'Now that I know what you're about': black feminist reflections on power in the research relationship

Feminists have identified reflexivity as a particularly incisive tool for navigating shifting power dynamics, using it to draw attention to a how a researcher's positionality informs every aspect of the research process, from development of the research question to interactions with research participants. In this article, I describe my reflections as a black feminist researcher conducting research with black women. I examine the unexpected ways in which power can manifest during the research process, complicating the theoretical advice offered by institutional ethics board and feminist methodology textbooks. Intersectionality serves as a useful tool to tease out these dilemmas and though it cannot preempt or solve all challenges, it provides reflexive space for exploring such dilemmas and a tool for navigating power in the research process.

Keywords: intersectionality, feminist research, reflexivity, black motherhood, attachment parenting, power

Debates and analyses about power and how best to navigate its complex machinations are a significant theme in feminist methodologies scholarship. From the 'original' critique of 'malestream' research traditions (Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1983) to the emergence of intersectional methodologies (Rice, Harrison and Friedman, 2019), feminist scholars have sought to develop tools and strategies to negotiate shifting power dynamics in the research relationship. Many of these methodologies utilise a Foucauldian approach that rejects a hierarchical notion of power that sees it as the possession of some individuals at the expense of others. Instead, power is theorised as 'flowing from complex relationships between individuals, organizations and institutions' (Conti and O'Neil, 2007: 68). In this way, power is viewed not as fixed, rigidly attached to particular social categories (Conti and O'Neil, 2007) but as shifting, reflecting the dynamics of intersecting experiences.

Feminists have identified reflexivity as a particularly incisive tool for navigating shifting power dynamics, using it to draw attention to a how a researcher's positionality informs every aspect of the research process, from development of the research question to interactions with research participants (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Nencel, 2014; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). Because feminist research is explicitly political in its orientation, defined by its express objective of addressing women's oppression, reflexivity is thus also an ethical notion, an attempt to ensure that researchers are accountable to the people with whom they co-create knowledge both during the research process and in the final research report (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004).

In this article, I describe my reflections as a black feminist researcher conducting research with black women. I examine the unexpected ways in which power can manifest during the research process, complicating the theoretical advice offered by institutional ethics board and feminist methodology textbooks. Intersectionality serves as a useful tool to tease out these dilemmas and though it cannot preempt or solve all challenges, it provides reflexive space for exploring how 'methodological difficulties' shape both 'the manner in which research is practiced and the character of knowledge claims it produces' (Conti and O'Neil, 2007: 63). By pointing to *intersectional* reflexivity as a tool for navigating power in the research process, I drill down on the scrutiny reflexivity demands, becoming especially attuned to the 'differential effects' (Collins, 1998: 211) produced by the intersections of race, gender, class and other axes of difference and the *situated* nature of positionality (Shinozaki, 2012).

An intersectional feminist methodology

Though it has no conclusive definition, feminist methodology is an approach to research that both identifies women's oppression and seeks to change it, as well as advancing an epistemological and methodological critique of 'malestream' research traditions (Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1983). Feminist methodologists reject methods that contribute to the oppression of research participants, contest the notion of the objective, distant researcher and centre the lived experiences of participants, situated in their particular social-political context (Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1983; Conti and O'Neil, 2007; Kim, 1997).

Though these critiques are important and have transformed mainstream methodological norms, feminist methodologies have their limitations. In the same way that much (white) feminist theorising has been criticised, feminist methodologies have been challenged for their failure to take seriously differential experiences of womanhood. For example, feminists of colour have long challenged the assumption of a 'non-hierarchical' relationship between women researchers and women research participants, drawing attention to the way that race,

for example, can alter and inform the research process (Bhopal, 2010: 188; Egharevba, 2001). The theoretical contributions of black feminists, particularly intersectionality, have transformed social research (Rice, Harrison and Friedman, 2019), leading to the development of a methodological approach that begins 'with the experiences of groups that occupy multiple social locations and finds approaches and ideas that focus on the complexity rather than the singularity of human experience' (Dill and Zambrana, 2009: 2).

