

## “Oh, Those Loud Black Girls!”: A Phenomenological Study of Black Girls Talking with an Attitude

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### Abstract

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Current research suggests that it is imperative for researchers and educators to pay more attention to the needs of African American adolescent girls and how their race and gender affect schooling (Fordham, 1993; Morris, 2007). The purpose of this study was to highlight the lived experiences of two African American adolescent girls when they used the African American women’s speech practice, “Talking with an Attitude” (TWA), with their teachers. Using phenomenology and Afrocentric feminist epistemology as methodological and theoretical approaches, interviews were used to collect and analyze data that revealed the nature of their lived experiences. Van Manen’s description of selective highlighting of statements that point to themes was used as a means of analysis. The findings indicate that the girls reappropriated the use of TWA to resist what they perceived to be hostility and disrespect on the part of their teachers.

### Keywords

females, African American students, speech practices, talking with an attitude, behavior, teacher interactions, race, minority groups, phenomenology, Afrocentric feminist epistemology

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*No matter how backward and negative the mainstream view and image of Black people, I feel compelled to reshape the image and to explore our many positive angles because I love my own people. Perhaps this is because I have been blessed with spiritual African eyes at a time when most Africans have had their eyes poked out....So, like most ghetto girls who haven't yet been turned into money-hungry, heartless bitches by a godless money centered world, I have a problem: I love hard. Maybe too hard. Or maybe it's too hard for a people without structure—structure in the sense of knowing what African womanhood is. What does it mean? What is it supposed to do to you and for you?*  
(Sistah Souljah, as cited in Richardson, 2003)

### Introduction

While I did not grow up in the ghetto like Sistah Souljah, the author of the above quote, I have come to love my people hard, and I aim to highlight their often unheard voices as they describe their experiences with teachers and their use of the speech practice, “Talking with an Attitude” (TWA; Troutman, 2010). As these girls navigate their school ecology, they are also exploring their identities as African American<sup>1</sup> females. Through the sharing of their lived experiences, I hope educators will walk away with more knowledge about the development of their multiple identities and of the TWA speech practice, which is part of the African womanhood Sistah Souljah mentions. But first, I want to share my journey by describing my experiences with the phenomenon.

First, as an African American adolescent, I attended public schools whose student populations were majority African American, and many of my female friends talked with an attitude. At the time, I did not understand talking with an attitude as a speech practice within the African American women’s speech community (AAWSC; Troutman, 2010), but my recent studies have developed within me an interest in this language and literacy practice. Although other races, ethnic groups, and cultures may appropriate talking with an attitude, it has been recognized in the literature as part of the AAWSC and the Black Diaspora, so this study focused solely on African American girls because of its history within this community.

In the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2010), the word “attitude” has several meanings, including: fitness, adaptation, disposition, and posture, that is, an outlook on the world. When talking about attitude generally, among the White dominant culture, the meaning of attitude denotes these characteristics. For the AAWSC, talking with an attitude means so much more than an outlook. Troutman (2010) states:

For many African Americans that self-identify as members of the AASC [African American Speech Community], attitude holds another layer of meaning, including to the extent that attitude becomes manifested overtly, through language and kinesics, by a speaker’s ability to **talk** with an attitude, **walk** with an attitude, **act** with an attitude, **be** with an attitude. In many instances within the AASC, then, attitude actions are marked distinctly and can be read by other group members. These are actions that are learned socio-culturally in socially real contexts (emphasis in original; p. 107).

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<sup>1</sup> Like Battle-Walters (2004), I will use the terms Black and African American interchangeably to include Black females who refer to themselves as Black and to provide a possible connection of this phenomenon to females of the Black Diaspora.

She goes on to state that those outside the AAWSC may look at TWA negatively, but to those inside the group, TWA can also be positive as noted by some of her participants quoted in the following text.

In Troutman's (2010) study of fifteen African American women ranging in age from 20-74, she noted that her participants defined TWA differently based on age. The older generation thought that attitude exuded confidence and self-esteem, while the younger generation thought that it meant having a chip on one's shoulder or talking back. I found the latter negative connotations to be true of some classmates in my early education, so that was how I defined TWA for many years until I went to college and graduate school. Now, I see TWA as an African American women's speech practice that is used to show confidence or resistance in oppressive situations.

As stated earlier, in my elementary grades, I had constant contact with girls who engaged in the practice of TWA, and my ideas on how TWA was operationalized were different. My thinking toward TWA continued to be negative because I saw what I perceived to be angry and threatening behaviors. My exposure to many girls who used this speech practice changed a little in high school when I entered honors and Advanced Placement classes, which many of them did not take.

As much as I hate to admit it, I was often intimidated by TWA and often did not respond adeptly. As a result, I hated this speech practice because I could not use it to stand up for myself, and consequently, as Morgan (2002) describes, I felt and looked like a fool. My lack of skillfulness with TWA was probably the case, in part, because of my family's child-rearing practices. For instance, my family taught me to restrain my tongue and avoid the semblance of conflict if at all possible. Even instances of using TWA to form camaraderie with classmates were frowned upon, so holding in my feelings may have created the inability to engage in TWA with my Black female classmates.

Another possible reason for my inability to engage in TWA may have been due to my socioeconomic status. My family was middle-class, and we lived in a Black suburban neighborhood, but I attended inner-city schools. Morris (2007) notes the tensions within Black communities because of social class, but specifically highlights the tensions among Black females. In his analysis of the relationships between teachers and their Black adolescent female students, Morris noted that Black female teachers often, but not in all cases, experienced friction over the expectation that these girls behave "ladylike" and avoid being loud or talking with an attitude (p. 506). He surmised this expectation had to do with the social class the Black female teachers acquired by virtue of their position. While Troutman believes TWA crosses social classes (personal communication, February 4, 2011), that was not my experience, and I think it should be studied further to parse out this possibility.

In college, these feelings dissipated as I attended a historically Black university. There were times when my friends talked with an attitude, but the practice was carried out differently. It was usually playful, and it created a connection between us.

The experiences of hearing African American females talk with an attitude continued when I entered the classroom as a student teacher in a redistricted suburban school with many students of color and English language learners from urban areas. My African American female mentor teacher and I once talked about our difficulties in reaching these girls, mainly because of their

“attitudes.” I remember her saying that out of the many years she had been teaching, she had noticed an increase in African American girls talking with an attitude. I wondered why these girls used this practice. Perhaps my mentor and I had a lack of understanding of the use of TWA among young Black girls (as opposed to older Black women) and, as a result, it may have been a deterrent to reaching them. Furthermore, we were also using many Eurocentric novels and texts. Because of our lack of understanding and our following school and district mandates to use several Eurocentric materials, we probably were not seen as allies and adults who truly cared about their well-being.

