

# “We Are Our Only Way Forward”: Dialogic Re-imaginings and the Cultivation of Homeplace for Girls, Women, and Femmes of Color

Urban Education  
2022, Vol. 57(10) 1784–1804  
© The Author(s) 2021  
Article reuse guidelines:  
sagepub.com/journals-permissions  
DOI: 10.1177/00420859211003931  
journals.sagepub.com/home/uex



Grace D. Player<sup>1</sup> , Mónica González Ybarra<sup>2</sup> ,  
Carol Brochin<sup>3</sup>, Ruth Nicole Brown<sup>4</sup>,  
Tamara T. Butler<sup>4</sup>, Claudia Cervantes-Soon<sup>5</sup>,  
Victoria S. Gill<sup>6</sup>, Valerie Kinloch<sup>7</sup>,  
Detra Price-Dennis<sup>8</sup>, Cinthya M. Saavedra<sup>9</sup>,  
and Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz<sup>8</sup>

## Abstract

This article narrates the contours of a digital “kitchen table talk”—a conversation that brought together WoC from various areas of literacy and language education to discuss the state of the field and the next steps in transforming literacy studies and education for GFoC. Using bell hooks’s

<sup>1</sup>University of Connecticut, Storrs, USA

<sup>2</sup>University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA

<sup>3</sup>University of Arizona, Tucson, USA

<sup>4</sup>Michigan State University, East Lansing, USA

<sup>5</sup>Arizona State University, Tempe, USA

<sup>6</sup>University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA

<sup>7</sup>University of Pittsburgh, PA, USA

<sup>8</sup>Columbia University, New York, NY, USA

<sup>9</sup>University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley, Edinburg, USA

## Corresponding Author:

Grace D. Player, University of Connecticut, Charles B. Gentry Building, 249 Glenbrook Road, Unit 3033, Storrs, CT 06269-3064, USA.

Email: [grace.player@uconn.edu](mailto:grace.player@uconn.edu)

concept of “homeplace,” we bring together the reflections of eleven WoC across intersected Black, Latina, and Asian identities to examine the realities of GFoC, the urgency around their lives and needs, as well as self-examination of our role in the academy taking up feminist projects with GFoC.

### **Keywords**

literacy, urban education, women and girls, identity, race, identity

#### *Just Us*

*Here is my invitation  
for you to bend towards  
justice.*

*My arc of self bends  
in favor of love—*

*Asking hard questions  
& waiting for answers  
that don't offer conclusions,  
just more wonderings  
about how to live a life  
worthy of the children  
who come after us.*

Sealey-Ruiz (2020)

### **Introduction**

Girls and Femmes of Color (GFoC)<sup>1</sup> across the globe receive messages that their existence is excessive—too loud, too dark, too much body, too much attitude, too much anger, too much everything—and yet at the same time, never enough. The oppressive force of white heteropatriarchy—a system that enforces the intersections of white supremacy, gender normativity, and patriarchy—creates a violent world where GFoC are often silenced, robbed of their creations, hypersexualized, dismissed, physically punished, and overlooked for their brilliance. GFoC are simultaneously responsible for surviving these violent contexts while also proving their voices, ideas, and bodies are important and not disposable. GFoC take center stage in leading movements for radical transformation toward a better world and their labor is often invisibilized. These realities are felt and survived differently by all GFoC.

Understanding and truly seeing the experiences of GFoC requires other(ed) lenses and sensibilities. That is, re-shaping narratives of GFoC demands a critical examination of intersectionality and a troubling of monolithic framings that leave out explicit confrontations of anti-blackness, transphobia, and settler colonialism. To do justice-oriented work with and alongside GFoC is to acknowledge how these systemic operations function across communities. This paper is an invitation for us to bend toward justice, like Yolanda calls for in the poetic offering that opens this paper. Specifically, it is a call to bend toward justice for and with GFoC by opening a space for a dialog that includes hard questions, that invites wanderings and wonderings, that proposes new imaginings of worlds worthy of the GFoC that we know, we teach, we love.

In this spirit, we bring together the reflections of eleven Women of Color (WoC) across intersected Black, Latina, and Asian communities to examine the realities of GFoC, the urgency around their lives and needs, as well as the self-examination of our role in the academy taking up feminist projects with girls, women, and communities of Color. In the midst of a global pandemic and just before another wave of public outrage at the murders of Black folk—Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Tony McDade, Nina Pop, Elijah McClain, and many more—we made time and space for connection, mentorship, and healing. The authors of this paper work from our own positions as once-GFoC, as now WoC in the field of language and literacy education, and as teacher-educators, to learn from each other, and to make meaning through our experiences. What we share in this paper is an intentional, yet at the same time, completely subconscious re-narrativizing of our lived realities and those of the women and girls with whom we work. In other words, as WoC we are both committed to resisting and re-shaping dominant narratives of GFoC (narratives that are also about us) as well as working outside of those limitations and instead seeing and documenting our own collective beauty outside of the white-heteropatriarchal gaze. In what follows, we take the reader through this dialog.

