# *Jazz Researchers: Riding the Dissonance of Pedagogy and Inquiry*

*Brian D. Lozenski, Macalester College*

**Abstract**

*Drawing from a two-year ethnographic study, this article establishes jazz as an epistemological metaphor for critical participatory action research. The author juxtaposes the tensions inherent in jazz music and critical participatory research methodologies to provide a framework for understanding how dissonance can become a productive element for meaning making and Truth-telling. The article establishes three major implications for critical researchers: 1) The desirability of discomfort in critical qualitative research as a means to avoid stagnation; 2) the "crisis-generating" potential of jazz epistemologies as an approach to critical participatory action research; and, 3) the emergence of new perspectives on research and pedagogy from the intersections of critical research and teaching practices.*

*Keywords: jazz, jazz epistemologies, dissonance, critical participatory research*

> *Jazz requires what might be considered a certain irreverence toward the music as written. This irreverence does not imply a lack of respect for the composer or the music, but a sense of participation with the composer in the creative process. The music serves as an outline for the new event, rather than an untouchable and finished creation, not to be tampered with.*
> –Oldfather & West, 1994

In conjuring forms of knowledge that "*begin* with the pile-age of wreckage," Cornel West (in Taylor, 2008) lays a foundational premise for the understanding of critical epistemologies, and thus critical research methodologies. Research that is born from an understanding of and intimacy with the depths of lived despair illuminate particular truths that are skeptical of the status quo and hostile to social stagnation. These are truths that are ugly to look at and difficult to reconcile. They exist when critical race theorists suggest that racism is endemic to and thus a permanent aspect of U.S. society. They exist when Marxists uncover that certain forms of educational resistance among the working class serve to reify their socioeconomic position within a classed hierarchy (Willis, 1977). They exist when Indigenous scholars position the project of maintaining a fragile form of democracy as being incommensurable with Native sovereignty (Grande, 2004; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Yet, these critical forms of knowledge are what contain promise, desire, and nuance; rejecting grand narratives and orienting researchers toward complex approaches to unsolvable problems. Critical researchers recognize that our work is about existing in the muck and mire of the

often unanswerable. Still we are called to make meaning, strategize to win, and speak Truth to power. The Truth in this sense lies in the recognition of the iterative wreckage and all of its twisted manifestations that hail critical researchers and are conveniently ignored or rationalized by historical wielders of "reality"-constituting power. Simultaneously, drawing on the multiple and often dissonant truths that are used to name the wreckages are necessary in order to find the infinite ways out toward natural desires for humanness. In this way, critical researchers must search for Truth, while sifting through truths.

In his assertion that a different mode of thinking comes from beginning with "the pile-age of wreckage", West was not referring to critical research methodologies. He was talking about the epistemologies of jazz and the blues, which he argues come from a foundation of "the catastrophic." He riffs, "the blues is personal catastrophe lyrically expressed." Using the prolific saxophonist Charlie "Bird" Parker symbolically, West (in Taylor, 2008) reiterates his logics of criticality:

> [Rejecting the notion of wholeness] is where jazz starts. Do you think Charlie Parker's upset because he can't sustain a harmony? He didn't care about the harmony. He's trying to completely ride on the dissonance, ride on the blue notes….Why start with this obsession on wholeness?

Critical researchers, like Parker did with his instrument of meaning making, attempt to ride on the dissonance, searching for ways to break apart the imagined whole so as to re-envision it; yet knowing that the whole—societal harmony—can never exist. With this in mind, the challenge for critical researchers is to consider how the "pile-age of wreckage" and "the catastrophic," as forms of knowledge, can result in something as optimistically future-oriented as jazz.

Attempting to meet this challenge, this article explores how jazz as an epistemological construct, and then as a metaphorical research methodology (Dixson, 2006; Oldfather & West, 1994; White & Hermes, 2005), necessarily maintains a symbiotic relationship between the individual and collective in a search for the Truth of dissonance. Jazz, as an overarching framework, serves as the backdrop for analyzing the ways in which liberatory Truth is able to navigate structures of oppression, specifically with regard to the experiences of youth of African descent in educational systems, acting as public intellectuals, set on impacting collective consciousness and public policy. I explore how researcher/educator positionalities can conflate research and teaching in what I describe as an *irreversible methodology*, where there comes a point when previously delineated teaching and research practices become indistinguishable (Freire, 1982). The multidimensional aspects of research methods are explored through the symbolism of jazz, as each of the "players" learned to work independently within a collective structure that was democratically created.

The article explores how the youths' Truth-telling informed my teaching and research, and their positionality as community-based documentarians, and organic, public intellectual knowledge producers. The broader critical ethnographic study that this article explores is set in a community-based organization in St. Paul, Minnesota where the youth—who were my students, co-researchers, and research participants—were enrolled in a course under my instruction where they received high school and college credit. The course was a hybrid of Africana studies and action research methods, designed for the youth to understand and apply epistemological frameworks from African knowledge systems (Harris, 2011) to their research on issues most directly

impacting their lives. The youth in the study focused their research on the creation, and maintenance through media, of the term "ghetto" in depicting black youth.