It was not until my graduate school studies that I began to understand the language and literacy practice of talking with an attitude and my Black “sistahs” who used it. I no longer loathed this practice, but began to appreciate it for both its seemingly positive and negative aspects. I now understand the self-esteem that comes with TWA that the older generation indexed, and I can appreciate its use as a form of resistance or as a way to make our voices heard.

At the end of my second year of doctoral studies, a former university professor asked if there was research or professional development available for teachers whose African American girls engaged in this practice, because the school district was suspending more girls for behavioral issues, which included TWA. Because of my own experiences, newfound knowledge, this professor’s request, and my doctoral readings, I decided to undertake a study about TWA, as it relates to Black adolescent girls.

The research question for this study is the following: What is the nature of the experience for young Black girls who talk with an attitude with or around their teachers? I explored the phenomenon of talking with an attitude using the theoretical lens of Afrocentric feminist epistemology (Collins, 1990) and phenomenological methods (Van Manen, 1990). This theory and approach allowed me to get at the issues of voice for my participants. The study encompasses interviewing adolescent African American females about their experiences with their teachers when the students talk with an attitude. It was my goal to provide my participants with the opportunity to voice their lived experiences of talking with an attitude with their teachers without my judgment or criticism. I aimed to use their voices to provide an understanding of the nuances of their lifeworlds.

The issue of voice is important here because African American females, along with other historically-oppressed people, have been noted for having to face what W.E.B. Du Bois (1903/1994) calls a “double-consciousness.” Du Bois states that the double-consciousness is “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (p. 2). He continues, “One ever feels his two-ness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (p. 2). Here, Du Bois explicates the idea that African Americans have the burden of displaying two selves, one that is acceptable to dominant society and one that wants to be the true self. Both entities war within the African American. This conflict is reflected in the politics and realities of our day as well. For example, if one studies Arizona’s ban on the teaching of ethnic studies, one might infer that this law aimed at increasing Americanism by banning curricula and instruction that officials believe re-segregate people (Downey, 2012). This tension creates a double consciousness for those who want to celebrate their culture. This example points to the reason why the voice of my participants is so important; they, even as young African

Americans, may have a war raging within, as they have been privy to some racialized experiences with their teachers.

Double-consciousness does not stop there, however. Before Du Bois, Anna Julia Cooper introduced the concept of triple identity that outlines the difficulties of being Black, female, and an American. Carby's (1987) work explicates, "Cooper argued that women should not be confined to narrow ideologies of domesticity and sexual objectification in either White or Black spheres of influence..." (as cited in Giles, 2006, p. 631). This racialized experience is still part of the African American woman's experience. To explain, some African American women have stated that they had been sterilized against their wills throughout the 20th century (Volscho, 2007). This example points to the possibility of these women having the triple identity conflict because their color/race, gender, and Americanism all played a part in their sterilization. Most recently, the state of North Carolina acknowledged the plan of mass sterilization of poor minorities in the 20th century, but the North Carolina Senate refused to approve compensation that the House had approved for victims (Gann, Hutchison, & James, 2012). These examples point to the negotiation of multiple identities that African American women face.

These examples are not given to place judgment on the morality of these laws/issues of banning cultural studies and sterilization; rather, they point to the multiple identities that women of color have to face in current times. This contention of managing a triple identity remains in current society, so it may also be a part of the lifeworlds of my participants who are learning to navigate this reality in their schools.

In sum, many African American women take up having a triple identity, positively shown through our strength for navigating multiple identities in a racist and sexist society. Even Cooper (1892/1998) stated, "But to be a woman of the Negro race in America, and to be able to grasp the deep significance of the possibilities of the crisis, is to have a heritage, it seems to me, unique in the ages" (p. 117). Even now, we have many possibilities in our current crises, if not more, as Cooper mentioned of African American women in her time. However, it may still be burdensome for African American adolescent females who are on the cusp of learning to navigate these identities.

### **Conceptual Background**

The literature on learning to navigate multiple identities provides a conceptual starting point for understanding why talking with an attitude is important for further study, especially for the school context. As part of the specific experiences of Black females, Troutman's (2010) participants explain what talking with an attitude means to them. First, however, Troutman explains that "*attitude* [is] a broad concept that can be displayed in language and/or kinesics" (p. 85, italics in original). She continues, "Its meanings and functions derive from social contexts and community norms" (p. 85). Troutman does not provide a definition of TWA because she uses the method phenomenology that involves putting co-researchers (referred to as participants for my study) in the subject position and allowing them, not the principal researcher, to co-define the term (D. Troutman, personal communication, February 4, 2011). Before presenting her co-researchers' definitions, however, Troutman provides the example below by Morgan (2002) to help the reader better understand the concept:

A verbal routine that I remember as a child resulted in my losing face when two of my very "best friends" were talking to each other. I innocently walked up to them, listened

for a bit, and then offered my expert advice about their conversation.... [T]hey said to me: “This is an A and B conversation, so C your way out!”...Fast forward to the new millennium, and what has happened to this kind of verbal death blow? It has become [sic] even more lethal. The eyes and head still roll, but the lips say something that requires insider youth membership. “Girlfriend” now says something like: “You just AAAAALLL UP in the Kool Aid!—And don’t EEEVEN know the flavor!” or “Stop dippin’ in my Kool Aid.” (p. 41)

Notice how Morgan calls this type of attitude a “verbal death blow” and “lethal” (p. 41). These adjectives describe a practice used negatively. To further support this point, Morgan goes on to say that her “sister overheard this and reported to everyone that [she] had no cool and had been made a fool” (p. 41). This is what I meant when I said that I felt foolish when faced with TWA as an adolescent. Although Troutman agrees that this example has negative implications for TWA, she adds that it also has attributes that are positive. She states that these “acts have been socially learned, transferred, and sanctioned by specific communities of practice” (p. 96). Although she believed this assertion to be the case, Troutman interviewed other Black women to get their perspectives. Nevertheless, in correspondence with Troutman, she stated that “Negative acts may have stood out most prominently from the Morgan example, yet it struck me that positive associations must have been and continue to be part of the TWA act; otherwise, it would not continue to be appropriated within and beyond the AASC” (personal communication, February 4, 2011). In other words, because TWA is still used within and beyond the AAWSC, it must be positive, as it has been maintained as a part of the cultural and ethnic community.