First coined by black feminist legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality describes a foundational principle of black feminist theorising that asserts that the oppressive structures that constrain society are governed by race, class *and* gender. Intersectionality posits that approaching discrimination and oppression through a 'single-axis framework' (Crenshaw, 1989: 39) not only erases those who experience more than one form of oppression, particularly black women, but also limits the theoretical potency of anti-oppressive politics (Crenshaw, 1989). Though it does not lend itself to a particular methodology, intersectionality is explicitly political in its orientation, centres the experiences of oppressed groups, focuses on both group and individual identity, considers different expressions of and relationships between 'domains of power' and directs these insights towards social justice initiatives in order to make real change (Dill and Zambrana, 2009: 5; Collins and Bilge, 2016; Rice, Harrison and Friedman, 2019).

An intersectional feminist research methodology, then, attends to the different and sometimes contradictory or unexpected ways in which race, gender, social class, national origin, marital status, employment and other social categories manifest themselves in narratives of lived experience. Intersectionality does not require the explanation of every instance of these manifestations (Bowleg, 2008) but instead necessitates an orientation that is open to the ways mutually constitutive oppressions affect individual experiences and structures. Intersectionality allows for recognition of the complex interplay of structures as they constrain and inform lived experience.

Power and reflexivity

Intersectionality also demands a reconceptualisation of power that attends to both its 'constraining and productive functions' (Rice, Harrison and Friedman, 2019: 6). Building on critical feminist and Foucauldian engagements with power, an intersectional feminist methodology attends to the contradictions of power, rejecting hierarchical explanations of power that fail to acknowledge its complexities and agentic capacities (Conti and O'Neil, 2007; Rice, Harrison and Friedman, 2019; Wall, 2001).

Reflexivity in feminist research is understood as 'the process through which a researcher recognizes, examines, and understands how his or her own social background and assumptions can intervene in the research process' (Hesse-Biber, 2007: 129). An intersectional feminist approach is specifically attuned to these power relations, recognising the 'differential effects' (Collins, 1998: 211) of the intersections of race, gender, class and other axes of difference and their impact on research. Black feminist theory foregrounds the relationship between power and knowledge (Alinia, 2015) and thus influences how I take up reflexivity (Nencel, 2014), especially the call to use lived experience as a 'criterion of meaning' and to view knowledge as constructed through dialogue (Collins, 2000: 258).

Further, reflexivity necessarily requires a recognition of positionality not only in terms of experiences of oppression but also of privilege. Following Hesse-Biber (2007) and Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) who rely on Harding's concept of strong objectivity, the

intersectional feminist research methodology I articulate here requires continuously examining what 'specific power and privilege' (Hesse-Biber, 2007: 130) that researchers bring to their work at every level of the research process. An intersectional reflexivity, then, involves interrogation of the researcher's positionality, attending to its situated, dynamic nature (Collins, 1998; Shinozaki, 2012).

It is an explicit goal of black feminist (and intersectional) thought to oppose oppressive research practices and engage in the work of knowledge production for the purposes of advancing social justice (Dill and Zambrana, 2009; Rice, Harrison and Friedman, 2019). This unequivocally political nature redefines ethics, not in terms of research practices that protect academic institutions from litigation or public censure but according to how a project best serves a marginalised community and reflects their lived experience. With this view of ethics, as politically situated and responsible to the participants at the centre of the research process, reflexivity becomes an '*ethical* notion' (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004: 262 original emphasis). An intersectional methodology offers a model of reflexive, ethical practice that is responsive to dynamic relations of power that inform the research process.

