to offer new perspectives on the three debates and, in so doing, to identify ways to better qualitative research methods as tools for emancipating the marginalized – by invigorating cross-professional and transdisciplinary dialogue, collaboration, and love.

Keywords: antiracism, bell hooks, Black feminism, epistemology, marginalized identities, qualitative research methods

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Introduction

"All of us in the academy and in the culture as a whole are called to renew our minds if we are to transform educational institutions—and society—so that the way we live, teach, and work can reflect our joy in cultural diversity, our passion for justice, and our love of freedom." – bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (1994a, p.34)

bell hooks' recent passing has left an indelible void in the social sciences, humanities, and in Anglo-American culture more broadly. Though a cultural critic in name, her work was charged with a love and belief that made it interdisciplinary: to emancipate the marginalized, we must change *how* we *think*. This article thus takes pause to commemorate her legacy by articulating key methodological and epistemological themes that guided her *oeuvre* and love and to bring them to bear on several debates on the conceptualization and use of qualitative research methods (QRM) in sociology.

Distinct from quantitative methods that reduce social phenomena into calculable entities to be analyzed numerically, QRM rely on the description of subjective accounts, exploring the production of meaning among actors on the micro-level and within broader group interactions, which then consist larger phenomena.

From the 1970s onwards, QRM began to figure into the heart of social scientific inquiry in general and sociology in particular. Providing a genealogy of QRM, we can contextualize the surge of interest in QRM in the political landscape of the 1970s. The Civil Rights movement in the 1960s had spurred into action other marginalized groups in society by the 1970s, chiefly women of color and minority workers. Theirs was a broad-based movement to challenge discrimination in hiring, promotions, and working conditions at corporations and universities (Flug, 1990; Roth, 2004). During this era, Ella Grasso was elected the first female Governor of

Connecticut, Margaret Chase Smith the first female Representative of Maine to the House of Representatives, among other women who rose to positions of influence in government bureaus (Ferree & Hess, 2002, p.22). This feminist spirit comprised a watershed moment for QRM when many of these women entered academia (Collins, 2022) and feminist sociologists coming from movement activism began systematically documenting sexism and gender inequality (Connell, 2017, p.291).

The changing landscape prompted scholars to systematically rethink the legitimacy and utility of QRM (Brinkmann, Jacobsen, & Kristiansen, 2014). QRM practitioners of the era engineered paradigms of practice that have gained currency since (e.g. grounded theory) and epistemologies that signalled it was not just methodology, but a commitment to representing and serving marginalized identities. This commitment was taken up in post-1970 by a surge of sociological scholarship on social justice and "Othered" experiences of marginalized peoples (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Kovach, 2010; Smith, 2012).

However, this body of research has also invoked strong pushback from QRM scholars, rooted in the low-consensus nature of QRM as a "vibrant and contested field with many contradictions and different perspectives" (Brinkmann, Jacobsen, & Kristiansen, 2014, p.18). In a similar vein, this article respects the multivoicedness of QRM and casts new light onto key debates within this large body of work.

This article focuses on debates about the politics (whether to humanize participants), practice (whether to intervene in fieldwork), and epistemology of QRM (which orientation to adopt) in studying marginalized identities (Au, 2022; Denzin, 2002; Hsiung, 2016). Recent events and trends over the past twenty years justify the salience of these three debates and the fundamental questions that animate them.

On politics, the merits of interpretivism in QRM have been a feature of debates on methodology, especially in theoretical developments on QRM post-1970s (Au, 2018). In a fierce 2002 debate in the *American Journal of Sociology*, Wacquant (2002) challenged fellow ethnographers Anderson (2002), Newman (2002), and Duneier (2002) on humanization. The latter three published widely-read ethnographies that illuminated the everyday lives of the underclass, and Wacquant scorned these practices as apologia for the social structures that repressed them. The latest rise of decolonization has breathed new life into this debate in a "turn toward humanizing the object into a subject—often through the inclusion of people of color, women, youth, and Native researchers" (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p.814). The matter thus continues to divide QRM practitioners: do we humanize our participants or not? That is, do we attend to the personal, emotional, and moral dynamics in their lives – and to what end?

On intervention, the extent to which a researcher immerses herself in her participants' lives has been deeply impressed in the canonical theorization and praxis of ethnography. Scrutiny toward how far researchers should move from "complete strangers" to "complete participants" is tempered with the admonition against "going native", with differing accounts offered about where the line can be drawn most effectively (Thompson, 2019). Does our research call us to not only observe participants' lives, but to change them?