There are three major implications discussed in this article. The first is the desirability of discomfort (Ginwright, 2010; Kumashiro, 2002) in critical qualitative research and critical dialogic teaching. As with jazz music, comfort in the process of research and learning amounts to stagnation. Pillow (2003) suggests that researchers interrogate feelings of comfort as they can lead to blind spots with regard to counter-narratives of hegemonic truths. Pedagogical research that seeks moments of crisis on the part of the researchers and learners can prevent these moments of comfort and maintain hesitancy (reflexive practice) in research and teaching in the face of oppressive conditions. The second implication is the "crisis-generating" potential of jazz epistemology. Oldfather and West (1994), Dixson, (2006), and White and Hermes (2005) have previously explored the parallels between jazz, qualitative research methods, and critical theory. This article builds from their theorizations by honing in on the convergence of critical research methodologies and critical pedagogy, where the result becomes a wonderfully dissonant jazz tune rife with complexity and promise.

Oldfather and West (1994) write, "In contrast to the formal concert hall atmosphere of classical music, jazz is at home in nightclubs and bars. Jazz performers undergo their 'naked' creative struggles in front of an audience, whereas classical performers do so in private rehearsals" (p. 24). In similar ways jazz researchers live out dilemmas of tension and contradiction in the midst of the research process. I explore how jazz musicians and jazz researchers encounter moments of tension between the individual and collective, which have the potential to reach new places of thought and action, or settle back into established structures. Examining these moments of tension (crises) allows for greater understanding of how they can be intentionally created and the conditions needed to do so. Finally, I examine the *irreversible methodology* that emerged as a manifestation of joining critical ethnography, youth participatory action research (yPAR), and critical dialogic pedagogy. By focusing on the trajectories of historical, present, and future acts, I examine how these methodologies can be applied to understand the process of learning through critical participatory inquiry dedicated to youth public intellectualism and activism amidst oppressive conditions.

## Engagement: Getting into the groove

In reference to cultural relevance in education, Ladson-Billings (2006) suggests that it is not what educators *do* that should be foregrounded but rather how they *think*. Her implication is that the way educators understand ourselves and our students in relation to the world—our ways of being in the world—will directly impact what it is that we do. Gevonee Ford, the executive director of Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD), which was the setting for this study, often makes this point more plainly, by saying, "The way you think about a *thang*, determines what you do about a *thang*." The same idea applies to research. For researchers, it is more important to focus on understanding our role within the histories that constitute research traditions than to simply begin doing the "research thang." This is why a deep understanding of methodology is crucial. Methodology is a mediating factor for researchers that bridges the thinking and the doing. Methodology contains epistemological underpinnings that shape researchers' thoughts and actions when designing research, generating data, analyzing data, or representing themselves and others through writing and the dissemination of their work. I want to be careful, however, and not suggest that there is such a clear, linear distinction between thinking and

doing. The epistemology of jazz would suggest that thinking and doing are synergistic and often simultaneous. The recognition of oneself as a critical researcher entails certain dispositions toward the work of research that could be likened to the ways in which jazz musicians are predisposed to approach their practice, finding comfort in dissonance. Thus, it is important to examine the dispositions inherent in critical participatory action research as they relate to dissonance and discomfort in research.

In order to illuminate the methodological dispositions and underpinnings of this study, I first explore the idea and centrality of engaged research, which cannot be separated from critical research, with regard to my work. Jazz is an engaged art form. Jazz musicians feed off of each other in real time to reimagine what is possible. The chords change unexpectedly, rhythms emerge from improvisation, and there exists a natural reciprocity between audiences and practitioners when solos conclude and new sonics emerge. Engaged research holds similarities as collaborators are placed in conversation with each other, encountering the unexpected and being asked to improvise, yet remain true to the original vision of the project.

Mulligan and Nadarajah (2008) correctly suggest that *engaged research* (or *community-engaged research*, among other terms) has become such an overused and broad term that it has begun to lose its meaning and risks losing the counterhegemonic origins from which it grew (Hale, 2008). Inherent in the idea of engaged research is the existence of such a thing as disengaged research, or a form of research that is removed from the reality of the people and environment in which it takes place. The *mestiza* feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) crystallizes the notion of disengagement, writing, "Western culture made 'objects' of things and people when it distanced itself from them, thereby losing 'touch' with them. This dichotomy is the root of all violence" (p. 59). Anzaldúa's powerful and provocative statement, while broad in its framing, could aptly be applied to the historical violence of "academic research." Western conceptions of research traditionally require strict demarcations and distance between researchers (subjects) and the researched (objects). This distance has made it possible for researchers to easily come and go from communities with little regard for the effects of their analysis on objectified peoples. The symbolic violence of research has had wide-reaching and devastating implications for Indigenous peoples of Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the South Pacific, as well as women, communities of color, impoverished communities, and other marginalized peoples in every corner of the globe.