Though reflexivity can assist in navigating shifting power dynamics in the research process and inform an analysis that better attends to social justice principles, it has not been absorbed into feminist research methodologies without critique (Nencel, 2014; Rose, 1997; Turner, 2000). For reflexivity to serve its intended critical, and political, purposes, particularly within an intersectional methodology, it must be more than a brief catalogue of the researcher's social location before the 'real' work of analysis begins. Indeed, critics have drawn attention to the limitations of purely cerebral and detached accounts of reflexivity that fail to take seriously the body (Turner, 2000), reflexivity strategies that assume that the nature of the research relationship is 'predefined' (Nencel, 2014: 76) and the offering up of reflexivity as a modernist panacea for unequal research relationships (Lather, 2001). Intersectional research requires a reckoning with the 'dynamic, unstable nature of social ontologies', both engaging with identities and structures as research participants might represent them and attending to their instability and capacity to be made and remade (Rice, Harrison and Friedman, 2019: 6). Thus an intersectional intervention in the conceptualisation of reflexivity begins by treating neither the researcher's positionality nor that of the participants as entirely static or fixed. The assumptions that can intervene in the research process are contextual and require careful deconstruction.

This paper attempts this deconstruction, detailing the complex relationship between power, positionality and the intersectional reflexive response that emerges out of a black feminist methodological framework. The employment of an intersectional feminist methodology during my doctoral research, while reflective of my black feminist theoretical orientation and critique of contemporary parenting discourse, did not result in an uncomplicated research experience. However, this methodological approach did enable an intersectional reflection on the research process. Rather than identifying one factor, whether it was race, social class or gender, as most significantly shaping the research, intersectional reflexivity highlights the complex interaction between social categories, appearing and receding at different 'ethically important moments' (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). There were several of these moments during my doctoral research and in this paper, I discuss two; the complexities of racial 'sameness' and the significance of a mothering identity (or lack thereof). Before I turn to the first of these methodologically charged moments, I describe my research project.

Black mothers engage with attachment parenting

This article reflects on my experiences as a black feminist researcher examining attachment parenting from the perspective of black mothers living in the UK and Canada. Attachment parenting is an increasingly popular parenting philosophy, most often associated with American paediatrician William Sears, that prioritises building 'secure attachment' between parent (mother) and child. In his numerous books and expansive website, Sears argues that certain parenting practices, including breastfeeding, babywearing and bedsharing, are key to building this secure attachment which will have positive, life-long effects for parents, baby and most significantly, broader society (Sears and Sears, 2001; Dear-Healy, 2011).

In his justifications for AP's superiority, Sears refers to science and nature, claiming that AP is both supported by empirical evidence and that it echoes the practices of 'our' ancestors and extant 'primitive' societies. Sears identifies 'Africa' as one such primitive society where mothers 'don't have the benefits of books and studies about mothering hormones. What they have is centuries of tradition' (1993: 263-264). Given this romanticised, if one-dimensional, view of African motherhood on the one hand and the dominant construction of black motherhood in the West as pathological and damaging (Collins, 2000; Reynolds, 1997, 2005; Roberts, 1997) on the other, how do black mothers living outside of Africa negotiate their maternal practice? And what role, if any, does attachment parenting play in their experiences and perceptions of themselves as mothers? My doctoral research explored these questions by interviewing nineteen black mothers familiar with AP.

Interviewing these mothers and the wider research experience was punctuated with moments of methodological and ethical importance (Conti and O'Neil, 2007; Guillemin and Gillam, 2004) that reflected the challenges and productive value of operationalising an intersectional feminist methodology. The first of these moments occurred at two distinct yet interrelated stages of the research journey; recruitment and data collection, upending the typical linear depiction of research and revealing the methodological dilemmas that can unsettle novice researchers.

Negotiating sameness and blackness

I began the process of recruiting interviewees for my doctoral project confident that I would reach (and possibly even exceed) my goal of thirty participants, fifteen in the UK and fifteen in Canada. Though I was recruiting from relatively small populations (black people comprise 3% of the population in both countries), participation criteria was broad, requiring childrearing experience with an infant within the previous five years and awareness rather than practice or investment in attachment parenting[i]. Though I had read critiques of the alleged benefits of race matched research (Beoku-Betts, 1994; Egharevba, 2001; Winddance Twine, 2000), I believed that my shared racial identity with potential participants would ensure a simple recruitment process.