As stated earlier, Troutman’s (2010) participants defined TWA in positive and negative ways. For example, one of them stated that it means “having a chip on your shoulder,” or always being upset, and “flipping the finger,” while another one said that it is an “inflection in voice; sass, talking back, but it’s not disrespectful” (p.99). Finally, another participant stated that it is “confidence; I see it as a positive. Some people say, ‘Get rid of the ‘tude.’ When I first think of attitude, I think of it as positive” (p. 99). For instance, one of her participants stated, “models on a runway come out with attitude. [A] fashion director says, ‘Give me some attitude’” (p. 99). Attitude to these women means exuding confidence, self-esteem, command-of-self, command-of-language, and being empowered.

When asked who talks with an attitude, some of the women stated that TWA is “associated with teens and betweens,” “older and younger,” “Black females usually,” and “People who are self-assured, confident in status, in themselves, in their community, their work, [and] their roles” (Troutman, 2010, p. 100). They added, “Teachers may [TWA]; ministers may; leaders do it; males in their own way; females in their own way” (p. 100). All of these definitions demonstrate the polyvocal nature of the term. In addition, one of Troutman’s co-researchers stated that for older African American women, TWA means confidence, but it was often looked at negatively by their younger counterparts. As it will be seen later, my participants also conceived TWA as a negative act. However, talking with an attitude on the part of young people could very much mean more than just having a chip on one’s shoulder—as it is sometimes interpreted by teachers—but could also be used as an act of resistance on the part of Black adolescent girls (Fordham, 1993; Morris, 2007).

### **Possible Reasons Behind Adolescents’ Use of TWA**

Black girls talking with an attitude is not new. Grace Evans (1980), a former secondary teacher in Inner London comprehensive schools, “had a political background which included a

commitment to feminism and the exploration of race as a personal and political reality,” which informed her work (p. 183). As a former teacher of social studies, English, English as a Second Language, and special needs students, she heard her White colleagues exclaim, “Oh, those loud Black girls!” in the lounge of an inner-city secondary comprehensive London school (p. 183). Evans adds that this exclamation was often “followed by the slamming of a pile of folders on to a table and the speaker collapsing into a chair or storming off to get a cup of coffee” (p. 183). Evans continues her narrative with the statement below:

The words were usually uttered in response to a confrontation in which the teacher’s sense of authority had been threatened by an *attitude* of defiance on the part of a group of Black girls...they patrolled this territory with much skill, sending out a distinct message of being in and for themselves. (p. 183, emphasis added)

These teachers were not necessarily remarking on the volume of the girls’ speech (see Mitchell-Kernan (1972) on loud-talking); instead, they were incensed at the girls’ attitudes of defiance. These teachers were frustrated because they felt that their authority was undermined by skillful speakers who knew how to speak their mind and rebel against what they perceived as unfair uses of the teachers’ authority. Again, this use of TWA is positive, in that the girls used it to maintain their cultural integrity.

Evans (1980) also argues that these girls, like their Black male counterparts, are not represented in the curriculum, in school exhibits, or in books. This was also generally the case in the school district where I taught. In fact, this “hidden curriculum,” as Evans termed it, suggested that Black students were destined to work the jobs of those low on the social hierarchy of the school. In her school, the majority of the teachers were White, and many of the cooks, cleaners, and additional employees were Black women. Evans (1980) states, “Looking at the subject hierarchy of the secondary school, it is a small intellectual leap to make from identifying the subjects with the least status—home economics, needlework, child development—to observing that it is in these spheres of work that Black women are to be found in the outside world [of school]” (p. 187). These females had few role models of Black women from the higher social hierarchy from which to glean information that would help them climb this ladder without negating their language and literacies. In fact, Evans states that a “good” education often comes at the cost of one’s Black cultural identity.

Finally, the author points out the challenges that these girls face by being Black and female. She notes that the experience of marginalization is different for Black and White women; for Black women have been castigated as “the mammy, the Aunt Jemima figure, the masculinised beast of burden and the sexually licentious, exotic nightclub singer/dancer/prostitute” (p. 188). These images, often found in the media, are difficult to erase when attempting to replace them with positive ones, such as the person who is excelling in the arts or sports. Even putting forth an image of a Black female as *only* able to succeed in arts and sports is somewhat marginalizing her. Images of women in business, education, finance, and politics present careers to which young Black adolescent girls should be exposed, in addition to arts and sports. A lack of access to positive images of Black women is a challenge that Black girls struggle with as they begin to develop their identities (Evans, 1980). Images of Black women who have been able to operate successfully in the dominant society are missing, and so are the ways in which they navigated TWA in their climbs up the social ladder. This lack of positive images is problematic because teachers of Black girls’ may also lack these positive images, which may affect how they interact with them.

Similar to Evans' chapter, Morris' (2007) article outlines the educational obstacles and perceptions that Black girls face, but in an American public neighborhood middle school. Unlike Evans, Morris noted that Black female teachers, as well as White teachers, disciplined Black girls for talking with an attitude. His examples show that teachers who share the same race and gender can also carry out oppressive practices. In his findings Morris noted, for example, that Black female teachers presumed that each of their Black female students lacked "interactional skills" because of her family's socioeconomic status (p. 504). Female-headed households in these socioeconomic groups were presumed inadequate to pass on values that the dominant society esteems. However, Morris made sure not to demonize these teachers, because their intentions seemed to be caring. They did not want their Black female students to be marginalized by the racist and sexist society that they knew awaited them. Although my participants noted the racialized nature of their experiences when talking with an attitude, it is important to note that teachers who share the same race may engage in oppressive practices as a result of several factors including class, as noted by Morris.

As a result of his research, Morris noticed three themes that are relevant to the present study. The first theme was perceived challenges to authority, and it was noted because teachers often chastised girls for subverting their authority in classrooms. After one teacher scolded one of her Black female students for being assertive by asking questions, the girl put her head down on the desk and was disengaged for the rest of the class.

Another theme that coincides with my research is perceived loudness. Loudness here not only represents the volume of the girls' speech, but attitude as well. One of the teachers told Morris: "The boys here are always quiet and the girls are real loud. Girls are loud at this age, they have *attitude*. They won't want to do something, or think something is stupid, and move their heads back and forth and click at me" (emphasis added, p. 505). While this teacher was speaking of girls in general, the author notes that her description of clicking and head movement is stereotypical Black female behavior. This perception of Black girls as loud often resulted in discipline from many teachers.

The third theme is related to an African American male teacher in Morris' study, who described Black girls specifically as loud and confrontational. However, he added, "...[T]hey've learned to be combative because they don't have the system behind them. They've learned this to survive" (p. 506). Morris states this teacher's statement reflects scholarly research. My participants used their loudness or TWA in the same way.