Yoruba-feminist scholar, Oyeronke Oyewumi (1997), further complicates the notion of disengaged research through her depiction of regional African studies as a chain of incomplete translations: "translation from oral to written, translation from one culture to another, and finally translation from one language to another" (p. 27). Her analysis can be expanded to explain not only the problematic history of continental African research done by European colonizers, but also research conducted throughout the African Diaspora. Oyewumi uses a sophisticated framework to describe the problem of trying to fit some African societies into Western epistemological frameworks. She explains that Western scholarship and culture is overly concerned with observation and seeing as a way of interacting (researching) with others, as opposed to "being" with the world, which she attributes to many Indigenous African communities. She juxtaposes the terms "worldview" and "world-sense" (p. 2) as primary indicators of the difference between Western and African ways of interacting and being. Worldview, in her representation, does not provide a complex enough understanding of how African (specifically Yoruban-Nigerian) people see (or rather *be*) their humanity.

Thus, the importance of seriously and intentionally developing critical research practices that are antithetical to the traditional norms of research becomes clear. Engaged research potentially offers an avenue for research that is not symbolically, or epistemologically, violent (Teo, 2010). Engaged research can broadly be described as systematic inquiry that is embedded in a reciprocal partnership between researchers and communities. Further, critically engaged or activist research with communities actively works to reverse historically constructed asymmetries in power dynamics and knowledge construction while working toward a common goal (Hale, 2008). It does not go so far as to pretend that these asymmetries can be eradicated over short periods of time, or that research from the academy can truly be seen as representing a similar agenda to that of community entities, but by recognizing these realities, engaged researchers can attempt to open more honest channels of dialogue between universities and communities, where a mutually beneficial research agenda has the potential to emerge. Mulligan and Nadarajah (2008) describe several principles of engaged research:

- An overt commitment on the part of the researchers to work in the communities concerned for a matter of years not weeks
- The formation of some form of Critical Reference Group within the communities that can offer frank, helpful and detailed advice on how to proceed.
- Researchers should consult widely about research aims and ways of collecting relevant data.
- Discussions should take place not only in formal meetings, but also in informal settings, over a shared meal perhaps, or in visiting places of local significance.
- Researchers should use a wide range of research methods to tap into the knowledge and experience of the communities concerned. (p. 93)

These principles underlie critical researchers' desires for multiplicity, innovation, and informality that help provide pathways to alternative ways of knowing. At the same time they provide fertile ground for dissonance as a mechanism for researchers to further locate themselves within lived experiences born from the catastrophic. Many of these principles were at the core of the program I was part of developing.

The analysis in this article comes from a two-year critical ethnographic study at a community-based organization called the Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD). NdCAD is an African-centered (Mazama, 2003) family education center located in St. Paul, Minnesota, focused on literacy development and building healthy identity among youth and families of African descent. NdCAD is a learning organization that has developed its own community-based research methodology (Lozenski & Ford, 2014) to explore and illuminate the cultural assets present in the various communities with which it interacts. My work at NdCAD merged Oyewumi's notion of African "world-sense" with many of the community-engaged recommendations of Mulligan and Nadarajah. An integral part of designing the Uhuru Youth Scholars program, which provided the opportunity and context for this study, was the formation of an advisory board, made up of numerous stakeholders from NdCAD, the University of Minnesota, and the broader communities of African descent in the Twin Cities including high school youth and parents.

The program at the center of this analysis is the Uhuru Youth Scholars program (Uhuru) (Lozenski, 2014). Uhuru is a hybrid course designed for teenaged youth, where they receive high school and college credit to explore and conduct youth participatory action research (yPAR) through the lens of African knowledge systems (Harris, 2011). The cohort of youth researchers in

this study took the course with me, while I conducted a critical ethnographic study of their partic-ipatory action research experience, resulting in a multilayered study where I was a researcher, co-researcher, and teacher at different and often overlapping moments. During this year there were five youth in the research cohort. Each of the youth, regardless of their academic trajectory toward postsecondary education, identified the fact that they could receive college credit through the University of Minnesota as a primary reason for enrolling in Uhuru. Nathaniel, an 18-year-old African-American young man grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota. Autumn, a 17 year old, grew up in a suburb touching St. Paul and is self-described as multi-racial. Will, a 19 year old African-American young man, had an extremely transitory childhood, moving with his mother and younger siblings across multiple states since he can remember. AJ, a 17-year-old young woman of self-described mixed-race and ethnicity, grew up between Minnesota and California. Sheekey, a 20 year old immigrant from Liberia living in St. Paul, graduated halfway through the program, but stayed on as a paid intern while he looked for work and a way to continue his education. This article draws primarily from the experiences of Autumn, AJ, Nathaniel, and Will.[1]

### The Desirability of Discomfort: Riding the Truth of Dissonance in Teaching and Research

How does one become a jazz researcher? Jazz musicians are created in a multiplicity of ways. Some come into jazz music after being trained in technical musicianship, where they read and compose music, are well-versed in music theory, and have performance experience. Others identify with the sound of jazz and "pick up" instruments in order to learn how to play what their ears identify, with little technical training, only a passion for playing. These musicians all need to reconcile, at some point, how they will deal with the dissonance. Will they recoil and attempt to "fix" it, or will they see it as an opportunity for further exploration? Jazz researchers develop in much the same way, some learning formal research methods in classrooms and others seeing what works and picking it up by what feels right. Below I explicate how intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional dissonance the impacted the youth learning to become critical researchers in these various ways.