However, I soon found that it was another facet of my positionality that entered and constrained the research process; my status as an international student placed severe restrictions on this phase of data collection, for example, limiting my time in the UK to ten weeks. To make matters even more fraught, my initial recruitment strategy, which involved contacting nursery schools, churches, playgroups and community centres, failed. One school explained that they had already had several researchers working at the school and could not accommodate any more. This decision alluded to the historical reluctance marginalised groups, particularly black communities, have expressed towards research, given its use to reinforce harmful stereotypes (Daniel, 2005; Kanyeredzi, 2018). The school's rejection of my

research and the wider failure of this initial recruitment strategy demonstrated the limitations of a social justice-oriented research methodology if it could not be effectively or persuasively communicated to potential participants.

Though I switched to a more successful recruitment strategy, using social media, parenting forums and online community groups to generate interview leads, awareness of this community-wide hesitation infused the remainder of the recruitment and data collection process. The usual power attributed to researchers as responsible for setting the terms of engagement was upset; I experienced the 'route between identifying a potential informant' and the actual interview with heightened anxiety (Conti and O'Neil, 2007: 69). As the end of my stay in the UK grew closer, I became more and more aware of how important it was that I made a 'good impression' with the interviewees, hopeful that they would recommend me to their friends and family for interviews.

For example, at the end of our interview, Eleanor[ii] explained that now that she knew what I was 'about', she would be happy to share my call for participants with her networks. I got the impression that knowing what I was 'about' was linked very clearly to her approval of my (particular kind of) blackness and related appropriate attitudes towards parenting. My conversation with Eleanor until that point had been replete with ruminations on different kinds of blackness, most evident in her attempt to distinguish between 'Africans' and 'West Indians', the latter she argued had 'lost' their culture as a result of being 'indoctrinated' during slavery. For Eleanor, that we were both black was insufficient cause for her to promote my call for participants among her friends and family. In order to earn that privilege, I had to demonstrate a specific kind of blackness, a quasi-politically orientated blackness rooted in what I argue is an imagined Africa:

> I feel like there's cultural differences, spiritual differences and different practices, how we do things and I always feel like…you get two extreme ends of the spectrum, you get either the hippies and tree-huggers or you get the ones where it's a very clinical perspective. I feel like for me, I didn't fit anywhere between although other black people that aren't necessarily like the way I am, they would see me as being a hippy of some sort *chuckles* but I don't see that 'cause…I don't do what hippies do, I don't do those kinds of things although some of the things are similar so I feel like…I'm…I feel like a lot of the information about attachment parenting is obviously there but because we don't see ourselves in it…we don't necessarily take it on and we assume that it's a white thing not realising that these people have seen this in our cultures back home, whether it's in Africa or the Carib-, well, not so much the Caribbean 'cause like, the Caribbean have been indoctrinated in a certain way because of slavery and stuff but I feel like when they go to these places and see these things and then they think 'oh, that's a good idea!' and then they take it on themselves and yet we've been doing it for long (Eleanor, UK, 33-year-old mother of two daughters and one son aged 12, 6 and 3).

Eleanor's construction of Africa was inextricably tied to her parenting style. She viewed practices such as babywearing and bedsharing as originating in Africa, and as a woman of West Indian descent herself, she wished to embrace these 'cultural' practices. Though Eleanor never explicitly asked me whether I was a proponent of attachment parenting, I believe she read the absence of any vocal disagreement with the parenting practices she described during the interview (and my involvement in the project in the first place) as my endorsement of them. It was on the basis of these two related readings of me; as appropriately black and

supportive of an African kind of attachment parenting, that I was deemed legitimate enough to be recommended to her network.

Eleanor's assessment and eventual approval of me echoed the evaluations she herself described undergoing as a light-skinned black woman:

> It's kind of funny because my appearance *chuckles* with black people…they...have a hard time accepting me and the way I look. It's not until I talk and say and share what I know then they kind of relax about it.