On orientation, Michael Burawoy (2005) kickstarted important debates about competing orientations for praxis with the heuristic of considering its role in public life, noting the "antagonistic interdependence" among them (p.4). The turn to antiracism among qualitative sociologists has spirited a similar debate as the epistemological convergences between QRM and antiracism are pondered, particularly as they engender interpretivist epistemologies that challenge power imbalances in knowledge production, give voice to marginalized experiences,

and attune students to these forms of critical thinking (Au, 2022). What kind of orientation is best served in a world where our research sites are increasingly pervaded by racially charged hatred from a "post-truth" political climate?

This article casts new light on these powerful debates about the politics, practice, and epistemology of QRM by adopting a Black feminist approach (BFA) and identifying how to better serve marginalized peoples through QRM. This article innovates by offering a perspective on the examination of marginalized identities across these three debates from the perspective of a marginalized identity, chiefly through one of the first systematic analyses of the qualitative methodological and epistemological themes in bell hooks' work, one of the most prolific and influential Black scholars in Anglo-America.

A Black Feminist Approach: The Legacy of bell hooks

The overarching objective of hooks' work is best captured as effecting the conditions that would enable everyone to "live, teach, and work… [in ways that] reflect our joy in cultural diversity, our passion for justice, and our love of freedom" (1994a, p.34). The overtones of emancipation ringing through this call for justice, love, and freedom come together in the subversion of domination, which is embedded in the DNA of academia. Ours are halls where centuries of curricula have been decided by white, Anglo-American scholars that threaten to expunge even Black and marginalized minds (the very victims of this domination) of their messianic zeal for antiracist struggle (hooks, 1994a, p.114; 2000a, p.9).

Yet, subversion in Black feminism is more than an end, but a means – a methodology that defines hooks' BFA. She unpacks this methodology in *Talking Back* as "educating us collectively for critical consciousness so that we can explore and understand better the workings of… sexist oppression, the political basis, and be better able to work out strategies for resistance"

(hooks, 1989, p.35). Though her concern is with the marginalized, she makes clear on multiple occasions that this methodology is universal – to be dispensed to "masses of women *and* men in our society" (1989, p.35; 2000a, p.viii) to ensure the movement to free all marginalized people from (racial) hierarchical oppression not devolve into another kind of patriarchy, like Black male patriarchy in the abolitionism era (1990, pp.5, 16).

Scattered, but consistent references to "consciousness-raising" (2000a, p.7; 1990, p.8; 1994a, p.34) reveal that hooks' characterization of subversion as the core of a BFA consists of three themes: it is inclusively pedagogical, creatively dialogical, and reflexively accountable.

Other accounts of Black feminist thought begin from the same recognition as hooks that a BFA is morally and epistemologically rooted in love and spatially centered on the classroom. Like hooks, Black feminists emphasize the necessity of creating a space "characterized by humanizing visibility, empowered womanhood, and unapologetic self-love" (Patterson et al, 2016, p.57).

Within this scope, a BFA responds to the needs of women of color and minorities to have affirming spaces within an imperialist white supremacist patriarchy, especially in a "post-truth" political climate (Au, 2020; Collins, 2022). Thus, in opposing the values that live large in mainstream society to oppress minorities, Black feminists share in hooks' turn to pedagogy as antiracist praxis and the classroom as a social space for resistance.

Inclusive Pedagogy

Inspired and shaped by the feminist movement that took force in the 1970s, QRM limned the material and symbolic position of women in society to excavate forms of gender oppression, originating theoretical movements (e.g. standpoint theory) to deconstruct the concept of gender into varying and competing cultural influences (Collins, 2022). hooks was among the first to

point out that this feminism was exclusionary, preoccupied with higher-educated, white, middle-class women to the effect of excluding poor people of color who could not afford to join the academy (hooks, 1984). hooks went further to observe that this feminism offered, without merit, immunity to white women from charges of racism under the pretext that racism was an inherently (white) male phenomenon (1990, p.123).

hooks' criticism is grounded in an astute and complex theorization of racial oppression as a political and analytic concept that binarizes social categories and relations of power. The hazards of this categorization, hooks writes (1984), are that it subordinates the marginalized by perpetuating what Audre Lorde (1983) called a "hierarchy of oppression." It misguides us to characterize, weigh, and polemically declare a winner among different oppressed groups, diverting us from the relations of power that oppress them. hooks thus led the charge for Black women to intervene in scholarly discussions, bringing their multiple identities into dialogue on racial oppression (hooks, 2000b, p.2; 2009, pp.104, 114), and stimulating a significant counterpoint to white feminist perspectives.

A BFA, for hooks, stipulates that the inclusivity needed to stalwart the totalization of marginalized identities is achieved by pedagogy in the classroom – a "location of possibility," where "we have the… freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom." (1994a, p.207).