Jazz music, as with critical research entails dissonance. This is the space where musicians and researchers learn about themselves. Dissonance as a pathway, or road for leaning, presents itself in many forms, one of which is something like crisis. Crisis is a recurring element in the context of the Uhuru Youth Scholars program, and also as a desirable methodological element within critical research. First, crisis must be reframed so that it does not conjure up its traditionally negative connotation. Crisis can be understood as opportunity and, even further, as a necessary precondition for transformation (Kumashiro, 2002). Crisis, in this sense, is not concerned with injury or violence (McCarty, 2012) but rather an intense discomfort. It is a sociocultural location of active discomfort within the status quo. This can manifest in political, social, and intellectual spaces, or in our self-conceptions of identity. For instance, an identity crisis is a precondition for certain forms of re-evaluation of the self, and re-organizing of responses to life conditions. However, crises do not necessarily result in a generative transformation, and they can often have limiting effects on people's actions and potential for positive change, particularly when experienced through a paradigm of individualism (Lozenski & Ford, 2014). Experiencing crisis in isolation can result in further entrenchment in the status quo, or a space of disequilibrium, as a singular person tries to make meaning of their discomfort. That is the opposite of the environment we tried to

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1. Each of the youth selected their pseudonym.

create in the Uhuru program. Obviously there are no absolute responses to crises, but communal responses are desirable as learning is ultimately a social process.

As the collaborative research unfolded I began to understand crisis as a collective teaching, learning, and research commitment. Kumashiro (2002) writes:

> Education is not something that involves comfortably repeating what we already learned or affirming what we already know. Rather, education involves learning something that disrupts our commonsense view of the world. The crisis that results from unlearning, then, is a necessary and desirable part of antioppressive education. Desiring to learn involves desiring difference and overcoming our resistance to discomfort. (p. 63)

Sometimes technically trained musicians experience crisis in unlearning a viscerally negative response to harmonic dissonance. The goal is not to sit in perpetual modes of crisis, but rather to move from moment to moment of crisis through the development of a reflexive learning practice. And while Kumashiro's work specifically addresses education, I position critical research and education as inhabiting the same space, where there exist obvious parallels.

Kumashiro describes the desirability of discomfort (the catastrophic) with what is already known and predictive through "commonsense" approaches to teaching and research. As a musician and student of jazz music, I see jazz as a powerful metaphor for researching and learning in crisis. As jazz musicians work in concert as a unit, some individual players may push the bounds of the established structure through improvisational soloing or rhythmic experimentation. This aberration in the structure of the song then causes other musicians to adapt in order to maintain a sense of the rhythmic or harmonic elements of the song. Often the moments of crisis in jazz simply resettle into the established structure; however, there are times when these crises lead to new keys, rhythmic styles, or unknown directions—possibilities rising out of dissonance. Every improvisational shift has the potential to open new opportunities for crisis and resist predictability. The collective aspect of jazz allows for these crises to occur in supportive spaces where they typically do not result in catastrophic collapses.

These moments of interpersonal and collective tensions or crises formed the basis for Uhuru's research. Consider Autumn's and my description of how the group's research questions developed to a research methods class at the University of Minnesota.[2]

> **Autumn:** Me and this other student (Nathaniel), we were arguing about who we thought was "ghetto" and this guy walked on the bus and he was African American and he had his pants sagging, he smelled like weed, and he was just very – he kind of frightened me a little bit…. And I was just like, "this dude is ghetto." And Nathaniel was like, "No man! He's not ghetto, he just knows what's up." And me and him had this huge debate about what is "ghetto" and he brought it to class, and had this huge discussion.
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> **Brian:** This conversation that turned into a classroom discussion – became a unit of analysis for us. Right? It became well, "what does ghetto mean?" "How do we understand

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2. I was asked to speak to a graduate-level class of pre-service and practicing teachers at the University of Minnesota about yPAR as a research methodology. I thought it would be more useful to bring some of the Uhuru Youth Scholars with me to demonstrate that the purpose of yPAR is to position those most impacted by an issue as the researchers and experts of that issue. Autumn was excited to help me plan the session, so we worked together outside of class time to put together our presentation. On the day of the presentation, Will and Sheekey decided to join us to document the presentation as part of our research.

that?" "Where does it come from?" "What is this?" "How can we learn more about this?" "How can we understand this more deeply?" So taking our own interests in this idea, and then taking it out and doing what we call "exploratory data analysis" of taking our own ideas but then also going out to those we consider our community and seeing what their interest is and our interest, and how we can merge those two.