Eleanor's struggles over her acceptance as a black person (and specific fears about being mistaken for a mixed-race woman, which she articulated later in the interview) reveals an obvious diversity of possible black experiences and identities but also suggests the elevation of a kind of singular authentic blackness, defined by adherence to apparently African-influenced values and practices. Eleanor's assertion of attachment parenting as African worked both to reclaim the philosophy from white experts such as the Sears and to carve an assured place for herself in black communities that seemed to view her with suspicion.

In the midst of the interview, I interpreted Eleanor's statement within a broader framework of belonging, with black mothers, often constructed as neglectful interlopers, using a particularly kind of African attachment parenting to claim both good motherhood and good citizenship. Upon reflection, however, I realise that Eleanor's statement also provides insight into my own kind of 'identity management' (Conti and O'Neil, 2007: 75) that involved not only juggling how and when I expressed my views on attachment parenting but also how I presented myself as a black person. Indeed, through an intersectional reflexivity which compels a revision of not just assumptions about shared experience between women researchers but also between a black woman researcher and the black women she interviews, any assumption of a common intersection of gender and race guaranteeing rapport and obstacle-free research is undone. While these tensions of blackness were played out with Eleanor as West Indian versus African, or perhaps light-skinned versus dark-skinned; in Canada, social class emerged as the key intersection with anxieties now heightened around my 'respectability'.

As researchers before me have described and advised, I tried to dress professionally when recruiting and conducting interviews. Perhaps as a reflection of the difficulties of navigating graduate school and the transition to professional adulthood it implies, I made an effort with my clothes and hair in order to be taken seriously as a young researcher and to convey respect to the women who had taken time out of their clearly busy schedules to talk to me. Until my interactions with Lorde and Notisha, two mothers living in Canada, I believed that I had been successful in these efforts. However, as conversations with both women turned to the difficulties of raising black children in a racist society, they both described one of the strategies they used to protect their children as linked to appearance:

> Like it's really upsetting but yes, unfortunately it is a part of my parenting not because I want it to be but because it has to be. Because I need my son to be safe and aware of his surroundings, I don't believe in sheltering him to keep him safe because the world isn't going to do that for him at any age unfortunately so no, you're not allowed to have chapped lips, you're not allowed to be ashy and you have to brush your hair and you have to get your hair cut (Lorde, CA, 33-year-old mother of two sons, aged 4 and 2 and expecting a third).

I always wanna make sure that the children look put together, that they don't look, you know, rough, I guess, and I think that's kinda where it's come from, my parents...[I] always wanna make sure that their hair's in place, braided up nice or put in a ponytail or whatever, it's nice, clean, clothes ironed…I think that's instilled from my parents but...I think it could be just in the back of my mind, I don't want people to make an assumption that there's a raggedy black child or something like that, you know what I mean? And like I said, I think I come from...my parents, you know, in the back 'always look put together' you know, 'you wanna make sure you look nice and clean and neat.' Yeah. Always look your best (Notisha, CA, 34-year-old mother of two daughters, aged 3 and 1).

Immediately following these comments, I recall feeling anxious about my appearance. My efforts to dress professionally were not on par with the decidedly fashionable outfits and hairstyles worn by these participants. While they never alluded to my hair or dress in a derogatory fashion, the anxiety I experienced forced me to think more reflexively about the political expediency of respectability politics[iii], especially in a context widely understood as 'postrace'. My attention to their respectable appearances (and the implied appearance of their children) during the interview informed the analysis where an intersectional perspective demanded attention to not only how their blackness and womanhood shaped their parenting practices but also the influence of their social class. My own anxiety over my appearance and the extent to which it revealed my economic position (or lack thereof) led me to link their stated class position (both called themselves 'middle-class' or higher) with not only how they presented themselves in the interview but the strategies they described to protect their children from racism, sometimes invoking a politics of respectability that suggested their children's 'respectable' appearances were the most appropriate strategy for shielding them from racial prejudice, a strategy that appeared to rest on distinguishing the participants' middle-class children from their 'raggedy' counterparts.