We conceptualize WoC as a political identity for non-white women. As Morales (2001) states, “This [collective] called ‘Women of Color’ is not an ethnicity. It is one of the inventions of solidarity, an alliance, a political necessity that is not the given name of every female with dark skin and a colonized tongue, but rather a choice about how to resist and with whom” (pp. 102–103). In what follows, we provide an overview of WoC feminist perspectives as a guiding framework for this project, specifically bell hook’s notion of homeplace as a particular theoretical tool for analyzing the meaning-making that occurs when WoC come together in dialog. We use the notion of homeplace to discuss literacies, the creation and complexities of homeplaces, and conclude with reflections on what homeplace looks like in the academy for

WoC whose work is committed to creating a better world for GFoC—or as Yolanda stated “to be the best ancestor that I can be.”<sup>2</sup>

## Theoretical Framing

In highlighting the multi-faceted languages and literacies of GFoC, we challenge and actively re-shape the dominant, deficit narratives that exist about girls navigating the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and citizenship status. We are able to do this because of the ground from which we are working. WoC feminisms (Collins, 2000; Lorde, 2007; Mohanty, 2003; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983) is a theoretical tradition that has provided us with tools and frameworks to reflect, critically examine, and give voice to our own raced-gendered-sexualized experiences. Anzaldúa (2007, 2015), for example, offers the concept of *autohistoria-teorías*, “a multidisciplinary approach and a ‘story-telling’ format, [where we can theorize] our own and others’ struggles for representation, identity, self-inscription, and creative expressions” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 3). *Autohistoria-teoría* embodies what Sandoval (2000) has articulated as oppositional consciousness, or the sensibilities WoC have cultivated for survival and resistance. This particular way of seeing, thinking, and reflecting on the world is central to the epistemologies of WoC feminists (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Dillard, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000). These theoretical framings have created opportunities for WoC to honor the cultural significance of the collective “we” and theorize how the experiences of individuals are always situated within the communities of which we are a part. WoC feminist theory has shown us how to name the brilliance and power from our own communities and also see through the distorted images about us and the women and girls with whom we work (Brown, 2009; Evans-Winters, 2019; Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). WoC feminist scholars have articulated how we can re-think and re-build new worlds that see women, queer folx, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color as human. It is from these standpoints that we continue to push ourselves to re-envision the futures and spaces that exist for GFoC, and constantly question who is included in these imaginations and who is pushed to the margins.

In this paper, we specifically draw on bell hooks’s notion of homeplace. hooks (1990) defines homeplace as “[a] special domain, not as property, but as places where all that truly matter[s] in life [takes] place—the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls. There we [learn] dignity, integrity of being; there we [learn] to have faith.” (p. 383). Homeplace, then, for so many Women, Girls, and Femmes of Color has become a space of shelter and resistance. While hooks explores the ways Black women create spaces outside of the purview of whiteness and masculinity, scholars like Kelly (2020) illuminate that, so too, *within* white male

domains, like schools and universities, Black women and girls necessarily enact homeplace in order to survive. As a theoretical tool, homeplace highlights the necessity of physical and metaphorical spaces dedicated to Women and GFoC. Additionally, homeplace helps us understand how Women and GFoC exist within these created spaces, the knowledge that emerges from our creation, and how we continue to cultivate power and tools for survival. Further, it provides us with a lens to identify the literacies that emerge in these contexts, what and who is missing from our homeplace(s), as well as the dangers and precariousness of stepping out of our homeplace(s). Through our use of homeplace, we locate new understandings and articulations of the knowledge and literacies of GFoC as well as the labor of love that WoC wholeheartedly take on to bring them to light.

The concept of homeplace is in conversation with WoC theoretical offerings that center the knowledge production, teaching, and learning that takes place within communities of color and amongst WoC in particular. These spaces include the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001), the kitchen table (Black Girl Literacies Collective, 2016; Trinidad Galvan, 2001), church or religious spaces (Collins, 2000), and many others. WoC feminists have also articulated the importance of dialog within these spaces and how they are central to the theory-building, healing, and the sharing of intergenerational knowledge (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1990; Pérez, 1999). These dialogs, or pláticas, are central to histories of knowledge production that often occur in the homeplaces WoC build with each other, both physically and metaphorically. Through these dialogs, WoC develop theories to name, understand, and change their worlds. These theories often, if not always, draw on critical linguistic practices and metaphorical thinking that support the radical re-imagining and re-articulation of hegemonic concepts theorized through white-heteropatriarchal lenses. This theory of meaning making through dialog deeply informed our approach to this manuscript. As we discuss in the section below, pláticas are practices of knowledge co-construction through dialog (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). As a method, pláticas have been used to re-think how data are collected and center the co-creative and reciprocal nature of WoC research (Gonzalez Ybarra, 2020; Mendoza Aviña, 2016). In this tradition, we drew on dialog/pláticas as a methodological tool to co-create knowledge through conversations, specifically about GFoC literacies through our personal and professional experiences.

## Methodology

Grace and Mónica brought together colleagues who contributed to the ideas and theoretical groundings of the Girl of Color Literacies Special Issue in

*Urban Education*. This included mentors and friends, senior and junior scholars in the field of language and literacies whose work centers on the epistemologies, literacies, activism, and languages of Black and Brown girls, women, and femmes. In the midst of a global pandemic, when everyone was struggling to find solid ground amidst transitions into roles as caregivers and home educators, grieving lives lost across the world as well as in our own families, and craving physical closeness, a group of 11 women agreed to meet virtually via Zoom.