Autumn and I explored how a mundane conversation, when mediated by yPAR, became a research project. This improvisational aspect of yPAR allows for youth interest to become the organizing force for thinking and research design. Traditional, or less participatory research designs are not necessarily conceived through the dilemma of the person experiencing the problem. More often, outsiders construct the problem for the research participants. For the Uhuru Youth Scholars, Autumn and Nathaniel's disagreement on the way to class grew into our unit of analysis for the year. Specifically, the research questions the group decided to investigate were:

1. What is the impact of the media on the representation of black youth as "ghetto?"
2. How does the media help create and maintain stereotypes of black youth as "ghetto?"

Using these questions, the Uhuru Youth Scholars began to design and conduct a mostly qualitative study of this issue, by interviewing peers, adults, and experts in the field. They documented popular TV shows and Internet websites to track how black youth were being represented. However, during the course of the research process another interpersonal crisis emerged. This crisis was precipitated by a disagreement between Autumn and AJ about what the term *ghetto* even meant. Autumn described the encounter to the class at the University of Minnesota:

> [In trying to describe which peers to interview based on their experiences] I was kind of describing who I thought was (labeled) "ghetto" and another student in the class (AJ) said, "So you think I'm ghetto, 'cause what you described is just like me?" So I was just like, "Ahhh, I'm sorry." But, it's just how the way I was raised and how that person who I thought these things [about] made me feel.

This tension between Autumn and AJ served as a springboard that pushed the group to crisis by considering not only how media has influenced the creation and maintenance of the stereotype of black youth as "ghetto," but also how and why they had internalized these messages. As in a jazz arrangement, this moment marked a shift in the rhythmic structure of our work. The emphasis of the research was no longer outward, but more introspective. The dissonance in how Autumn and AJ perceived each other's blackness became more interesting, and thus, like Charlie Parker, our collective made the decision to "ride on the dissonance."

The shift in rhythmic structure and the resulting harmonic dissonance of our research required the youth to use alternate methods of qualitative data collection. They began interviewing each other about their personal histories and experiences with education, race, and other factors that they believed influenced their thinking, such as the media they consumed (e.g., music, movies). They video-documented mundane daily interactions, trying to discover why they did certain things without a second thought. They kept reflective "metacognitive journals" (Ladson-Billings, 2006) where they wrote about their own thinking. They also wrote improvisational and analytical

pieces about prevalent issues in their lives. One could have described their new direction as "autoethnographic" (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2012; Ellis, 2004) because there remained a systematicity to their self-reflective research.

The turn toward self-inquiry was not a random occurrence. Outside of the research the youth and I were conducting, we spent much of our time surveying black liberatory theories. The youth were exposed to critical race theory, black radical theory, African-centered theory, and black feminism, through texts, film, and guest speakers who dealt in various traditions of Truth-telling. We discussed the overlaps and nuances within these theoretical lenses. One of the assignments the youth were asked to complete was a tracing of their own theoretical lens, for which they were asked to name and sketch a basic framework. It is not coincidental that they took this curricular framework around self-actualization and applied it to their research.

The youths' responses to my questions about why they decided to shift the focus of their inquiry highlighted the development of an "oppositional worldview" that hooks (1990) describes as necessary for moving toward self-determination, starting with an understanding of *ourselves* as part of a social group. The youths' participation in the research collective took on a dialectical nature as they were pushed to collaborate through yPAR, but also maintained competing ideas of what their work should entail. Both the limitations to collaboration and its realization, at times, seemed to have contributed to the reflexive turn in the youths' research process.

This participatory dialectic among the youth mirrors the contestation between dominant, negative societal narratives of blackness and their emergent critical consciousness that was being honed at NdCAD. Introspective inquiry, then, became another process through which the youth could try to reconcile intrapersonal and interpersonal crises based on incommensurable positions about race. Autumn and AJ's perceptions of each other, while limiting participatory interactions at times, provoked introspection among the group. Their dissonance became an internal source of knowledge production, in a sense using the discomfort of crisis to emerge from potential catastrophe. Autumn and AJ were never able to fully reconcile their tension, but each made a significant contribution to the research collective through different modes. One of Uhuru's products for disseminating their research was a small book called *Finding Our Lens* (NdCAD, 2012). Much of Autumn's work in the book was highly personal, dealing mostly with her identity as a multiracial youth coming to terms with societal messages regarding her blackness. One of Autumn's contributions was a poem, which she titled "An Ode to my Skin," celebrating her ancestral connection to people of African descent. Reflecting back to her confession at the beginning of the semester of "not wanting to hate herself" because of how others read her blackness, this was a significant personal outcome.

AJ focused more on structural issues in her contributions to the Uhuru Youth Scholars' text. In an essay on race she wrote:

> So racism is power, basically. All jobs should be equally fair to people but it's hard to prove someone didn't get a job because of racism. Is this how life is supposed to be? One big tangled mess of hatred? I think so 'cause the world doesn't know anything different because it's been around for so long. (NdCAD, 2013)

Autumn and AJ's contributions represent prevalent articulations of how blackness is constructed in their respective worlds; however, these articulations allowed for separation in how they spoke to the issues that were important to them. Autumn's personal identity and understanding of her own blackness was disconnected from AJ's concern about structural racism in hiring practices. As

jazz researchers they each were able to interpret their solos differently while exploring the prevalent theme. They were also able to effectively illustrate the combination of micro and macro factors that constitute racism both individually and institutionally, which is one of the central tenets of Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006).