Indeed, just as the women's parenting strategies were entangled with awareness of and strategies to avoid racism, so my position as a black researcher, and the wavering benefits and disadvantages that status brought, could not be separated from my position as an attachment parenting researcher. Eleanor was not the only interviewee to express belief in the power of a particularly *black* re-appropriation of attachment parenting and indeed, approval of how my research project might work to promote AP in black communities. The interviewees' articulation of attachment parenting as a protective mechanism for the black community meant that my responsibility to portray them respectfully, explicitly rejecting exploitative stereotypes that have emerged from historic research on black folk (Daniel, 2005; Kanyeredzi, 2018), might be mistaken for a duty to describe attachment parenting favourably.

The women's hopes that my project might popularise attachment parenting among mothers was evidently a motivation for participation in the project. Their keenness for this promotional function suggested that my efforts to craft an open call to black mothers with only familiarity with attachment parenting had not been entirely successful; these mothers had assumed that the project was for attachment parents and in celebration of the philosophy. I chose not to disclose my critiques of AP to such participants, motivated by fear that my criticism would result in a closing down of not only that particular interview but the potential for further interviews with the participant's network (a serious fear given my previous struggles with recruitment). However, their belief that we had partnered in the work of promoting AP facilitated a specific kind of description of attachment parenting and how they deployed the philosophy as a method of resistance; a key finding of my doctoral work. I take

up this tension between participants' goals for participating in the research and my own critical orientation in the next section, where I discuss the impact of my status as a non-parent.

'My PhD is my baby': doing parenting research as a non-parent

Before fieldwork began I anticipated that my childlessness would be the major division between participants and I. I expected that participants would be curious and perhaps even suspicious about my motivations for studying motherhood when I was not a mother myself. However, it rarely came up as a topic of conversation[iv]. Unlike Shinozaki (2012) whose participants viewed her non-mother status as cause for explaining experiences of parenthood in greater detail, participants in this study described their mothering in a manner that assumed I was familiar with the experience. For example, during my interview with Stella she proudly informed me that she had only pushed for under five minutes during the birth of her child. At the time of the interview I did not know that this was far under the average length of time for pushing, especially for a first child, but Stella did not feel the need to explain. The fact that the study was explicitly about their experiences of motherhood may have also contributed to participants' assumption that I was familiar with the everyday realities of parenthood. Answering questions about daily routines or sleeping arrangements required them to provide detail but they also often assumed that I understood the meaning of specialist terms like 'baby-led weaning.' Given that baby-led weaning is often named as an attachment parenting practice, it is no surprise that participants expected a research project on AP to be conducted by someone familiar with AP. However, that can also have complicating factors.

Among those participants who enthusiastically called themselves attachment parents, several assumed that I was doing the research for the purpose of promoting the philosophy among black mothers and thanked me for undertaking such an important task. During writing up, I was (and remain) anxious about their reactions to my analysis. As I indicate above, my anxiety is underlined by the sense of duty I feel to my participants as a black woman researcher (Narag and Maxwell, 2014). I began this project with the express intent to counter both the history of exploitation that is characteristic of academic research on black communities, particularly black women, and the tendency in popular and academic scholarship on attachment parenting to either omit black mothers' perspectives or, more commonly, to appropriate their experiences to serve as symbolic representations of 'good' motherhood in an imagined 'Third World'. I am also concerned about the potential consequences of an uncritical application of neoliberal ideology as a lens through which to read participants' experiences by, for example, describing such experiences in the language of neoliberal discipline in a way that implies that they are merely dupes or victims of false consciousness. Attending to the meaning they assign to their parenting activities and how this shapes their sense of selves as mothers is an important strategy to counter any appropriative tendencies of neoliberal policies. This is also the point at which anti-racist and feminist scholars' calls to 'reflexively evaluate [the researcher's] standpoint throughout this process' (Beoku-Betts, 1994: 430) are particularly important. My standpoint as a black person and as a woman are important criteria through which to judge my interactions with participants but I also draw attention to my personal history with attachment parenting and the analytic journey I have embarked upon as I examine this philosophy.