Underpinning hooks' love for pedagogy is the belief that having multiple identities in the classroom subverts patriarchal and racial domination by eroding boundaries. A boundaryless enterprise, pedagogy is how "feminists are made, not born" (hooks, 2000a, p.7); it effectively *relieves* "the sexual and racial differentiation which together make for the exclusion of black

women" (1990, p.7). The historicity of the practice is not lost on hooks, who recognizes that it was only "when women first organized in groups to talk together about the issue of sexism and male domination," that they recognized they were "socialized to believe sexist thinking and values as males… [so] before women could change patriarchy, we had to change ourselves; we had to raise our consciousness" (hooks, 2000a, p.7).

Creative Dialogue

A classroom with multiple identities allows for *creative dialogue* in service of this "consciousness-raising". Creative dialogue is a process of learning. hooks gestures toward this in dialectical fashion, that "confronting one another across differences means that we must change ideas about how we learn… to find ways to use it as a catalyst for new thinking, for growth" (1994a, p.113). hooks' vision of creative dialogue in pedagogical form calls upon multiple identities to bring their heritage, their values with all degrees of proximity to the status quo, and their visions of the future together, with the understanding that learning is lifelong (hooks, 2003, pp.167-170).

Creative dialogue is also a process of *un*learning. Most of what we know about feminism stems from "patriarchal mass media" (hooks, 2000a, p.1), where the "predominant image is that of the 'fallen' woman, the whore" (1990, p.52). hooks stresses that even positive affirmations of Black women in the media, like the matriarch, provides an illusory empowerment that distracts from their marginalized position in society more than changes it (1990, p.81). The same social structures and the relevance of her BFA persist today. The mere discussion of the subject of critical race theory now invites white rage on media outlets, particularly in the aftermath of Trump's presidency.

In a comprehensive study of Trump's Tweets over his presidency, Ott and Dickinson (2019) observe that his managerial, physical, and linguistic performances expressed white rage that appealed to a predominantly white support base by manipulating centuries-old fears concerning the decentering of white privilege. Conducting a large-scale content analysis of major newspapers and news broadcasters, Brown (2021) finds that Trump's rhetoric of white rage manifested in popular denials of racism's existence among grassroots audiences and contributed to making racism appear "debatable" in news coverage.

This has had palpable effects in academia, with Black feminist educators reporting experiencing greater alienation, feeling branded with the "angry Black women" trope, and their classes on Black feminism and inequality being stigmatized as "white guilt" classes (Adair, 2018; Gallaway & Turner, 2020). Black feminists have thus stressed creative dialogue as means of community-organizing in response to the discrimination growing in this political climate.

Hester and Squires (2018) call for transdisciplinary dialogue in specifically justifying a BFA rather than merely intersectionality, arguing that intersectionality has historically been a tool that "rather than understanding the complicated relationship between assemblages of identity… works to create, 'a tool of diversity management'" (2018, p.344; see also Nash, 2013).

In her seminal 1989 paper on intersectionality, Kimberle Crenshaw initially conceived of intersectionality as a perspective with which to foreground the multiple marginalized identities that beset Black women, in so doing casting a light on how the oppressed may be subject to overlapping forms of marginalization. In her examination of employment discrimination by General Motors, for instance, she astutely pointed out how the courts forced plaintiffs to separate their claims of racial and gender discrimination. Citing the legislative history of Title VII, the courts concluded that "Congress either did not contemplate that Black women could be

discriminated against as ‘Black women’ or did not intend to protect them when such discrimination occurred” (Crenshaw, 1989, p.142).

Crenshaw and Black feminist scholars after her observed that the tendency to filter individuals into groups whose boundaries were closed was not just true of institutions, but of individuals themselves (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1990). In the many court cases that Crenshaw analyzed and became involved with, Black men sorted themselves into one group, and white women another, but Black women, who lived along the oppressive extremes of both axes, were dismissed or forced to choose either race or gender to identify with (Crenshaw, 1989).

Contemporary applications of intersectionality, however, have deviated from the radical origins of the spirit energizing intersectionality. In Crenshaw’s (2017) own words, applications of intersectionality have problematically treated it as either (a) a panacea-like grand theory of everything, which excuses inaction, (b) or an analytical tool to inspect racial, gender, and sexual problems in isolation from one another, which inevitably replicates the very same type of boundary closure and exclusion that Crenshaw (1989) initially critiqued.

Transdisciplinary Black feminist dialogue thus resolves the complacency sedimented in intersectionality – to become “postintersectional” by “reradicalizing race scholarship and center[ing] Black feminism” and “uncoupling black feminism and intersectionality… to search for knowledge and theory outside of our discipline” (Hester & Squires, 2018, p.344).