As a critical jazz research collective, the established structures and bounds of traditional research logics were continually pushed in order to find newer, more innovative and inclusive spaces through which knowledge and theory could be developed. West (1996) synthesizes the relationship between jazz and crisis by constructing it as a transformational human disposition:

> I use the term "jazz"…for a mode of being in the world, an improvisational mode of protean, fluid and flexible dispositions toward reality, suspicious of either/or viewpoints, dogmatic pronouncements and supremacist ideologies. To be a jazz freedom fighter is to attempt to galvanize and energize world-weary people into forms of organization with accountable leadership that promotes critical exchange and broad reflection. (p. 147)

It is important to understand that this is not about being caught up in popular truths, rather attempting to understand the unpopular Truth. West's notion of "galvaniz[ing] world-weary peoples" challenges us to shift perspective in a way that aligns us with those who have been impacted the greatest by social inequality and taken for granted assumptions of hierarchy. If educators and researchers are to take West's call for "jazz freedom fighter[s]" seriously, it is incumbent upon us to embed jazz-like elements into our practices in order to push the established boundaries. When we understand crisis as an opportunity to reflect and grow collectively, it becomes its own end and provides a path toward better understanding the conditions that nurtured it. My research, my students' collective research, and my pedagogy had the potential to induce crisis as a generative theme across the components that shaped our situated environment. Crisis through dissonance became a disposition for learning about ourselves and, thus, the outside world.

### Dissonance and Oppositional Worldview: Technologies of Breaking Away

The Uhuru Youth Scholars were guided by the pedagogical aspects of yPAR, and as crises emerged learning ensued. Much of the sociocultural literature regarding participation has significant explanatory power to describe how one becomes consciously and/or unconsciously socialized into a particular cultural community (Bourdieu, 1977; Rogoff, 2003). These cultural communities that sociocultural theorists depict are typically hegemonic in construction. For instance, Bourdieu's (1984) seminal text, *Distinction*, painstakingly documents how and why people seem to adhere to the social classes they were born into and how they come to accept their socially constructed cultural community as a natural occurrence. It is less common to see sociocultural analyses that specifically address the social, psychological, cognitive, and spiritual aspects of breaking away from naturalized cultural communities that maintain the status quo of unequal social relationships between people (Hilliard, 1995; Sandoval, 2000). The recognition and necessity of analyzing how cultural communities are not natural but constructed for the purpose of material resources is a necessary intervention in the sociocultural literature. This intervention in people's lives entails crisis by contesting the hegemony of the nature of culture, which became apparent in the experiences of the Uhuru Youth Scholars. Below I use an interview with Will to explore how his experience as a jazz researcher provoked him to recall the critical stance he once held, and begin to

reclaim an oppositional consciousness that searched for Truth outside of the constructs with which he was presented.

Sandoval (2000) outlines a "methodology" for developing an "oppositional worldview" (hooks, 1990), or what she calls "oppositional consciousness." She illustrates the "primary inner and outer technologies[3] that construct and enable the differential mode of social movement and consciousness" (p. 3). Using aspects of this methodology, I explore how crisis and participation became two vectors for moving toward an oppositional consciousness that aligns with black self-determination. Sandoval writes, "Such activity, perception, and behavior requires the development of a form of consciousness that is capable of tactically projecting any vertical, pyramidal, or 'deep' code onto a flat, horizontal, and superficial code" (p. 77). Using this framework in analyzing Will's interview, it becomes apparent that these multiple mappings help to illustrate his oppositional consciousness, which enables him to "ride on the dissonance."

In my final interview with Will, the openness he had toward assertions from our class, which competed with his own logic, began to make sense as he described his history of questioning.

> *Will:* This class kind of brought back a memory I had of—actually it's not just a memory, something that comes up and again and again and it's just, what is my history? Where—I know where we come from, but like, there's no way for the common person to just figure out, "Where exactly did I come from? Where do my ancestors, my main family, directly come from? And why did this happen?" I don't know, I was just—I can't think of the other questions right now, but I had a lot of them.
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> *Brian:* It seems like questioning is a lot of what you do, right? I mean it seems like kind of part of who you are. You ask yourself a lot of questions so it just kind of fell into that pattern of questioning for you?
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> *Will:* Yeah. And then another pattern formed where they just get laid to rest and then they just pop up like vaguely and it's just, "I know I had that question but…" Just too many piled up and then they got, I don't know, they blurred mentally.
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> *Brian:* So what do you think were the major things that you did take away from this class, now that we're kinda getting towards the end of it?
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> *Will:* I didn't know….Let me see, just trying to form this. I didn't know how many…. I didn't know that our people had built so much, had invented so much. I don't know. I didn't know that so much was… I didn't see as clearly how so much of that was being muddled over by all these other people's successes who… I mean, it seems like there's a social structure that's just ingrained and—that's probably what it is. And it's just, I don't know how to explain this. I have it in my head but I can't put it out.
>
> *Brian:* You're doing a good job I think.
>
> *Will:* It seems like it's just there and then all we're doing is just building off of that and it would be really hard to try and grow outside of that.
>
> *Brian:* It's hard to get outside of the structures?
>
> *Will:* Yeah. (Interview, 4/23/13)

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3. I do not work through each of Sandoval's "technologies" in this writing because they are quite extensive, and I have previously documented Will's experience connected to the first two technologies of "semiotics" and "deconstruction" (Lozenski & Ford, 2014).