Grace Player is an Asian American feminist scholar with familial roots in Brazil whose work focuses on the literacies of GFoC and their formations of sisterhood to change the world. Monica Gonzalez Ybarra is a Chicana feminist scholar whose work focuses on Chicana/Latinx literacies, languages, pedagogies, and epistemologies from a Chicana/Latina/WoC feminist theoretical perspective. Tamara Butler is a Black feminist scholar whose work looks at Black girl literacies, engaged pedagogies, and Black women storytelling, specifically Black women in South Carolina. Claudia Cervantes-Soon is a Chicana feminist scholar whose work is grounded in Chicana/Latina anti-colonial epistemologies and pedagogies in bilingual education, cultural studies, and the study of the educational experiences of girls on the Mexico-U.S. border. Valerie Kinloch is a Black feminist scholar whose scholarship and leadership in the field of education is committed to humanizing and equitable approaches in education, specifically those that Black people and people of color. Ruth Nicole Brown is a Black feminist scholar whose work is dedicated to Black girlhood through a variety of lines of inquiry that include music, the arts, and creative productions. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz is a Black feminist scholar whose scholarship has been largely focused on Black and Latinx boys through lenses and orientations that center Black women epistemologies and lived realities. Victoria Gill is an Asian American feminist scholar whose work engages intersectionality in English education pedagogies. Detra Price-Dennis is a Black feminist scholar whose work has focused on the training and practices of critical teachers and the education of youth of color, specifically on Black girls' language and literacies in digital spaces. Cinthya Saavedra is a Chicana feminist scholar who takes up feminist epistemologies in early childhood studies and language and literacies among Chicana/Latinx communities. Carol Brochin is a queer Chicana feminist scholar whose personal and professional work intersect at the crossroads of queer mothering and the training of bilingual educators to honor and protect the lives of queer Latinx children in schools.

To guide us in our conversations, Grace and Mónica sent the following list of questions for everyone to reflect on before the virtual gatherings:

1. How does your research reflect a commitment to girls/femmes of color?
2. Why is it important to highlight the languages and literacies of girls/femmes of color?
3. What are the directions we need to go as researchers and educators of/with girls/femmes of color?
4. What does a world built for/with GFoC look like to you?
5. What does it mean to be a WoC doing this work? What theoretical and epistemological orientations do you rely on to guide you in your research?
6. What does sisterhood, both in and outside of the academy, mean for your work? How does coming together in ways that reflect our home and community practices challenge dominant notions of knowledge production in the academy?
7. What possibilities exist when women of different epistemological standpoints come together to locate intersections as well as discuss the variety of experiences faced by GFoC based on differences across lines of race, gender, sexuality, citizenship, and class?

The creation of these questions was based on the understanding that everyone in the group was simultaneously working from multiple positions as WoC, as former GFoC, as well as working directly with GFoC. Our intention was to create space for all of these different facets of everyone's work and positionalities within the dialog.

To accommodate everyone's schedule, we divided the group into two sessions. Each dialog was set for 60 minutes. Although everyone who participated knew either Grace or Mónica, not everyone personally knew each other. We began with introductions, which in many ways, turned into responses that addressed various aspects of the questions listed above. To intentionally focus on particular themes, however, and to be respectful of everyone's time, we (Grace & Mónica) selected three questions for each group. For group 1 (Tamara, Claudia, Valerie, and Ruth Nicole), we selected questions 2, 4, and 5. For group 2 (Yolanda, Victoria, Detra, Cinthya, and Carol), we selected questions 2, 3, and 7. As we weaved in and out of each other's reflections, we were actively determined to document what we do and the relationships that contribute to our theorizing, while also being transparent with each other about the urgency to look harder within ourselves, hold each other accountable, and acknowledge what is missing from our conversations within the oppressive contexts of anti-Blackness and white heteropatriarchy.

Both dialogs were recorded, transcribed, and coded thematically individually by Grace and Mónica. After conversations around initial codes, Grace and Mónica turned to hooks' notion of homeplace to inform the second and third rounds of coding. The use of homeplace led to three major areas through which we situate the reflections in these conversations:

- (1) Literacies from the homeplace, which refers to the meaning-making process that exist when girls, women, and femmes of color co-create knowledge through textual productions across modalities.
- (2) The co-creation and complications of homeplace, which highlight the love labor that goes into creating homeplaces as well as the tensions that arise and make space for new creations.
- (3) WoC in the academy, which documents our various experiences at predominantly white institutions and the ways we are forced, yet at times also desire, to transform them to be homeplaces where we can belong.

### *The Co-Creation and Complications of Homeplace*

WoC homeplaces are spaces we co-construct in order to shield ourselves and each other from whiteness and masculinity, where we are able to build strength to care for and fight for our own communities, where we are able to work toward liberation by recovering and renewing. What's more, as hooks discusses, these are spaces where we can pass on knowledge and help younger women, girls, and femmes grapple with their concerns, develop their identities, build solidarity, share feminist thinking, and commit to liberation. With this Black feminist construction of home, it is no surprise that "home" continually arose as vital to various aspects of our work throughout our conversations.

Home arose, first, in a very literal sense. Ruth Nicole, for instance, spoke of her childhood home with her Black parents and her Black siblings, as integral to the development of her epistemologies. The knowledges of her home that taught her to navigate systems creatively, reinforced a commitment to Black girls, and developed her sensibilities as Black woman understanding of what it means to work with Black girls. She describes growing up:

I grew up in the south suburbs of Chicago, Chicago Heights, Park Forest, multiple hometowns. I always like to say my family migrated from Kentucky to the south suburbs. We didn't move from Chicago to the suburbs, contrary to the dominant narrative around suburbanization. Steel factories, the Anthropocene, as they call it, has shaped my own black girlhood as well as

being the youngest, by 13 or 15 years to my siblings, which meant that my parents are older, and I was always a little bit different. Still am. [They] cultivated space in the backyard for me to dream and to be, to be alone to do that important work.