In sum, pedagogical, creative dialogue across professions and disciplines in hooks’ BFA reverses the dishonor that marginalized identities are branded with in the psyches of the Anglo-American public by developing “a whole new language and a whole new way of communicating because our language itself is so infused with the politics of domination” (Brosi & hooks, 2012, p.77; hooks, 1994a, p.148; 2000b, p.12; 2003, p.80) – an approach that gains ever more

relevance in the contemporary political climate. hooks echoes Collins (2022) by affirming the importance of conversation between Black scholars and Black *women*: dialogue between different agents of knowledge invokes relationships and connectedness that create a new form of knowledge production and political tool to subvert patriarchal and racial domination (ibid; Hsiung, 2016).

Reflexive Accountability

When we participate in this creative dialogue, we become reflexive. For hooks, reflexivity goes beyond recognizing our own biases, as is conventional in QRM – it means holding *oneself accountable*. Antiracist "consciousness-raising" is an ontological obligation for humans. By foregrounding the fact that our species has only ever been embedded "small communities," hooks politically stresses "aware[ness] of our differences… to come to terms with those differences" (Brosi & hooks, 2012, p.77), because "restorative justice does take away a notion of blame… we can be mutually accountable for healing even though there might be a person who is 'a victim'" (Brosi & hooks, 2012, p.80; 1994a, p.2).

Mutual accountability is an epistemic shift in thinking to center *both* the oppressor and the oppressed in dialogue with one another. "Feminist consciousness raising for males," for instance, "is as essential to the revolutionary movement as female groups. Had there been an emphasis on groups for males that taught boys and men about what sexism is and how it can be transformed, it would have been impossible for mass media to portray the movement as anti-male" (hooks, 2000a, p.11).

hooks (2003, p.177) suggests here that dialogue is true reconciliation: dialogue airs grievances, histories, and standpoints, all mingling together until they sediment into an agreed-upon agenda for seeking amends. Dialogue, moreover, is both an epistemic virtue and an

institutional form, such as "a non-hierarchal model for discussion [at consciousness-raising sessions that] positively gave every woman a chance to speak… and clarify our collective understanding of the nature of male domination… a realistic standpoint on gender exploitation and oppression" (p.8).

Including "everyone's voice" in dialogue is the heart of subversion precisely because it *includes*, and therefore makes real, the identities of the oppressor and oppressed. This dialogue is important because "…different, more radical subject matter does not create a liberatory pedagogy… a simple practice like including personal experience may be more constructively challenging than simply changing the curriculum" (1994a, p.148).

Black feminists have also vindicated the significance of multiplicity and dialogue in crafting a liberatory pedagogy that prompts oppressed subjects to express, expose, articulate, and rethink the conditions of their oppression. Schools, for instance, perpetuate an imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy through curricula and intergroup relations that consistently draw distinctions between majority members and minority members, affecting students and also teachers, psychologists, and school administrators (Delpit, 1995, p.xiii).

As such, Black feminists like Marva Collins and Corla Hawkins founded their own schools and innovated a maternal approach to education based on the idea that making oneself personally accountable for students disrupts the emic hierarchies in schools performatively and therefore psychologically (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002, p.76; Delpit, 1995). This disruption has had powerful effects. Higher rates of student graduation have been recorded on account of the "new family structure that stresses success, personal achievement and self-esteem" within the school itself, created by educators and researchers who cognize themselves as part of the dialogue and being reflexively accountable (Valente, 1996, p.45).

The Politics of Qualitative Research Methods: Whether to Humanize?

A central debate within QRM figures around whether and how to humanize subjects in the field and representations thereafter – and to what effect.

Argument A: to humanize.—Sociologists call attention to how the act of humanizing subjects is a political one with emancipatory potential, allowing subjects to reclaim their identities through the power of self-definition (Okello, 2018). Duneier (2019) operationalizes the act of humanizing in his ethnography of sidewalk vendors by depicting his subjects' (vendors, panhandlers, scavengers) human qualities, such as their hopes, aspirations, and values as they surface in everyday life. The chief merit of doing so, he asserts (2002), is to disrupt defeatist stereotypes of racially and class oppressed individuals that foster stigma among outsiders and fatalism among insiders.

Other ethnographers who see humanization as a matter of methodological rigor have similarly striven to humanize the underclass by showcasing their willpower, character, and responsibility as well as ultimately nesting these observations in larger statements about policy reform – suggestions, for instance, that they are not morally depraved, but institutionally overlooked and deprived of employment opportunities (Anderson, 2022; Contreras, 2019).