### **TWA as a Form of Resistance**

Several authors have discussed some aspects of language and literacy practices such as TWA among African American women and the women's struggles in American society. One such author, Gwendolyn D. Pough (2004), speaks of some practices as "bringing wreck," a means of resistance. Specifically, she states, "Bringing wreck, as the term is used here, is a rhetorical act that has close ties to various other speech acts that are often linked to Black womanhood: talking back, going off, turning it out, having a niggerbitchfit, or being a diva" (p. 78). I would dare to say that if Troutman (2010) had written about TWA at the time this article was written, the term might have been included in that list. In fact, Pough cites Troutman, stating that Black women use their speech acts as a form of resistance. She references Troutman when she states, "Black women have had to develop and pass on to future generations of Black women a form of verbal



and nonverbal expression that combines politeness with assertiveness” (Pough, p. 78). Pough is indexing here Troutman’s 2001 analysis of the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas investigation, in which she analyzed Anita Hill’s assertive style throughout the questioning. Anita Hill’s assertiveness was used as an act of resistance, just as TWA is used in some situations.

### **Helping Black Adolescent Females Negotiate their Triple Identity**

Similar to Pough’s discussion on the struggles of Black women, Battle-Walters (2004) talks about Black women’s challenges with being Black and female in her published research study, *Sheila’s Shop: Working-Class African American Women Talk about Life, Love, Race, and Hair*. Battle-Walters, who studied the impact of race on a group of Black women in a hair salon, discusses the realities of being discriminated against for being Black and a woman, reinforcing Philomena Essed’s (as cited in Battle-Walters, 2004) concept of gendered racism. To begin this discussion on gendered racism, Battle-Walters begins by asking her participants what it is like to be a Black woman in America today. The responses particularly resonated with one of her participants: “It’s hard!” (p. 31). This client was alluding to the idea that it is hard for Black women to be successful because they find resistance from supervisors and institutions.

This concept of the gendered racism is similar to the previous discussion on Du Bois’ (1903/1994) concept of double-consciousness and Cooper’s (1892/1998) notion of the triple identity. Black women have felt compelled to navigate multiple identities as a result of not only wanting to express themselves to the world, but also to gain access to the culture of power, or the economic and social power associated with the White or dominant society (Delpit, 1995). As previously stated, Black adolescent girls also feel the effects of the triple identity. Elaine Richardson (2003) makes comments on the conflicts African American girls’ face in regard to their language and literacies. She states:

For many African American girls...[t]here has been a conflict, between our mothers and others, about what language is and does for us. This conflict is so prevalent that many Black females at some time or another internalize it: Should we respect our language and ways of knowing as little girls, or in our homes as we develop into women? Or should we gradually have our minds (our mother wits) erased with each passing year of formal schooling? (p. 76)

This quote speaks to the need of helping Black adolescent girls in the development of their identities by respecting their ways of knowing and educating teachers about their literacies. Providing this information to teachers will help them to understand and to educate Black adolescent females, so that their cultural expressions are validated while they are simultaneously taught how to access the culture of power (Delpit, 1995; Richardson, 2003). This knowledge will help all teachers, regardless of race. However, in this study, three White teachers may have needed this information to avoid the racialized incidents with the two participants. Knowledge about Black girls’ literacies, and how these girls may use them as a defense mechanism, may have curbed the conflicts between the girls and their teachers. This concept of understanding TWA as an avenue that Black girls use outside cultural contexts to defend themselves is a point illuminated through the lens of Afrocentric feminist epistemology and phenomenology.

### **Theoretical and Methodological Traditions**

Afrocentric feminist epistemology, a tradition best explicated in the work of Patricia Hill Collins, came about because Black women wanted to have the ability to combine both Afrocentric *and* feminist standpoints (Collins, 1990). She lists four dimensions to Afrocentric feminist epistemology: (a) concrete experience as a criterion of meaning; (b) the use of dialogue in

assessing knowledge claims; (c) the ethic of caring; and (d) the ethic of personal accountability. Concrete experience as a criterion of meaning indicates that Black women place greater value on wisdom gained through experience than on knowledge of a concept (Collins, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The Black adolescent females in this study were treated as experts having wisdom because of their lived experiences with the phenomenon. During interviews with these adolescents, I purposed to place value on their accounts in order to honor the wisdom they brought to the phenomenon. Placing value on their experiences is critical because while I had exposure to TWA, I had never used it with teachers, so their wisdom served as enlightenment for me as a researcher and educator.

I also employed Collins use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims by talking “with” and not “to” the participants in order to dialogue with them instead of treating them as objects. Therefore, we dialogued as subject to subject. To elaborate on this tenet, Collins (1990) states, “For Black women new knowledge claims are rarely worked out in isolation from other individuals and are usually developed through dialogues with other members of a community” (p. 212). Therefore, my participants and I worked through their knowledge claims by delving deeper into their stories through clarifying questions in order to come to a better understanding of their experiences.

Furthermore, in using the ethic of care, I encouraged them to tell their stories because I wanted them to walk away feeling the value placed upon their lived experiences. Care was also established through the solidarity gained by our interactions during their activities at the Boys and Girls Club. The girls’ own ethic of care was demonstrated when they talked about their experiences witnessing classmates being verbally attacked by teachers. Through my research, they wanted other teachers to understand that everyone has feelings, and one may not know a student’s life experiences.

Finally, I incorporated the ethic of personal accountability that involves an individual taking full responsibility for her knowledge claims and the researcher’s evaluation of an individual’s character, values, and ethics. Through my participant observation of the girls during their Boys and Girls Club activities and probing to ensure they indeed had these experiences, I held the girls accountable for their knowledge claims. In turn, they held me accountable, while I clarified their responses, for getting their stories right.

Along with Afrocentric feminist epistemology as a theoretical framework, I also used the method of phenomenology to get at essential meanings from my participants’ lived experience accounts. In phenomenology, participants’ experiences are reduced to a description of universal essences (Creswell, 2007). An essence refers to the “nature of an experience” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 10). Phenomenological research, according to Van Manen, is at its core the human scientific study of essences. My research question gets to the essence of the experience under study. Again, it is, “What is the nature of the experience for young Black girls who talk with an attitude with or around their teachers?” This question gets at the meaning of the lived experience instead of just the facts of the experience (Van Manen, 1990). For example, in my research, I identified the phenomenon of African American adolescent girls talking with an attitude with or around their teachers, and collected data from five girls who might have experienced the phenomenon. Two were chosen because of their experience with the phenomenon, and after the interviews, I developed a description of the essences, or nature of the experience, for both participants.