This place, cultivated for her in her backyard, these moments of watching her mother read, this living in a specific time and place, have shaped her way of being “a little bit different,” shedding light on the ways that, for some of us, home is more than simply a place we return to at the end of the day. For WoC, homeplace can be a space of cultivating learning and understandings that allow us to do our work the way we do it now. She adds that thinking about her own Black girlhood, the girlhood that developed in this cultivated space, then, has shaped her current research and community engagement, has allowed her to build an agenda of putting Black girls first, understanding the brilliance and insights they bring to the world, and allowing her to think more deeply of Black girls and nature.

When we understand homeplace as a place of intellectual growth and safety for GFoC, we understand that home, for some, is more than physical space shared with biological family. In fact, the family home is not always a homeplace, in the Feminist of Color sense, for some of the most marginalized GFoC. Carol highlights this, bringing light to the reality that particularly for queer kids of color, the family home can be unsafe. Thus, in this Feminist of Color conception of homeplace, home is less literal, but instead, a place that GFoC, particularly those who do not fulfill their families’ expectations around gender roles, create for themselves, oftentimes in schools and amongst other youth. She comments:

. . . Most young kids that I meet that are trans or queer or [under] the larger kind of LGBTQ umbrella, they’re not out at home. They’re out at school before they’re ever out at home. . . . The most vulnerable amongst all of us, like how do we—in my case, how do I—prepare teachers to think about these issues in ways that create classrooms that are safer for kids who might not even be safe at home, right? Like, we know that [with] Covid-19, all of a sudden, kids, college kids, high school kids, who were trans at school or out at school are now back at home, right? So maybe they had a sisterhood somewhere, and, at home, you know, they’re not safe.

Here, we come to see that for some GFoC, the physical home is not the space of safety and learning, of sacred work, that it is for others, particularly because of how heteropatriarchal ideologies deny girls their full selves. However, we can see that GFoC, in their creativity and resourcefulness, can sometimes find ways to create sisterhoods at school, or in other spaces, as home. Carol

points out to us, then, the importance as our role as teacher educators and education scholars to think about how we best prepare teachers to create spaces that are safer for those who do not feel safe at their family homes. If we understand homes, like bell hooks, as spaces cultivated to recover and to protect ourselves from whiteness, then we have to understand that for some girls, home must also be a space of protection from heteropatriarchy and homophobia that can be present in familial homes. We must understand that homes can be cultivated in other spaces that girls occupy, with other people who provide the shelter, the healing, the movement toward liberation that hooks names as part of *homeplace*.

How do we, then, prepare teachers to provide opportunities and resources for girls to create *homeplace* in school so that they can cultivate the knowledges that Ruth Nicole describes as so integral to her own work in the world? Moreover, how do we create spaces for girls that, as Detra brought up, defy the respectability politics and heteronormative ideologies about girls, which are so often percolating in programming for urban GFoC? How do we prepare future teachers to do this work with us? Exploring these questions lends itself to a re-imagining of urban schools as sites to center solidarity, rather than individualism, and as resistant and liberatory *homeplaces* for our most vulnerable students, including and especially queer GFoC.

Finally, *home*, in this dialog, was used as a metaphor for the work we do as researchers and educators who are attempting to cultivate homes within the academy. Victoria claims the following, in response to Yolanda's call for forward movement in the fight to work for and with GFoC:

The directions that we need to go as researchers is cleaning up our own house, meaning resisting and fighting. Like you said the word fighting. I'm not shying away from that anymore either. Fighting patriarchy, colonialism, sexism, ableism, all in academia, that's what I'm talking about. I would love to attack all of this stuff in our own homes, in academia, where we are creating the next generation of educators.

Here, Victoria highlights that if we look at our work as *home*, we need to understand that there is inward transformation we must do to break ties with white supremacist heteropatriarchal ideologies that have been taught to us by the worlds in which we exist. There are times when the dirt of the outside world is tracked into our own homes, and we need to clean house. As we build these homes, as we attempt to create something new and better with Women, Girls, and Femmes of Color in our work, we must sometimes re-evaluate what we are missing. For instance, Carol has brought to our attention throughout our dialog the necessity of a more expansive understanding

of gender and a questioning of whether the “Girl of Color” category is exclusionary to certain girls and certain femmes. Home, then, through this discussion is not a pure place, it is not a guaranteed place, it is not a static place. Rather, it is a Feminist of Color creation that necessitates constant and ongoing cultivation and upkeep in order to fulfill its promises as a space of resistance and liberation for GFoC.