Argument B: not to humanize.—Yet, an opposing view holds that such micro-level efforts to humanize subjects within the research process itself produce the opposite effect: that when we actively strive to fish out what Duneier (2019) calls human qualities from amidst the social and economic struggles plaguing victims of marginalization, we inadvertently romanticize, neglect, and, worst of all, valorize the material deprivation that underpins their disadvantaged social position to begin with (Wacquant, 2002). This pushback against "exonerating the character of dishonored characters" (ibid, p.1470) criticizes its encouragement of the systemic roots of the

oppression under study by shifting our attention away from the harms of institutional, social structural repression toward piecemeal distractions.

Academic institutions reveal the same problem. Public commitments to "decolonization" and "racial representation" by universities have largely failed to produce material change for Indigenous and racial minorities (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 2012; Tomlinson, 2018). Even ethical review boards, for instance, protect powerful groups in society, such as by disproportionately favoring research proposals by white men and topics that deal with white-settler experiences, coming to homogenize studies about the marginalized into conforming with the white-settler experience and thus excluding marginalized identities from visibility (Bhopal, 2018; hooks, 2000a, p.22; hooks, 2000b, p.36; Sabati, 2019).

In sum, *Argument A: to humanize* holds that QRM should aim to identify the cultural values that marginalized people adopt amid their conditions to restore some sense of humanity to them, in defiance of stereotypes that may suggest otherwise. *Argument B: not to humanize*, meanwhile, holds that to celebrate anything about the marginalized risks romanticizing their disenfranchisement and shifting our thinking to fallible small-scale reforms as the solution.

A BFA thus strikes a balance between *Argument A: to humanize* and *Argument B: not to humanize* to assert that social revolution (the main objective of Wacquant and scholars in his camp in *Argument B: not to humanize*, which they say is unachievable in *Argument A: to humanize*) is needed for systemic change but would stress the importance of inclusive pedagogy and creative dialogue insofar as including the underclass, speaking with them, and learning from one another (the main practice of *Argument A: to humanize*). For a BFA, the objective that *Argument A: to humanize* holds for changing how outsider see insiders is but a nominal distinction, for the very same stereotypes that outsiders use to view insiders are how insiders

view themselves. Relatedly, this insider-outsider debate downplays the scale of the change needed, for if we only believe the views of outsiders need changing, we are steered to restricted policy reforms.

However, a BFA holds that reform is ineffective because "institutional structures impose values, modes of thought, ways of being on our consciousness" (hooks, 1989, p.37), namely through the values of an imperialist white supremacist patriarchy in schooling (hooks, 2003, p.xiii). First-hand experiences reported by Black women professors and statistical data corroborate capillary forms of racially motivated microaggressions and a racial divide in tenure decisions, such that Black faculty promotion rates would need another 150 years to reach parity with their white counterparts (Arnold, Crawford, & Khalifa, 2016).

Black feminists including hooks expressed frustration at this: "some of the best and brightest among us… [were] disappointed and enraged that the radical politics undergirding women's studies was being replaced by liberal reformism" (hooks, 2000a, p.9). After all, reform instead of revolution risks merely replicating the status quo in a different form:

> "Black activists [did] not reject the value system of [American] culture. Consequently, they did not question the rightness of patriarchy… [and] 'you see the colored men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as it was before'" (hooks, 1990, pp.4-5)

Humanization is thus political as much as analytical – it does not mean to prove our humanity (which would be to accede to the cultural images laid upon us by imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy), but to give voice to our human qualities and reclaim them from erasure by academic institutions by recognizing the structural disadvantages that oppress our survival

(which is to resist and re-story the images imposed by imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy).

As a result, hooks asserts that we are all called to reflexive accountability to humanize participants. Only thus can we effect "mass-based political movements calling citizens of this nation to uphold democracy and the rights of everyone to be educated, and to work on behalf of ending domination in all its forms—to work for justice, changing our educational system" (2003, p.xiii). Dedicated to inclusive pedagogy and creative dialogue, a BFA witnesses in its own history how Black women introducing their identities, experiences, and life histories (humanizing themselves) into their work generated new genres of scholarship, rendered themselves visible, and afforded symbolic and material rewards in the forms of institutionalized recognition, such as when they taught in universities (hooks, 2000a, p.9).

To humanize and include the marginalized benefits all agents of change, even those who are not marginalized. By including ordinary Black women in the feminist movement, for instance, all agents of change were forced to "take [theoretical] abstraction and articulate it in a language that renders it accessible—not less complex or rigorous—but simply more accessible" (hooks, 1989, p.37). In essence, a BFA recognizes that a more accessible movement with a broader base enacts a powerful paradigm shift, given the potency of language as a domain where the powerful exert their control by limiting the communicative rights of victims (access to events, speech acts, topics of discussion, etc.). To render a movement accessible is to democratize control over the public sphere from the traditionally powerful to the powerless and to reconfigure victims' consciousness, ultimately laying the foundation for greater public support for later institutional reforms of all scales and contexts (hooks, 1995, p.235).