Also in the study of lived experiences, it is only possible to understand the experience through reflection, or after it has taken place, because it is impossible to reflect upon the experience as one is living it (Van Manen, 1990). This statement means that phenomenological research is also the explication of phenomena as they presented themselves to consciousness. Therefore, in this research study, I attempted to provide an environment in which the participants were in a natural attitude so that they could provide the concrete, detailed account of their experiences (Van Manen, 1990).

Van Manen (1990) states that “[it] does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world” (p. 9). He means here that we attempt to grasp the world pre-reflectively and immediately. This line of thought is similar to twentieth-century German philosopher Heidegger (1927/1962/2006), in that for him phenomenology values lived experiences, precisely because the subject’s experiences are “ready-to-hand” (p. 98). In other words, the experience is action-oriented. The subject is being by doing. In this research study, I was interested in my participants’ ready-to-hand experiences. However, when I analyzed the research, I took on the position of “presence-at-hand” (p. 101). This phrase simply means that I stepped back and examined or observed the phenomenon in order to discover what is happening. For instance, after I read the interview transcripts, I concentrated on meanings as they were presented, in order to illuminate them and provide an analysis of themes as they appeared in the transcripts.

Another aspect of phenomenological research is that it is the description of the experiential meanings we live as we live them. In other words, phenomenology values meaning over statistical relationships among variables, frequency of behaviors or statements, and so on. Van Manen (1990) also states that phenomenology differs from “other disciplines in that it does not aim to explicate meanings specific to particular cultures (ethnography), to certain social groups (sociology), to historical periods (history), to mental types (psychology), or to an individual’s personal life history (biography)” (p. 11). Instead, phenomenology seeks to give meaning to our everyday experiences in this lifeworld (Van Manen, 1990). Thus, I also strive to give meaning to the African American adolescent girls’ experiences. Therefore, my purpose in this research is not to develop cultural meanings based on a certain social group but to come to more universally shared meanings that may be relevant to those outside of the group<sup>2</sup>.

Studying the human science of phenomena is also a part of phenomenological research. Phenomenology is scientific in that it is the systematic, explicit, self-critical, and intersubjective study of our lived experience. Phenomenology is a human science because it studies the meaning of the “lived *human* world” (p. 11, italics in original). In studying the human world, phenomenological research is also the attentive practice of thoughtfulness toward our subjects.

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<sup>2</sup> Although TWA is located more in the AAWSC, it has possible applications beyond this group as well. For example, others reading this article may remember an experience of friction with teachers and identify with it. This example is part of what phenomenology is all about. It notes the importance of the phenomenon to the individual or specialized group, but some aspect of the experience could have universally-shared meanings.

As I interviewed my participants and analyzed their experiences, I purposed to practice thoughtfulness and care, going back to Afrocentric feminist epistemology.

Phenomenological research is also a poetizing activity. Like a poet, phenomenologists speak the world rather than speaking about it. The phenomenological researcher will use language not to give the latest information, summarize, or conclude, but to try to elucidate the goings-on in the world. As we speak the world, it helps us improve it by giving voice to participants' experiences and making meaning out of them. This research empowers participants and enlightens readers to a phenomenon they may not have considered but to which they can in some way relate.

Orbe, Drummond, and Camara (2002) discuss how Afrocentric feminist epistemology aligns well with phenomenology, and are therefore both important models for my own work. First, both frameworks treat participants "as experts of their life experiences" (p. 125). These personal experiences are considered as solid evidence in research (Collins, 1990; Orbe et al., 2002). Like Afrocentric feminist epistemology, phenomenology also asserts that personal expressiveness and emotion are important to knowledge, theory, and research. Next, both traditions "focus on the power of dialogue in creating knowledge" (p. 125). All in all, "Phenomenological inquiry creates a discursive space where African American women can give voice to the circumstances that are central to the ways in which they experience life" (p. 125). Providing a space to voice experiences was my goal in this study: to use the voices of African American adolescent girls to explain their experiences with teachers when they enacted TWA. Afrocentric feminist epistemology and phenomenology enabled me to get at the core of their lived experiences in order to understand the phenomenon of teacher engagement with these speech practices.

## **Data-Gathering Methods and Analysis Procedures**

### **Sample and Participant Selection**

I gathered data through two interviews with each of the two participants: one in-depth interview with a follow-up interview. These interviews were with two African American girls over a one-month period. I interviewed several girls, but only two of them, who participated in a Boys and Girls Club in a Midwestern city, met the criteria for the study. To request their participation, I distributed a flyer to inform the girls and their families of the research. The Teen Director also allowed me to have a meeting with all of the African American adolescent girls in the program to describe my study. In addition to providing this information, I participated in their games and other activities to become less of a stranger to them. Olivia and Stephanie (the assigned pseudonyms for the participants) were chosen because of their experiences with the phenomenon and their willingness to participate in the study. They coincidentally belonged to the same middle school, so this fact probably played a part in the similarity of their experiences. As suggested above, they were not chosen based upon the fact that they attended the same school; their willingness to discuss their experiences with TWA was the reason that they were selected.

### **Research Procedures**

In my interviews with these girls, I aimed to get the full story of what it was like to talk with an attitude with their teachers by attempting to create an environment conducive for a natural attitude or relaxed state. This attempt was made by asking the girls to tell me about their day, what they did, and if they enjoyed themselves that day. I also asked them to tell me about themselves, including their hobbies, their favorite parts about school, and what they liked most about the Boys and Girls Club. During the main part of the interviews where I tried to ask

questions more pointedly about the phenomenon, I used reduction, the process of withholding one's prior knowledge, in order to try and see their experiences freshly. In other words, I withheld my knowledge and experience with TWA in order to listen and understand their experiences as if the concept was new to me. However, in analyzing the data, I followed Van Manen's (1990) method of using my prior experiences with the phenomenon to inform my interpretation of it. I found this method helpful in understanding the girls' feelings about their teachers' behaviors.

I audiotaped the interviews, and after these sessions, I transcribed the interviews verbatim and reread them several times, looking for significant statements to arrive at essential meanings which Van Manen describes as the selective approach. While this method helped me gain greater insight into the girls' lived experiences, I did struggle with making meaning out of them. Because of this struggle, I solicited the help of a colleague well-versed in phenomenology to help me arrive at themes from the data. His probing and insight helped me to think more deeply about the themes within the text and how the meanings could be universally shared.