## Literacies from the Homeplace

As WoC scholars whose work has either been situated within or deeply connected to language and literacy education, many of the ways in which we work to conceptualize literacies is in stark contrast to dominant ideas of literacy, which are often limited to standardized practices of reading and writing. Given that GFoC are forced to navigate colonial models of schooling, our work has collectively been dedicated to the re-thinking of literacies. In doing so, we have problematized the current educational contexts through which literacies of GFoC are policed and constrained and through the use of WoC feminisms, we highlight what we believe are literacies from the homeplace. As Claudia describes, colonial notions of knowledge production and literacies contribute to the dis-embodiment of GFoC and continue to impact the physical and emotional wellbeing of communities of color at large. She states,

For example, the colonial ways in which certain truths or certain ideas are assumed as true. And the separation between mind and spirit and the body, that renders the body as completely savage as in need of control. And that’s been more true for girls than for anybody else, and even more so for GFoC than for anybody else. And that’s why I think it’s so significant, so important, that we bring in these [WoC] epistemologies, these ways of knowing to the center to dismantle those ideas, because it’s not only girls that are affected, it’s everybody else, right?

Yolanda builds on this, reminding us that this project around knowledge production has life or death consequences and requires a continued fight for justice within and outside of our classrooms. She declares,

This is 400 years of the dehumanization project in this country. And I’m always echoing what Dr. Jamila Lyiscott asks: What are we fighting for? What are we fighting against? So, I think that this issue, when we take up the experiences of Black and Latina girls, it is about what we’re fighting against AND what we’re fighting for. And I’m okay with fighting because I think that we have to fight. We didn’t ask for this, but this is where we are. So that’s what I would offer, just

the basics: we are human, we are beautiful, and we are fantastic, and we bring a lot. Can we just pause for a minute, teachers, and have you recognized that and then incorporate it into the curriculum?

Yolanda's questions prompted us to name these historical and structural barriers that work to dehumanize GFoC in their educational experiences.

We also discussed how the literacies of GFoC, those cultivated in homeplaces, often go unseen and unheard in classrooms. Cinthya reflects on her experiences as an emergent bilingual immigrant student, teacher, and scholar, saying:

As we examine this from even being a teacher in our field of language and literacy, the perception is deficit for Latina/Latino students, immigrant students, and their language and literacy practices as never being enough, right? And so even when I think back to my own experience taking these standardized tests, even though I was excelling in at school my scores always seem to not be up to par with my grades. That always kind of stuck with me. It's an issue of language and literacy. And it's because we're not capturing the brilliance that is happening with children of color, GFoC, and their literacies.

As WoC, we are best equipped to see these issues because we are able to draw from our own ways of knowing to guide us in the process of rethinking literacies. Cinthya reminds us of the urgency of this project and how educators and scholars must seek out different lenses that center the experiences of GFoC to truly see their power and brilliance. For example, educators and scholars must recognize how literacies from the homeplace value mothers, grandmothers, and practices of mothering as integral to GFoC literacies. Ruth Nicole shares her reflections of literacies and knowledge of the home with the following:

My mom insisted on taking me to the library and I would always watch her read. You know, my mom reads more books than anyone I know, colleagues included. And I just remember growing up, my mom modeled how reading was so important. It was like sacred grown women's work. Like, you know, you don't wanna interrupt her while she's reading and you better read the authors she's reading. And you know, she knew I was watching her. What I would make of what I saw, I think still is a surprise to her.

As Ruth Nicole highlights, literacies emerge from intergenerational pedagogies. Contrary to the belief that households of color are not sites of rich literacy practices, WoC feminisms makes space to see the pedagogical importance of mothering and mother-figuring as central to how girls and WoC read and make sense of the world.

As a collective, there were many moments where we shared how the literacies we were able to see created by GFoC came from reflections on our homeplaces and our own experiences as GFoC. The homeplace is where we recognize the creative potential of GFoC and see their literacies as multimodal, multidimensional, and critical. As Detra offers,

We've always drawn on multimodal multiliteracies to exist and be, right? Whether it's through our hair, through our language, through dance, through the way we dress, we're communicating every single time we step outside. We're communicating so many things to the people in our community and sometimes things outside of our community.

It is when educators fail to see these literacies in ways that honor this knowledge and creativity that they contribute to the silencing and erasure of GFoC, and Black girls in particular. Detra continues,

All of those things that we're doing, other people are taking credit for. What that says to us is that our literacy practices aren't good enough until someone walks down the catwalk on a line. So, your hair is ghetto until it's on a runway.

Despite continued attempts to erase, silence, and/or co-opt the brilliance of GFoC, they/we continue to create knowledge and language to make-sense of our experiences. For these reasons, it is critical to protect the literacies cultivated in homeplace and honor these literacies as created by GFoC.

Literacies in the homeplace are largely cultivated through metaphoric thinking and the ability to imagine futures and worlds where we can thrive and exist beyond oppressive social structures. To do so, we rely on the power of language, largely through metaphoric thinking, to name things and experiences that only we've come to understand—phenomena for which the academy and schools do not have names. In this conversation alone, we named and discussed metaphors such as “home” to reflect the creation of spaces that nurture and care for us, “maps” as a metaphor for how we leave trails for each other in order to survive and experience joy, as well as “thermometers” as a way for us, as Detra stated, “[to] really know when the situation is getting to a point, a boiling point that I don't want to be a part of because someone else has given me that temperature.” These are the literacies of homeplace. These are the ways we create our own languages and ways of communicating with each other that depend on and reflect our raced-gendered-sexualized experiences.

## **WoC Pushing the Academy to be Homeplace**

Being WoC working in the academy with other WoC, dedicating ourselves to creating worlds that are better and safer for GFoC, we are in a constant state

of building homes and imagining the architecture of our future homes. This is tricky work—as Detra mentions, we are constantly “tiptoeing around the traps that they set for us,” and by “they” we mean the actors that sustain the white, heteropatriarchal, capitalistic structures of the academy. We are building home on ground that is deliberately unsteady, deliberately packed with “traps” meant to destabilize, discomfort, and force eviction.