This exchange between Will and I is illustrative of several of Sandoval's "technologies" for the development of oppositional consciousness. As Will began to construct a historical perspective of his intellectual development, it was apparent that his curiosity about his ancestral origins weighed heavily on his mind. His articulation of the connections he was making between his historical wonderings and his Uhuru Youth Scholars experience, combined with the recognition that there exists "a social structure that is ingrained," aligns with Sandoval's notion of meta-ideologizing.

Drawing from Barthes (1972), Sandoval defines the technology of meta-ideologizing as "the operation of appropriating dominant ideological forms, and using them whole in order to transform them" (p. 83). Meta-ideologizing goes beyond the internal consciousness-raising processes of "semiotic deconstruction," which entails the recognition of signs as existing in socially constructed semiotic systems. This deconstruction is a precursor to meta-ideologizing, which can be seen in Will's responses. The reflexiveness of Will's responses is quite similar to the process Sandoval describes for moving beyond the inner techniques of developing a critical eye to the extent that "[t]he practitioner feels the work of ideology on perception and consciousness, but then replays those moments in order to interrupt 'the turnstile of form and meaning' by focusing on each separately—thus interrupting the formation of identity itself" (p. 104). With regard to Truth-telling, this internal interruption, or dissonance, becomes a filter through which previously taken for granted ideas are interrogated.

## Irreversible Methodology: The Groove's Cookin'

Will's experience, as well as that of Autumn and AJ, explicate the ways in which research became a process of learning through self-discovery. As a research facilitator and instructor I was able to act as a band-leader, providing the basic structure for our music. Oldfather and West (1994) write, "In jazz the original score is a 'bare bones' chord chart that provides just enough guidance for the musicians' collaboration" (p. 24). I composed our chart, but the collective made the song. Simultaneously, I was on stage performing as a jazz co-researcher and in the audience—absorbing—as an ethnographer. These vantage points allowed for clarity, at times, but also complexity as my roles began to collide in generative ways. The closing of ethnographic distance in my research enabled me to not only maintain the humanizing touch that Anzaldúa (1987) describes, but also to wrestle with my own responses to intra and interpersonal dissonances that emerged due to my own positionality. From a pedagogical sense, the youth and I embodied the "teacher-student" and "student-teacher" roles that Freire (1970) requires within a problem-posing framework. My research resulted in a hybridized methodology that I liken to an irreversible chemical reaction. Similar to the way a cake cannot return to its original components of flour, sugar, and eggs after being mixed and baked, the "original" components of my research were forever unrecognizable. Originally, I proposed engaging in a critical ethnographic study of youth conducting participatory action research. To add more complexity to this scenario, the context of the youth research would take place in a dual-credit course in which I was the instructor. Thus, the components of my research involved in this pseudo-chemical (social) reaction were critical ethnography, youth participatory action research, and critical pedagogy. However, I was no longer able to determine which aspects of my resulting methodology belonged to these original components. They reacted with each other to form an entirely new irreversible methodological substance.

One of the major transformations that occurred for me during this study was the idea that education and research can be, and in my work increasingly were, one and the same. Education

and research begin to enter into relationship with one another when teachers take up inquiry as a teaching and learning framework. Campano (2009) writes:

> A teacher who adopts an inquiry stance into practice is thus engaged in the infinitely complex and never-ending task of adjudicating between various categories and concepts…. These ideas are understood in relationship to the teacher's own ever-evolving conceptual understandings derived from classroom life, her or his singular relationships to students, and the local knowledge of the community. (p. 331)

Campano is focused on teachers "adjudicating between various categories and concepts" with regard to their students and the ecology of the educational environment. However, as educators begin to adopt inquiry as a pedagogical stance, the logical progression is to then inculcate their students with a similar disposition with regard to learning. It would not make sense for educators to recognize the richness and depth that inquiry extends to their own learning and practice for the purpose of working with youth in narrow educational paradigms that seek simple technical acquisitions of process and content knowledge.