To arrive at the themes, I had to determine the usefulness of those themes brainstormed by questioning whether they got at the meaning of the experience of these African American adolescent girls (Van Manen, 1990). The themes that were ultimately chosen seemed to get at the core of the "notion" we were trying to understand while also understanding that "no thematic formulation can completely unlock the deep meaning, the full mystery, the enigmatic aspects of the experiential meaning of a notion" (p. 88). Therefore, as the researcher, I did my best to get at the core of the experience, but also understood that my analysis might not completely get at the full mystery of the phenomenon. Van Manen (1990) captures developing a theme perfectly when he states: "As such, a so-called thematic phrase does not do justice to the fullness of the life of a phenomenon. A thematic phrase only serves to point at, to allude to, or to hint at, an aspect of the phenomenon" (p. 92).

Again, to isolate thematic statements, I used the selective/highlighting approach, which requires looking for any phrases that stand out. Therefore, I looked for sentences or part-sentences that seemed to be thematic of the experience of talking with an attitude with or around teachers (Van Manen, 1990).

Next, I attempted to transform these sentences linguistically to develop a theme that pointed to the experience, followed by the description that Van Manen (1990) calls "phenomenologically sensitive paragraphs," or the poetizing activity referred to earlier. Like my descriptions, I also attempted to word my themes in ways that got at the nature of the lived experience, but also used poetic language. In this research, for example, I developed the theme, "My Cup Overflows—Talking with an Attitude as a Defense Mechanism," as a result of one of participants' following statements: "And, then I'll try to tell them and stuff and sometimes they may want to get an attitude and stuff, but I try to hold it in as much as possibly like as long as I can. Sometimes, I do." This theme gets at the nature of the experience, but does so with language befitting phenomenology because it transcends "everyday talking and acting in that it is always arrived at in a reflective mood" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 97).

Furthermore, Van Manen explains that phenomenology seeks to develop a story that explains themes while remaining true to the experience. Developing these paragraphs required a "creative, hermeneutic process" (p. 96). To write the story, I reread the selective statements in the

interviews several times trying to determine the meaning behind them. I wrote down one-word phrases to begin my process of developing the themes, eventually created phrases, and consulted my aforementioned colleague for his input. I followed this process in the development of the themes' accompanying descriptions shared in the next section.

### Results

The following themes represent my participants' lived experiences. I went through the process of meaning making out of their interactions with teachers as they talked with an attitude. In other words, I stayed close to the girls' experiences as they were lived and avoided any attempt at a description of objective reality (what "really happened").

In this research, I had expected that the participants would initiate TWA and that, as a result, their teachers would not understand, thereby resulting in conflict between the two persons. I made this assessment as a result of my observations and Kochman's (1981) work that explains that miscommunication often happens between Whites and Blacks. Instead, I found that in the world of the girls' experience, teachers started and/or escalated tense situations with the girls, making them feel like they had to talk with an attitude in order to defend themselves or to resist what they perceived to be disrespectful behavior (attacks on their cultural being).

My themes are organized in a temporal sequence—reflecting the temporal nature of lived experience. The participants' lifeworlds reflected

- 1) their sense of being constantly exposed to a hostile school environment, which resulted in:
- 2) their feelings of confusion;
- 3) their feelings of disrespect;
- 4) their compulsions to talk with an attitude.

This temporal process will be described here in the form of themes.

#### **Theme one: Living in a hostile school ecology**

A constant throughout the girls' narratives is their feelings of living in a hostile ecology at their school. This perceived climate is not only a hindrance to their learning, but it also makes the girls feel uneasy and unhappy with their school. Through their words, it is evident that the girls expect school to be a safe place not only physically, but also psychologically and emotionally. Instead, they witness and receive teachers' frustrations, so the reality of the situation does not measure up to their reasonable expectations.

In her first account, Olivia described her hostile school ecology. She stated:

Um. There's this one teacher. He's my, um, Western Hemisphere teacher. I think he was racist, but he proved not to be because he treated White kids the same way. But, um, he would like whenever you would ask him a question or try to talk to him, he'd be standing right next to you and pretend like he don't hear you or whatever. He just be staring and stuff and – I don't know you just have to wait on his terms for everything. He'll be like, "Okay, I heard you," and stuff, and we'll be like, "well what are you waiting for?" I mean, like he – and he don't be doing nothing. And, he'll be like, "well wait until I get done doing what I'm doing." We be like, "So, what exactly are you doing?" and stuff. And, he just, I don't know. Nobody really likes him. And then his grading doesn't add up because when we get our progress reports, like if you had a certain grade, but all your papers at the percentages and stuff supposed to add up, so yeah my mom got on me a lot about

him, but I would try to explain to her. But that might have been the class I got a bad grade in for an overall grade or whatever. And I was mad. Yeah.

In this narrative, Olivia and other students appealed to their teacher to answer their questions. Instead, they perceived him as ignoring them and only answering once he had had enough of their persistent questioning (“he'd be standing right next to you and pretend like he don't hear you”). The behavior was so offensive to Olivia that she thought that he was racist at first, which demonstrates the hostility she sensed in her school environment. This excerpt also shows how much power she attributed to the teacher and how she distrusted him (“And then his grading doesn't add up...but all your papers at the percentages and stuff supposed to add up...”) She also found little relief that “he treated [the] White kids the same way.” Olivia's experience is one where her teachers did not care; indeed, if anything, she found them to be going out of their way to mock and ignore them, and to hurt them by unfairly changing their grades.

Another part of the dialogue that is worth noting is her use of the word “um.” Olivia seemed hesitant to share her story about her Western Hemisphere teacher (“He's my, um, Western Hemisphere teacher—But, um, he would like whenever you would ask him a question – he'd be standing right next to you and pretend like he don't hear you or whatever.”) Her hesitation to share might point to a possible fear of reporting what was really happening in her school environment. As she continued to share her story, she became less hesitant demonstrating that she was more comfortable with me and in the “natural attitude,” a term phenomenologist Max van Manen (1990) uses to denote this comfort in telling the whole story.

Olivia's second narrative about this same teacher also demonstrated the hostile ecology created among students. She stated that although this teacher never got an attitude directly with her, she had witnessed him getting one with another student. She recalled:

Yes. Ah, he disrespected this boy's mom. He, dang, he had got smart with the boy and then they just kept going back and forth or whatever. And, then he said something about the boy's mom and then everybody was like [gasps]. He was sort of calling her a h-o-e, but I forgot how in the terms he used it. He's like "Well, your mom blah blah blah blah blah—" something. I forgot exactly what he said, but we was like, "Oh my gosh." And we tried to protest the teacher so many times and stuff, and the security guards they knew how he was, and they would try to tell the principal, and the principal just I don't know— He was White and she was White, so – The security guards were Black, and most of the class was Black. There was like three or four White students, but yeah, so....