And yet, we persist. And yet, we continue to imagine how we build our homes while simultaneously changing the landscape of the academy to be more hospitable, more of us, more by us. We continue to develop understandings of what we, in the words of Valerie, “don’t have time for,” so that we can put our energies to being with and for *our* people, so that we may continue leading the fight with and for *our* people. As Claudia mentioned, “A teacher told me it is girls who are going to change things because they’re the ones who have been carrying this and suffering through this. They are the ones who are going to change this. My hope is in them.” At the same time, we recognize the tremendous amount of labor that often goes unrecognized, this is for women, girls, and femmes of color. For these reasons, in this section we simultaneously highlight the work being done and what needs to be done to prevent exhaustion and burn-out.

### *The Homes We Have Built/ Will Build/Are Building*

The homes we as WoC educators and researchers continually build are sacred. Ruth Nicole, speaking of her Black-girlhood-informed work says, “each new thing [I build] is always out of my own sort of creative force and energy. . . that is really sacred to me.” This recalls the attention that Lorde (2007) brings to the creativity and feeling that WoC carry within them and, when accessed and used, are incredible transformational and analytic powers. We understand that homeplace is rooted in our energies, our knowledges, our creativity born of racialized girlhood and womanhood, which is something that transcends the white male academy. We understand that by building these homeplaces we are, as Yolanda claims, “fracturing to rebuild” the academy.

This work of building homeplace starts with our recognition of who we are, as we claim the political identity as WoC, and how we are different from those who cannot claim that identity. Tamara points out,

I think WoC. . .who are really concerned about each other do the Academy much differently than those who are not. And I think that that is a different kind of conceptualization of critical that people don’t really talk too much about. I just think WoC do it differently. . . Like our offices are usually the place where

students want to camp out, where students want to hang out, where students want to confide and share. And they're also drawn to us because they see that we're doing something much differently.

As WoC, we listen differently, survive differently, in the academy and in the world. Importantly, as Detra asserts, we position ourselves as learners, always seeking to know more about self and others, often in service of care.

A product of this critical care that we enact is that we do this work in sisterhood and across generations with each other, standing committed to ourselves and to one another. This is a commitment that transcends the false boundaries that the academy attempts to erect between us. And as Valerie proclaims,

It's important for us to stand firm in who we are. And to stand firm in knowing who other girls and WoC are, even if we don't intimately know each other. It's like that universal sisterhood connection bond—that regardless of where we might be in the world, regardless of how intimately we might know other girls, or WoC, we always have to show up because it's a part of our blood and our soul and our spirit.”

Mónica and Grace have often spoken of the work that they are able to do because of their older sisters in the academy who have guided them, helped them avoid those “traps” that Detra described. Drawing on literacies cultivated in homeplace, specifically, the metaphor of how we act as thermometers in the academy, Detra states,

Because we're always kind of like popping in and out of these spaces and, really unfortunately, sometimes living in them and knowing the temperature, right? But then we can go out and kind of let people know, okay? When this is what it feels like, when it's oppressive, like giving people sort of a read on what the situations are.

Yolanda offers the metaphor of being one another's maps, helping each other to navigate the academy, to offer healing and mentorship, and to make spaces for one another. Specifically, she mentions programs like the Literacy Research Association's STAR (Scholars of Color Transitioning into Academic Research institutions) and the National Council of Teachers of English's CNV (Cultivating New Voices Among Scholars of Color), programs both developed to support emerging scholars of color. These were spaces not given to us by the institution, but spaces we created and developed by ourselves for ourselves. Both in codified ways, like mentorship programs, and in the invisible work we do, we continuously build homes not just for our peers,

but for the WoC who follow. We are, as Valerie and Ruth Nicole bring up, in service to each other and our students, and, in turn, in practice of building community with our students.

Victoria explains that this sisterhood has been life-saving to her as a younger scholar in the academy. She claims:

I'm finally able to be with my own, with my WoC, scholars and sisters. I'm finally able to say I can bring my full self to the table. And I can do that with a critical eye, but also with a compassionate, loving stance. And I can do that. And, because of this group, because of the work that we do in and outside of the academy, you know, of building our, building our bridges, building our sisterhood, I'm not only able to survive, but this is how I'm finally thriving. And, it's as simple as that. I'm finally, I'm finally thriving.

Here, Victoria invites understanding of the reality that it is the critical caring stance that our academic sisters embody that allows us to remain in the academy. Because we care for each other, we make efforts to understand and critique the systems in which we exist and, in turn, resist and reform them for and with one another, for and with the GFoC we dedicate ourselves to.

### *The Homes We Will Build*

The work we do is far from finished. The homes we build are yet incomplete, yet fully equipped to house all those with whom we align ourselves, all those we seek to care for and with. We understand that there is a necessary shift in how things are done in the academy and in urban education at large. We understand that these shifts must build on the traditions of WoC knowing and doing. What's more, we as WoC, still have work to do among ourselves to create spaces that are founded on justice. Importantly this work will be built on an ethos of "doing things our way" as Claudia mentions, an unapologetic engagement with our work that allows us to, in the words of Valerie, "dream forward" and "show up" in the ways we know we need to. We must continue to question what and who we are fighting for, as Yolanda presses us to do. As Cinthya pushes us to recognize, we must do work "that's intersectional, that's transformative, and that is cycle breaking." For example, particularly for non-Black WoC, we must confront anti-Blackness in ourselves and our communities. As cis WoC, we must confront the pervasiveness of the gender binary and create homeplaces that allows for a more robust conceptualization of who GFoC are and want to become.