The Practice of Qualitative Research Methods: Whether to Intervene?

Owing to a broader commitment to social justice and refracting the practical challenge of humanizing subjects, QRM scholars have been divided over whether and how to intervene during moral dilemmas in the field. Becker (2000) succinctly captures the difficulties of two competing positions, describing them as competing impulses to ignore social issues witnessed to ensure the success of the research and to "speaking up" to remedy such problems as they emerge, risking completion of the research project.

Argument A: non-intervention.—On the one hand, sociologists aligned with the non-intervention position assert that the success of the research project itself creates social change superior to piecemeal interventions in the immediate field. This claim assumes that publications and research findings effect more lasting change in the discourse surrounding subjects and for a broader audience *across* time, as many urban ethnographers of the racially disadvantaged allude (Becker, 2000; Flores, 2016). In his ethnography of drug dealers in segregated communities, Contreras (2019) even requests his subjects to censor any information about their illicit activities to minimize his involvement and protect the project's success, building off similar calls in sociology to mask identities in ethnographies (Jerolmack & Murphy, 2019).

Underwritten in these multiple reservations with intervention in the qualitative study of marginalized communities is danger to the researcher. As Contreras (2019) writes, there are physical risks that QRM expose a researcher to in the world of the underclass, typically observed to be rife with violence, substance abuse, death, and conflict with authorities.

Argument B: intervention.—Opposite to a non-interventionist position is a commitment to intervention. In support of intervention, Humphrey (2013) articulates in her study of professional education how involving herself in more intimate relationships with specific students and educators and their everyday lives is necessary to gain sufficient trust to obtain honest dialogue

about powerful, unwritten social norms. Denzin (2002) also affirms the value of moral criticism and making our own standpoints clear to create practical, collective change, because it is dangerous to try to be objective. Doing so risks simply replicating epistemologies that are immanent to hegemonic patriarchal power structures in academic knowledge production (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Tomlinson, 2018). The claim at hand rests on a conceptualization of intervention (and obtrusiveness itself) as a potentially useful tool for data collection by stimulating subjects to reflect on, challenge, and (re)conceptualize/articulate their interpretations (Burawoy, 2021).

In sum, despite their shared belief in the *goal* of research as redeeming victims from marginalization, the two camps part company where non-interventionists in *Argument A: non-intervention* conceive of QRM to be an *in situ* means of knowledge production and interventionists in *Argument B: intervention* conceive of the *process* of research to be a public service tool for empowerment (Burawoy, 2005).

A BFA observes the rift between the two arguments as a "false dichotomy between the so called 'theoretical' and writing which appears to be more directly related to the experiential" (hooks, 1989, p.37). The clash between interventionism and non-interventionism masks a deeper and more historic divide between theory and praxis – the extent to which one commits herself to theory and in what forms she gives its expression.

In critique of *Argument A: non-intervention*, a BFA stresses that to refuse intervention is to dismiss the injustice altogether. We must not be tempted to erase the significance of lived experiences. The feminist revolution that extended throughout much of the 20th century would not have happened had it not been for the ordinary Black women (with no academic training) who participated in early feminist discussions with nothing but their zeal and personal experiences (hooks, 1994a, p.114; 2000a, p.9).

Other Black feminist scholars echo this admonishment of the false boundaries set up between researcher and researched (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). Patterson et al (2016) conducted focus group discussions with Black women, but relieved themselves of QRM conventions (e.g. recording audio, following a script) when their shared identities and experiences offered them a source of mutual love to rely on. In their words, "precise conversational records were unnecessary. Participants shared as much as they felt comfortable, which oftentimes included intimate details of disappointment, triumph, hurt, and personal rebuilding… we provided each other with words and physical embraces of comfort. Increasingly, we spoke without filters or apologies" (p.61).

This illustrates an important quality of a BFA applied by marginalized identities to study marginalized identities: the marginalized come to possess their experiences through more than mere talking or living – but through surviving and thriving within multiple forms of oppression, a self-defined and embodied way of knowing (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). Indeed, the interventionism in a BFA pulls the researcher out of formalist roles laid down by QRM to recognize their shared heritage of oppression with the researched.

Intervention thus benefits the researcher's project in eliciting more powerful and fundamental truths in a phenomenon by exemplifying a methodological flexibility that questions "what currently passes as truth and simultaneously challenges the process of arriving at that truth" (Collins, 2022, p.270). In this spirit, a BFA would reference reflexive accountability in its response to *Argument A: non-intervention*'s admonishment about the personal danger incurred by intervention in the field: danger for whom?