Being read as a supporter of attachment parenting caused me to question how participants' motivations might shape the answers they gave during the interview. Attending to the influence of motivations allows greater analytic insight into the work AP performs for mothers, particularly black mothers. For example, if some self-identified attachment parents

chose to participate in the project for the purposes of promoting AP, how might that purpose inform their answers? Would they only portray attachment parenting positively in their efforts to 'preach the gospel'? However, as I looked over the data it became clear that even those most passionate about the superiority of this parenting style would nonetheless describe its disadvantages. Olive, for example, admitted that attachment parenting was harder than other types of parenting. Tracey criticised AP for excluding and judging mothers who did not follow its prescripts exactly. Demita described her fears that her child would grow up feeling different and perhaps even like an outcast because of her parenting choices:

> Now he's very different, already he's very different, you know, my family they call me 'earth mother', you know, they're like, he, he, he will cry if I don't put green powder in his cereal in the morning. What's gonna happen when he goes to school or when he goes out there and he starts doing things like that and everyone is like, you know, you're a weird child, you're weird, you know? How is he gonna feel about that? Will he be confident enough to say 'well, I'm weird but I, I love it'...will he be confident enough to say those type of things?...[or] will he resent us for making him different or raising him differently? (Demita, UK, 26-year-old mother of one son aged three)

Each of these women were avid proponents of AP but felt comfortable enough to offer critiques and describe the negative implications of the practice. However, I do not discount the possibility that these critiques were chosen as the least likely to put off interested mothers.

In other research interactions, the assumption that I was a supporter of AP was conflated with the assumption that I was an expert on AP. Though no participant ever explicitly stated either of these assumptions, interactions before, during and after interviews suggested that this was the case. For example, during each interview I asked participants to describe their definition of attachment parenting. In an example of how successfully attachment parenting has been established as an example of 'good' motherhood, throughout many of the interviews, participants asked me not only to confirm that these definitions were correct but also wanted reassurance that they were practicing AP. These requests for reassurance suggest the importance of validation in contemporary parenting discourse (Fox, 2009) more generally, as well as its particular significance for mothers already constructed as failures. Margaret and Patricia were the two clearest examples of this phenomenon with Patricia stating that it was 'good to know' that she fit the AP criteria, despite the fact that she rejected many of the central tenets of AP practice. Both their belief that AP is a form of parenting to be proudly proclaimed and the notion that I had the authority to confirm that proclamation are examples of the complexity of insider status and the shifting dynamics of power in the research relationship. At the point at which I felt least powerful in that my knowledge of AP is purely theoretical, these two participants re-confirmed the power that accompanies a research affiliation with a university. Regardless of my maternal status, it was assumed that I was a credible authority on attachment parenting.

The decision to recruit participants who had knowledge of attachment parenting, rather than only those who practiced AP, enabled access to the perspectives of women who rejected AP as a legitimate style of parenting, those who fully embraced it and those who fell in the middle. Each of these loosely categorised groups challenged my ability to control the narrative about attachment parenting. While I am largely critical of AP, the stories participants told in interviews pushed me to consider the assumptions I had been making about attachment parenting more closely and critically, particularly the ways that women can

use disciplinary knowledges, discourses that work to shape individuals into appropriately docile subjects, to different ends (Heyes, 2006). I am also aware of how the fact of my childlessness may have contributed to my commitment to 'take participants at their word.' I do not have my own experience of mothering to draw on when formulating my analysis of attachment parenting and thus must rely not only on my critical and theoretical faculties and resources but must also take seriously, though not uncritically, the perspectives offered by participants, as all black feminist research must.