It is with these commitments to growing and questioning that we believe a world built by, with, and for women and GFoC will arise. With these

commitments in mind, we begin to sort out exactly what this world might look like. Claudia, Ruth Nicole, Tamara, and Valerie share their visions of a future built for and by Girls and WoC. We start with Tamara's offering:

I see a lot of green. . . . I see a lot more of GFoC being outside. I think so often, we were written about as really indoor, locked-down, confined people. And I'm like we are actually probably some of the most free-thinking, liberated beings. And so how can we start to imagine a world where GFoC are actually outside? Where there's environment, there's clean air, water, growing our own food.

Claudia builds on this:

I see a lot of, like, chisme. Like girls together, like friendship, like, you know, like being with each other, like, like *intimacy*, not separation, individualism, but intimacy amongst different people.

Ruth Nicole follows with:

Dress codes are abolished. Laughter ends when we decide it, and not the police. Gendered responsibilities and families are abolished so there is greater space made for how we want to move and what we want to think about. I think it's really important that, in this world, GFoC, are not overlooked or looked over. That they are recognized as whole humans—human beings. You know, whatever we have to do in terms of our own assumption, so that, like, not all girls grow up to be women. We need other people to get with that and to come back to this bridge. And all that knowledge to recognize black girls as inherently valuable, as Combahee taught us.

Valerie offers a closing description:

A world where we're not questioning our competence and we're not questioning our identities. We are not trying to fit into a box to become like anyone else except for who we want to be. And we're not judging each other. We are always embracing and loving each other. And even when we disagree, we do it with love and because that's who we are. You know, I just see a world where brilliance and beauty, and bravery and boldness, just that's who we already are and that's the world that we live in within ourselves.

Women, Girls, and Femmes of Color continually envision and work toward the worlds they deserve, those worlds "we live in within ourselves." We engage these practices of imagining futures because this imagining is integral to our survival and the pursuit of radical change (Anzaldúa, 2007; Davis, 2015). As Detra claims, "We are our only way forward." We take this "we" to

include the WoC and GFoC who have been and will continue to fight for justice, who will continue building homeplace(s), and who will continue to challenge themselves and each other to do better and be better by each other.

## **Conclusion**

The constructions of homeplace garner opportunities for authentic dialog, pláticas like this one featured above. In co-creating spaces for knowledge to be exchanged, built upon, and questioned, the participants of this dialog contributed authentically and vulnerably. We believe these literacies emerge in a real way that reflects the literacies of our homes, communities, and girlhoods because of the commitment to create homeplace, even virtually. As a collective, we will create more sacred places for and with girls, femmes, and queer youth of color. We will call on teachers and demand that school administrators work alongside us to create these spaces for girls and WoC across educational contexts and call on teachers, specifically in urban communities. We believe that these spaces are integral to the survival and thriving of Girls, Women, and Femmes of Color.

As a collective, we will evaluate who is being left out of our conversations about GFoC and call on our colleagues across the field to make adjustments according to those evaluations. We will push past binaries that erase too many of our youth and their experiences. We will commit to dismantling anti-Blackness. We will follow the youth, particularly GFoC, knowing that they know more and do more and see more than we do. We will fight. We will understand that this work is personal and has real human impact. We will follow the demands of our GFoC to be seen and to be seen as beautiful, brilliant, transcendent. We will transform our institutions. We will create art and music and poetry and joy. We will write with our hearts on fire. We will go outside. We will embrace the expansiveness of GFoC. We will create pathways for the girls and WoC educators who will come after us. We will show up and stand up with and for our GFoC, always.

## **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## **Funding**

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## ORCID iDs

Grace D. Player  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2372-4971>

Mónica González Ybarra  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7441-7800>

## Notes

1. We use the term GFoC (GFoC) to describe all self-identified girl children and youth. In addition, we use this term to bring awareness to the complex and powerful ways that young people are understanding and resisting gendered binaries.
2. Yolanda notes that this idea arose from a conversation with Keisha McIntosh Allen (2020).

## References

- Anzaldúa, G. (2007). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (3rd ed). Aunt Lute Books.
- Anzaldúa, G. (2015). *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting identity, spirituality, reality*. Duke University Press.
- Black Girl Literacies Collective. (2016). Provocateur pieces. At the kitchen table: Black women educators speaking our truths. *English Education*, 48(4), 380–395.
- Brown, R. N. (2009). *Black girlhood celebration: Toward a hip-hop feminist pedagogy*. Peter Lang.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Davis, A. (2015). *Freedom is a constant struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the foundations of a movement*. Haymarket Books.
- Delgado Bernal, D. (1998). Using a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research. *Harvard Educational Review*, 68(4), 555–583.
- Delgado Bernal, D. (2001). Learning and living pedagogies of the home: The mestiza consciousness of Chicana students. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 14(5), 623–639.
- Dillard, C. B. (2000). The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen: Examining an endarkened feminist epistemology in educational research and leadership. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13(6), 661–681.
- Evans-Winters, V. E. (2019). *Black feminisms in qualitative inquiry: A mosaic for writing our daughter's body*. Routledge.
- Fierros, C., & Delgado Bernal, D. (2016). Vamos a platicar: The contours of pláticas as Chicana feminist methodology. *Chicana/Latina Studies*, 15(2), 98–121.
- Gonzalez Ybarra, M. (2020). “We have a strong way of thinking. . . and it shows through our words”: Exploring mujerista literacies with Chicana/Latina youth in a community ethnic studies course. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 54(3), 231–253.
- hooks, b. (1990). *Yearning: Race, gender, and cultural politics*. South End Press.