Yes, there is danger in the "fieldsite." Women have always been oppressed, Black women especially, in their everyday lives for centuries. It is even a privilege that the most

significant danger a researcher will ever experience is in fieldwork. Recognizing this privilege is not just important for research outcomes, as conventional QRM scholarship would hold, but for better identifying the role one can play in the antiracist struggle.

It is important for the marginalized themselves to take the lead in doing this kind of research. For too long have the academy and practice of QRM "identif[ied] writing by working-class women and women of color as 'experiential' while the writing of white women represents 'theory'" (hooks, 1989, p.37). Marginalized people doing research on marginalized issues is, therefore, an act of historical reparation that "integrate[s] the [Black self-]love ethic into a vision of political decolonization that would provide a blueprint for the eradication of black self-hatred" (hooks, 1994b, p.291).

hooks further emphasizes the political potential of this coupling in her praise of early radical feminist revolutionaries, noting that "whereas women from various backgrounds, those who worked solely as housewives or in service jobs, and big-time professional women, could be found in diverse consciousness-raising groups, the academy was and remains a site of privilege." (2000a, p.9). To fulfill its commitment to social equity, QRM research is thus called to include members of all social categories in pedagogical and creative discourse, and to call upon researchers themselves to be reflexively accountable for their personal history and heritage.

The Epistemology of Qualitative Research Methods: Which Orientation?

Imagining what QRM as an enterprise should accomplish leads to three main orientations, styles for how to practice, teach, and think about QRM: procedural, craft, and bricolage.

(a) A *procedural* orientation valorizes carefully planned research under what it deems "natural" settings (conditions not designed for research, to reduce observational bias) over long

periods of time (Hammersley, 2004). It thus concedes to a relatively static set of methodological rules believed to be indispensable to science, which warrant pre-study design and methods (Billo and Mountz, 2016). As Burawoy (2021) describes, process governs product within this industrial orientation of science, with the goal of systematically mining the world for objective knowledge.

(b) A *craft* orientation underscores practicality and variation, recognizing the fluid (changeable) nature of research topics and their adherent methodological needs/decisions (Becker, 2000) and so prescribing a trial-and-error practice of identifying the most appropriate research method (Hammersley, 2004). This orientation thus assigns its pedagogy the task of dispensing a particular habitus: an embodied tradition that inculcates a range of skills to pursue the craft, like a diagnostic toolkit for ethnography (Duneier, 2002) or innovative interviewing skills and ways to teach them (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Stressing practicality, it prescribes constant comparisons across observations, codes, methods, and inductive styles of inquiry that, like grounded theory, are generative of theoretical analyses that most appropriately "fit" the data (Burawoy, 2021).

(c) A *bricolage* orientation envisages QRM as art. Its core is a creative approach to flexibly manipulate decisions about research design, like a craft orientation, but tempered with a negative, rather than a pragmatic, impulse to challenge all assumptions (Starks & Trinidad, 2017; Charmaz, 2014). Rather than pursuing standardized techniques, it inductively mobilizes methods, rooted in a symptomatic vision of research findings as "representation[s] of concrete individual forms of… underlying structural determinants [of a phenomenon]" (Hammersley, 2004, pp.18-9).

A BFA helps us identify the limitations of each orientation and proposes a new orientation altogether. (a) To the procedural orientation, a BFA helps us recognize that it suffers

analytically from constituting a positivist ideology that better reflects the personal and social characteristics of the researcher. A procedural orientation blatantly overlooks the power dynamics that have lorded over the academy, historically dominated by white men and in exclusion of people of color (hooks, 1989, pp.36-7).

(b) To the craft orientation, a BFA identifies that its focus on pragmatic efficacy comes at the cost of theory. The kind of abstract thinking that goes into theorizing encourages us to participate in creative dialogue with others, reflexively hold ourselves accountable, and ultimately "raise our consciousnesses" about oppression.

(c) To the bricolage orientation, a BFA recognizes that its version of pedagogy ultimately neglects the relations of power that dominate QRM and the academy at large (Brosi & hooks, 2012; hooks, 2000a, p.11). And despite its fundamentally negative tendency to expose inequality and hierarchies, a bricolage orientation is blind to the necessity of *positive* tendencies needed to reverse these problems, erect a model of *equitable* practice thereafter, and overturn the preconceived notions about identities and QRM that people (even the marginalized themselves) carry from mass media and struggle to dispose of.

A BFA thus champions a new kind of orientation on this premise: love. Love is visibly missing from all three orientations and liberal politics at large. As hooks put it plainly in *Love is the Practice of Freedom*, "the absence of a sustained focus on love in progressive circles arises from a collective failure to acknowledge the needs of the spirit and an overdetermined emphasis on material concerns." Hers is an entirely human idea of love, universal, gentle, and always "the life force inside a dark place waiting to be born—waiting to see the light" (hooks, 1999, p.68).