Olivia experiences school as a place where White people oppressed Black people. Her voice, along with other Black students and Black adults, did not matter. Her lived experience leaves one to question how she can go about learning in school with these thoughts of perceived injustice at the back of her mind.

Stephanie, another participant, also provided a narrative that described the school as a hostile place. She said about a teacher, “Like she's known for yelling. Like she's always yelling at someone or like getting mad. Like moving you or touching you. Sometimes, she can get annoying like a little kid.” Notice that in Stephanie's description, she notes yelling and most notably, touching (“like moving you or touching you”), as a boundary that has been crossed. This boundary took away her feeling of safety. It is as if Stephanie, in order to get through the day, must set up a boundary around herself. When hostile teachers violate this space, feelings of strong annoyance are a result. She saw her teacher's behavior as childlike instead of demonstrating the caring adult figure she expects in this position.

When I asked Stephanie what the teacher did on one of the days that she chose to say something back to her, she said, “I kept on talking like, and she’ll say, ‘Go in the hallway.’ I’ll ask her why, and she’ll be like, ‘Don’t argue with me.’ She’ll just take your stuff, and go out there. And, then sometimes, some, like – this one kid she put her hands on.”

These experiences show how school can be perceived as a dangerous place. Olivia and Stephanie did not feel safe in an environment where they believed the very people who were supposed to care for them did not respect their human rights. Instead, she was left to use whatever tools she had to defend herself and survive in this environment. One of these tools was TWA, but before she used this cultural practice in this institutionalized context, she first went through this process of noting this hostile, dangerous ecology to a state of confusion. Why are people who are supposed to care for her carrying out these incidents?

### **Theme two: Confusion as a Result of Unmet Expectations**

In American society, teachers are expected to care, or in other words, have interest and concern, for students. As alluded to earlier, the girls felt no different, and told stories of teachers blatantly disrespecting them by unjustifiably yelling at them and using sarcasm to make them feel stupid. In the stories the girls told, these teachers seemed to expect the worst from their students and were on the offensive all the time. Their lenses colored what they saw in situations, and these teachers behaved like loose cannons by blowing up and yelling at the girls and other students.

The girls were confused as a result of their unmet expectations, and they wondered why their teachers were mean, sarcastic, and angry. These students believed that they did not provoke their teachers’ anger, so they were bewildered by it. They seemed to have the following questions: What would make a teacher so angry with students? Were they burned out? Did bureaucracy frustrate them? Had they been stepped on too many times by previous students and administrators? If so, these girls were not able to feel sympathy for their teachers.

Stephanie’s remarks cited earlier also show confusion (“I kept on talking like, and she’ll say, ‘Go in the hallway.’ I’ll ask her why, and she’ll be like, ‘Don’t argue with me.’ She’ll just take your stuff, and go out there”). Stephanie was unsure of why her teacher wanted her to go into the hallway. The teacher’s anger seemed unnecessary, so confusion set in. Stephanie also noted that she sometimes forgot who she was talking to when using TWA with teachers. She stated, “Yeah, I got angry with some teachers—[S]he’ll yell like get really loud with me. I be like, ‘*Okay, you don’t have to get loud with me.*’ I just like forget who I’m talking to sometimes. Like, I’m talking with a friend or something, and I’ve crossed the line.” Stephanie recognized that she was talking to a teacher, an adult figure, only after she used TWA (see italics), which shows that she is confused by her teacher’s behavior because she perceived it to be childlike.

Olivia gave one example of a time when she was confused: “It wasn’t an argument, it was just like he got smart and like I left it alone. Sometimes, I do try to say something back because he try to make a lot of people feel so stupid and I be like “*Why you got to be like that? It doesn’t take all that?*” I mean, eh [exasperation] I don’t know. He try to make you feel stupid and be sarcastic and stuff.” Later, as she recounted her thinking about the incidents, Olivia wondered, “Why are you [the teacher] acting like this? But he acts like that all the time.” Clearly, Olivia was taken aback by her teacher’s stupefying actions. In addition to her confusion, she talked with an attitude to her teacher during one of his sarcastic moments (see italics). Her account also



shows that she shut down when her teacher used sarcasm (“...it was just like he got smart and like I left it alone.”). Overall, Olivia felt powerless, and her questioning the teacher in TWA was the only way to regain that power. These feelings of confusion and powerlessness led to an awareness of the disrespect they felt as a result of their teachers’ behaviors.

### **Theme three: Living in an Environment of Disrespect**

After the girls went through the process of bewilderment as a result of their teachers’ behaviors, the feelings of disrespect set in. They felt as if they were not being respected as young students, and their teachers’ behaviors were unacceptable. Being yelled at without reason violated the ethic of care that they expected to receive, and it angered them. Furthermore, the girls also expressed frustration with the consistency of their teachers’ actions. Olivia told me, “I just got tired of it all that time, and I would never do anything for him to act like that.” Olivia learned to expect this behavior, but it did not take away her or Stephanie’s frustration with experiencing the teachers’ same disrespectful, angry behavior day in and day out.

Olivia stated as she recounted incidents of disrespect from the teachers, “Yeah, and I was about to ask my question. Before I got to do that, he was like ‘Well, of course you have a question. That’s why you raised you hand. Duh.’” This incident really seemed to bother her because she mentioned it twice in the interview. When she first mentioned this incident, she stated, “He’ll always be sarcastic with you and stuff...he get on my nerves.” Olivia recalled the frequency of the teacher’s sarcasm that she interpreted as a put down. It also took a toll on her as evidenced by the statement that it “get[s] on my nerves.”

Olivia later commented on a teacher yelling at her. She gave the supposition, “I may have been like, *Well you don’t have to yell at me or whatever.*’— I’d just tell him, you don’t have to yell at me.” One can hear her sheer frustration and hurt over this teacher’s disrespect through yelling. Notice too, Olivia’s use of TWA (in italics) when her teacher yelled at her. She used it to stand up for herself against her teacher. Olivia wanted the teacher to behave as a caring and respectful individual.