Conclusion

Recognising the responsibility and power I have to represent participants' lived experiences is a direct result of engaging in a project of reflexivity. Without attending to the power relations entangled in research relations and how the multiple, intersecting aspects of my identity and that of the participants might shape those relations, ethical research practice is not possible. I have suggested above that there is a gap between what is asked of researchers by institutional ethics review boards and what takes place in the field. I would argue that this is especially true for novice, student researchers and particularly dangerous for such researchers when they take up critical, emancipatory methodologies influenced by feminism or critical race theory. Belief that one has adequately prepared for fieldwork because one has received institutional ethical approval and that a feminist research methodology will definitively protect you and the people you engage with is not sufficient grounds for ethical practice. Instead, I suggest that reflexivity must be adopted as an ethical principle, in a way that is rooted in intersectionality, thus acknowledging and enabling attention to the situated, shifting nature of power.

The moments I have described in my research interactions illuminate the dynamics of power in the research process and the strategies an intersectional methodological approach can offer to help navigate research. I argue that intersectionally informed methodologies' demand for ethical, reflexive practice and engagement with social justice (Rice, Harrison and Friedman, 2019) provides a tool for navigating moments of methodological difficulty and a pathway through which to develop theoretically rigorous, situated knowledge that responds to and accounts for the lived experiences of marginalised groups. An intersectional feminist methodology centres lived experience and attends to the multiple and intersecting axes of difference that shape these experiences, without requiring that there can only be a single explanation for a particular interaction. The inclination to attempt to explain an interaction or experience by identifying one overriding social factor, one 'independent oppression', belies the complexity of the matrices that inform our daily lives and structures (Dunn, 2016: 273). Such an attempt would be a misreading of the work intersectionality demands of us as critical scholars; to approach the construction of knowledge through dialogue (Collins, 2000, p. 260; Yuval-Davis, 2012). When I assumed that my childlessness, for example, would dominate conversations with the interviewees, I failed to recognise how that status, non-motherhood, was informed by racial, classed and gendered dimensions, or indeed by my position as a graduate student attached to a university. My non-motherhood *did* inform the research interaction but not in a way that could be separated from participants' assessment of me as an attachment parenting expert or as a fellow black person navigating a white world. Intersectional reflexivity demands a reckoning with these shifting dynamics and offers an analytic framework through which to make sense of the relations between race, class, gender in specific contexts.

A researcher's chosen methodology (and the theoretical framework from which it is developed) influences how research projects are devised, who the target population will be, the choice of method, the kind of questions asked during data collection and the process of interpreting that data. An intersectional feminist methodology requires attention to power in the process of conducting research both from the perspective of participants and that of the researcher. I argue that recognition of the influence and malleability of power as well as the situated nature of knowledge is a necessary requirement of ethical, reflexive research practice, a practice that is made possible through the deployment of an intersectional feminist methodology. While it does not provide an answer to all questions, and, indeed, in the fact that it rests on the notion of partial knowledges, it cannot, it does suggest a path through methodological and theoretical difficulties and advance an analysis of the lived experiences of marginalised peoples that respects their expertise and agency as knowledge producers and attends to principles of social justice and change central to feminist and intersectional politics.

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[i] Though the openness of this criteria had (not fully realised) methodological advantages, it was motivated by a desire to gather a diversity of maternal experiences with attachment parenting, including those of mothers who embraced the philosophy, its critics and the mothering styles that fell in between.

[ii] All names are pseudonyms.

[iii] The politics of respectability involve an individual response to the problems of racism and sexism, suggesting appropriate, 'respectable' behaviour by marginalised groups to protect both individuals and the group as a whole from oppression (Obasogie and Newman, 2016). Though the term was first described to capture African-American women's church and community activism in the early twentieth century (Brooks Higginbotham, 1993), respectability politics has received renewed attention in a neoliberal, 'postrace' era (Harris, 2014).

[iv] When participants did ask if I had children I responded that for now, 'my PhD was my baby' but I hoped to have children in the future. This was not a deliberate attempt to direct the conversation away from my childlessness but simply the way I responded to friends, relatives and strangers who asked about my maternal status during my doctorate. More often than not, however, answering in this manner shifted the conversation towards my experience of the PhD and academia.