Put simply, because love is why we live, it should be *how* we live. hooks' BFA introduces love to the antiracist charge that spirits the practice and pedagogy of QRM, stressing

that, “as long as we refuse to address fully the place of love in struggles for liberation we will not be able to create a culture of conversion where there is a mass turning away from an ethic of domination” (hooks, 1994b, p.289). To love, then, is to erode the “hardness and toughness that… prevents sustained public acknowledgment of the enormous grief and pain” in marginalized lives (hooks, 1994b, p.292). Love is the North Star that orients all our ideals for the epistemology of QRM in a BFA. A communal force, love includes participants in the dialogue of knowledge production, even if they are not members of the academic profession.

Against the backdrop of white supremacist media institutions that twist Black men and women into bestial representations, teaching generations to hate themselves (hooks, 1990, pp.54-55), to love the marginalized self and other is to cast off the yoke of oppression enough to trust one another, researchers and fellow subjects alike, and collectively “raise their consciousness” toward subversion against domination.

Under what Nash (2013) coins “love-politics,” hooks is joined by Black feminist scholars who have grappled with love in similar fashion, like Catherine Squires, Patricia Hill Collins, Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant, Angela Davis, and countless others. As Hester and Squires (2018) note, this love,

> “… is not… navigating the ‘race conversation’ with people who are resistant or ignorant: it is you taking the deep dive inside to understand that you are a unique, worthy, loved being.” (p.346)

Collins draws our attention to an important aspect of this love often neglected by contemporary studies of intersectionality: Black self-love, which is, "loving Black people ... in a society that is so dependent on hating Blackness constitutes a highly rebellious act" (Collins 2004, p.250; see also Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002).

As Angela Davis (1981) makes clear, this recasts the meaning of solidarity in the antiracist movement into love, respect, and generosity fostered toward fellow marginalized folks and the self. After all, love is a rarely discussed inheritance that the marginalized receive, as Black feminist figures are often erased or their contributions minimized. Recognizing, giving name to, and taking up love is thus an act of rebellion that reverses the erasure of this bond between past and present; to liberate the idea of love itself from beyond a culturally narrow worldview focused on love in bourgeois nuclear families (Nash, 2013, pp.3-4) and focus on "a love for us that transcend[s] our… acquaintance, a love and pride rooted in shared identities" (Patterson et al, 2016, p.57).

Conclusion

QRM practitioners are often confronted with the question: how do we do good work? This question surfaces in three debates about the politics (humanization), the practice (intervention), and the epistemology of QRM (procedural, craft, and bricolage orientations).

This article casts new light on these debates by articulating a BFA developed through bell hooks' *oeuvre*. A BFA moves us to ask instead: how do we do good? This shift naturally benefits our objective of achieving equity. Drawing on the lived experiences of marginalized identities to reflect on the study of marginalized identities, a BFA recognizes that humanization through creative dialogue and inclusive pedagogy builds community in response to a precarious political climate. Intervention performs a reflexive accountability that levels the researcher and researched and conjures forth a more evocative narrative built upon their shared subjection to oppression. Additionally, a BFA recognizes the limitations of extant orientations to QRM in capturing the lived and embodied experiences of oppression shouldered by the marginalized and argues instead for an orientation built upon love.

What are the practical steps needed to invigorate dialogue, collaboration, love and to humanise research? How do we deal with the constraints to embed the notion of love in QRM? To relieve these constraints, this article has suggested the cross-professional (and transdisciplinary) inclusion of persons of color in the research process itself.

Our lives do not begin nor end within academia, as Collins pointed out in her transition into professorship. Our commitment to the antiracist movement ought not be yoked by disciplinary boundaries, as is so often the case in QRM when scholars are called to cite arcane references within a specific discipline. Our loyalty to the movement calls on us to consider the myriad ways that oppression takes place in professions and disciplines outside our own. To this, not the "canon" of our disciplines, is our highest calling as antiracist scholars.

Methodologically, this article also suggests relieving ourselves of the conventions that lord over conventional QRM in the study of marginalized experiences, such as recording audio and brandishing our positionality as researchers in an interviewer-interviewee dynamic. It is worth noting that such conventions were developed, with the exception of Du Bois, in large part by white settlers. Relieving ourselves of these conventions, then, allows us as marginalized researchers and our marginalized participants to recast our experiences outside the mold of white settlers' expectations, relish in the organic cohesion that follows, and uncover in collaborative and unrestrained fashion the stories of oppression and ancestry of love that bind us through our marginalized identities.

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