Olivia continued her account, “...[C]ause I remember he had said something, and he was just yelling at me like I was stupid. And, he actually called the students stupid before. He’s like, ‘YOU GUYS ARE SO STUPID!’ or whatever—We didn’t even do anything—I was like, *You don’t have to yell at me.*’” Again, Olivia used TWA (see italics) to defend herself because of behavior that offended her. She continued, “‘Cause I don’t like being yelled at. I really don’t...you got to consider people’s feelings because you don’t know what they’ve been through or whatever.” In this quote, Olivia used TWA with the teacher to assert herself.

In this same vein, Stephanie, as cited earlier, got so incensed that she forgot that she was talking to an adult who is supposed to, in her opinion, be treated with respect (“I be like, *Okay, you don’t have to get loud with me.*’ I just like forget who I’m talking to sometimes. Like, I’m talking with a friend or something, and I’ve crossed the line.”). However, when teachers crossed her boundary and showed disrespect, she forgot this principle and talked to them with an attitude.

### **Theme four: My Cup Overflows – Talking with an Attitude as a Defense Mechanism**

The teachers’ disrespectful behaviors of yelling and using of negative sarcasm resulted in the use of TWA that the girls knew well. However, in this instance, they used it not in play, nor as an expression of confidence, or self-esteem as noted by many older members of the AAWSC, nor as

a way to shame the receiver into a spirit of camaraderie as understood by those within that community. Instead, they used it (see italicized dialogue for instances of TWA) in an institutional context to defend themselves and to regain power. Olivia explained that sometimes her teachers' negative behavior caused her cup to overflow. She stated:

No. I try to be civilized as I can possibly be, but sometimes it's just the way they want to act toward you or if it's about a grade, I'll go up and confront them and I'll be like, "Excuse me, um, I think you might have made a mistake." And, then I'll try to tell them and stuff and sometimes they may want to get an attitude and stuff, but I try to hold it in as much as possibly like as long as I can. Sometimes, I do.

In this instance, Olivia remembered trying to hold in her feelings and refrain from using the TWA speech practice with teachers, but as she stated, she could hold it in for only so long, so she sometimes talked with an attitude.

Olivia also shared a story of when one of her teachers yelled at her and she became withdrawn from the classroom conversation. She remembered: "I think it was just like 'UH, OLIVIA! [says in an exasperating way]' He just kept going on and on. He wasn't like, 'I wasn't yelling at you' like I expected him to say. He just kept going on and on and on about what he was talking about. I was like why are you yelling at – I was listening, but I wasn't listening. He was standing in front of me or whatever, and I was just like whatever and stuff, so, 'cause he yelled at me then. Um. Yeah." When this teacher yelled at Olivia, she shut down, which probably disengaged her from learning concepts that day.

Stephanie also gave examples of when her cup overflowed. As mentioned before, she stated, "I just like forget who I'm talking to sometimes. Like, I'm talking with a friend or something, and I've crossed the line." In this quote, Stephanie talked about forgetting to whom she is talking sometimes, which is an indication that she had had enough of the teachers' disrespectful behavior. Later, Stephanie noted that her teachers also "cross[ed] the line with [the students] too much" resulting in her use of TWA as a form of resistance.

Yet, by using this practice (which is already outside many of their teachers' cultural context), it was used as a mark against them, as is seen in the stories of these girls. They are seen as "those loud Black girls," or girls with attitude as defined by those outside of the speech community.

Consequently, the girls used TWA as a way to resist perceived oppression by their teachers. Of course, their teachers also may have viewpoints about their use of TWA, but that would go beyond the scope of this study. The purpose of this study is to hear the lived experiences of these girls and to gather meaning from it.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

To reiterate, when I started this research, I anticipated that these girls' teachers would not understand them when they used TWA, and as a result, conflict would exist between the two. While this reasoning may still be the case, I found that their teachers, according to the girls' accounts, started the verbal duels in class. This finding was not what I anticipated, but I believe it is important to study further in order to help Black girls and teachers develop more positive relationships with each other so that learning can take place.

This research is unique in that it captures reality in a way that helps us all live more tactfully. It also gives a voice to a demographic that is often missing in the literature and lends itself to an understanding of the perspectives of Black female adolescents. This understanding is the first step a teacher needs in order to communicate effectively with these girls who have made it clear that they feel extremely misunderstood and mistreated. The individual interviews were also

strong because the girls were less distracted and could therefore focus on their own experiences instead of mimicking their peers. Although there is not much research on this topic, I am hopeful that other researchers will take it up so that Black families and educators will be better educated about ways teachers and Black girls can interact in ways that create an environment conducive for learning. I am also confident that there are already many teachers and administrators who are committed to the well-being of Black girls and are working toward helping them achieve their academic and career goals.

However, as a phenomenological study with two participants, this research is not designed to give ready-made solutions to this complex problem of teacher-student relationships when Black girls talk with an attitude. However, it puts forth the voices or lived experiences of girls who may not have had the opportunity to share their experiences otherwise. Unfortunately, the girls described a school ecology where there seemed to be no opportunities for the legitimate expression of their own voices. TWA seems to be their only opportunity to use voice, and then, it was used as a defense mechanism. Using the phenomenological method gave the participants the opportunity to use voice in a way that affirmed them because of the value I placed upon their accounts. All in all, much can be learned from their voices as we evaluate our teaching and develop appropriate relationships with our marginalized students.

This study is important to me, not only because of its implications for educators, but also because of its impact on me as a Black female educator. I hope this research impacts others like me and of other races to pay attention to Black girls and take the time to talk with them and knowledgeable others who can help facilitate appropriate classroom practice.

As mentioned earlier, phenomenology seeks to give meaning to our everyday experiences in this lifeworld, and does not attend to certain social groups, cultures, and so on, so the meanings gathered from the study are not exclusive to African American adolescent girls. The lessons can be applied to all genders and races. For example, many students, regardless of race or gender, have been victims of disrespect by teachers. The great thing about phenomenology is that it notes the importance of the phenomenon to the individual or specialized group, but some aspects of the experience could have universally-shared meanings. This point implies that there is something for everyone to learn from this research. Another important lesson is for teachers to reflect and make sure they are teaching empathically. Ensuring empathic pedagogy may not only reduce teaching problems, but also foster an understanding about how all students experience school.

Albeit, for this cultural group, we must recognize that navigating when and how to talk with an attitude may be challenging for African American adolescent girls. These particular students may lack mainstream society's cultural and social capital, which they could use to make their voices heard and resist hegemonic practices in public school classrooms. These girls are in a position in which they have access to this speech practice and appropriate it in ways different from its cultural import because they feel disempowered. The solution lies in the voices of these girls, and educators should listen to them in order to evaluate the stance with which they take them. When teachers step back and reflect upon their practices, perhaps things could improve for both parties.

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