- Kelly, L. (2020). "I love us for real": Exploring homeplace as a site for healing and resistance for Black girls in schools. *Equity & Excellence in Schools*, 53(4), 450–465.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2000). Racialized discourses and ethnic epistemologies. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2, 257–277.
- Lorde, A. (2007). *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. Crossing Press.
- Mendoza Aviña, S. (2016) "That's ratchet": A Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy as entryway to understanding the material realities of contemporary Latinx elementary aged youth. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 49(4), 468–479.
- Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminisms without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Duke University Press.
- Moraga, C., & Anzaldúa, G. (1983). *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color*. Kitchen Table Press.
- Morales, A. L. (2001). My name is the story. In Latina Feminist Group (Aus.), *Telling to live: Latina feminist testimonies* (pp.100–103). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Muhammad, G., & Haddix, M. (2016). Centering Black girls' literacies: A review of literature on the multiple ways of knowing of Black girls. *English Education*, 48(4), 229–336.
- Pérez, E. (1999). *The decolonial imaginary: Writing Chicanas into history*. Indiana University Press.
- Sandoval, C. (2000). *Methodology of the oppressed*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Sealey-Ruiz, Y. (2020). *Love from the vortex & other poems*. Kaleidoscope Vibrations LLC.
- Trinidad Galvan, R. (2001). Portraits of mujeres desjuiciadas: Womanist pedagogies of the everyday, the mundane and the ordinary. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 14(5), 603–621.

## Author Biographies

**Grace D. Player** is an Assistant Professor of Literacy at the University of Connecticut Neag School of Education. Her research inquires into the ways Girls and Women of Color mobilize their raced-gendered literacies to advocate for their individual and collective rights.

**Mónica González Ybarra** is an Assistant Professor of Language & Literacy and Latina/o Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her schooling experiences, and those of her family, guided her to research the rich language, literacies, and knowledge of Chicana/Latinx communities that often go unseen and/or erased in k-12 classrooms and beyond.

**Carol Brochin** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Sociocultural Studies in the College of Education at the University of Arizona. A queer Chicana/Tejana feminist, she is deeply committed to making an impact on the k-12 education of immigrant, bilingual, and LGBTQ+ youth and their families through teacher education in the borderlands.

**Ruth Nicole Brown** is the Inaugural Chairperson of African American and African Studies and MSU Foundation Professor at Michigan State University. She is an artist-scholar dedicated to the celebration of Black girlhood as practiced in *Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT)*, Black feminisms, and performance.

**Tamara T. Butler** is the Executive Director of the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture and Associate Dean of Strategic Planning & Community Engagement at the College of Charleston Libraries. She is also an Assistant Professor of Critical Literacies at Michigan State University. Her *BlackGirlLand* Project focuses on documenting Black women's connection to land, memory, and community. Her research includes Community-Engaged Pedagogies, Black Girl Literacies, and Black women's narratives connected to land.

**Claudia Cervantes-Soon** is an Associate Professor at Arizona State University. Situated at the intersection of anthropology of education, bilingual education, and Chicana feminisms her research focuses on anticolonial perspectives to analyze educational contexts, practices, and policies affecting youth from historically marginalized and U.S.-Mexico borderland communities.

**Victoria S. Gill** is a doctoral candidate in the Reading, Writing, and Literacy Program at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education. Her research investigates how students' and teachers' learning can be impacted by understanding and using intersectionality in their lives and curriculum/pedagogy.

**Valerie Kinloch** is the Renée and Richard Goldman Endowed Dean of the School of Education and Professor at the University of Pittsburgh, and she studies the literacies and community engagements of youth and adults inside and outside schools. Her forthcoming book with Emily Nemeth, Tamara Butler, and Grace Player is titled, *Where is the Justice? Engaged Pedagogies in Schools and Communities*.

**Detra Price-Dennis** is Associate Professor of Education in the Communication, Media, & Learning Technologies Design Program, and Co-Director of the Reimagining Education Online Advanced Certificate Program, at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her scholarship draws on ethnographic and sociocultural lenses to examine the intersections of critical literacy education, technology, and equity-based curriculum development in k-8 classrooms.

**Cynthia M. Saavedra** is Professor and Associate Dean of the School of Interdisciplinary Programs & Community Engagement at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Her research centers Chicana/Latina feminist epistemology in education, spirituality, and critical research methodologies. Her most recent publications can be found in *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *Language Arts*, and *Journal of Literacy Research*.

**Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz** is an award-winning Associate Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her research focuses on racial literacy in teacher education, Black girl literacies, and Black and Latinx male high school students. Her latest book co-authored with Dr. Detra Price-Dennis is *Advancing Racial Literacies in Teacher Education: Toward Activism for Equity in Digital Spaces* (Teachers College Press).