Freire (1982) describes this shift in research as situating the teacher to take up research as pedagogy:

> Instead of taking the people here as the object of my research, I must try, on the contrary, to have the people dialogically involved also as subjects, as researchers with me. If I am interested in knowing the people's ways of thinking, and levels of perception, then the people have to think about their thinking, and not be only the objects of my thinking. This method of investigation…is at the same time a learning process…Thus, in doing research, I am educating and being educated with the people. (p. 30)

Freire would also concur that it is not just about "doing research." There are methodological considerations to how this research process is approached: "The qualitative researcher may take on multiple and gendered images: scientists, naturalist, field-worker, journalist, social critic, artist, performer, *jazz musician*, filmmaker, quilt maker, essayist" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 5). Pedagogy is embedded among these multiple identities in qualitative research.

I was obviously not the first person to do this work or experience this dilemma of methodology, as I follow the footprints of scholars like Cahill (2006), Kinloch, (2010), Morrell (2004), Yang, (2009), and others. However, given the inherent contextualized unpredictability of yPAR, my experience within this research was unique, and thus ripe for analysis and interpretation. Additionally, most critical ethnographic research with youth engaged in yPAR foregrounds the experience of the youth, while paying less attention to the experience of the researcher/pedagogue. And while we should be thinking deeply about the social, political, and cultural experiences of youth, as I do in much of this analysis, there are no easy lines of delineation between youth and adults with regard to these sociocultural and political factors.

For instance, as an ethnographer, one of my primary methods for generating data was conducting qualitative interviews with my students. On the surface this was a simple ethnographic method for data generation; however, part of our curriculum focused on designing and conducting research. Thus my interview became an example of a method of data generation that my students could potentially use in their own research. The interview was, then, simultaneously an ethnographic method (Madison, 2005), a social practice (Talmy, 2010), and a pedagogical practice of

scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978). Take, for instance, this exchange between Nathaniel and me during an interview regarding what he took away from the course:

>  ***Brian:*** So [this class] hasn't taught you that much in terms of facts and history, that kind of stuff? Say more about that. So you say it hasn't taught you that much, but you gained from it.
>  ***Nathaniel:*** I probably say I gained a little bit more than facts and history, but then the way I see, sort of I can see how I see now. You understand what I'm saying?
>  ***Brian:*** Mm-hmm.
>  ***Nathaniel:*** So I can put a third person in the way I view things, in a way.
>  ***Brian:*** Yep. So you, okay. Does that have to do with the lens thing?
>  ***Nathaniel:*** Yeah.
>  ***Brian:*** So you can actually see the way your lens is shaped?
>  ***Nathaniel:*** Mm-hmm. Shaped.
>  ***Brian:*** Okay. That makes sense.
>  ***Nathaniel:*** People won't understand this when they listen to this. You know this, right?
>  ***Brian:*** Well, I'll understand it. I'm the only one that's going listen to it.
>  ***Nathaniel:*** Mm-hmm.
>  ***Brian:*** *[Laughter]* Seriously, no, I don't—
>  ***Nathaniel:*** But your teachers.[4]
>  ***Brian:*** No, no, no. I don't—this is my own [study]. So the only thing that [everybody] will listen to is—or they won't listen to anything. They'll read what I write. And what I write I'll share with you before I give it to them. So to make sure that you agree with what I'm saying.
>  ***Nathaniel:*** Alright.
>  ***Brian:*** Or you agree with how I'm interpreting stuff. So not necessarily that you agree with every single point that I make, but you say "that you're not misrepresenting me."
>  ***Nathaniel:*** And if you are—
>  ***Brian:*** Misrepresenting you?
>  ***Nathaniel****:* Yeah. *[Laughter]*
>  ***Brian:*** Well, that's why I would check in, because I don't want to misrepresent you. My goal is not to misrepresent you.
>  ***Nathaniel:*** Alright.

Nathaniel's suggestion that other people will not understand what he is saying indicates that he was considering this interview from a perspective beyond simply being the interviewee. As someone who has engaged in qualitative research practices, Nathaniel recognized that there was a broader purpose to analyzing and disseminating what he was saying in the interview. Further, a pedagogical moment arose when we began to discuss the ethics of interviewing, representation, and member checking—all of which were topics during our course. This brief example demonstrates the methodological merging of critical ethnography, yPAR, and critical pedagogy, through the practice of developing a typical research method. To go a step further, if we understand an interview as a co-construction of knowledge (Madison, 2005), or a social practice (Talmy, 2010),

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4. I was a doctoral student at the time of this study, which I shared with the Uhuru Youth Scholars.

my students and I were engaged in a dialogic process that had implications for how they understood their situated environment as students, researchers, and research participant/subjects, while I continued to shape my identity as a researcher/subject, teacher, and co-researcher.

The jazz metaphor becomes particularly useful in this instance as multiple roles and identities came into contact. Oldfather and West (1994) write,

> Jazz is adaptive and is shaped by the participants. Their improvisations are collaborative and interdependent; the quality of the music depends on each musician's hearing, responding to, and appreciating the performances of the other players. The spotlight moves back and forth between the ensemble and soloists—as they alternate taking the lead or providing backup. (p. 22)

In this sense, jazz, like critical qualitative research, is a dialogic process where the interlocutors exchange the power to shape meaning making. The irreversible chemical reaction of methodologies took time to occur. There were moments when dialogic pedagogy took the lead and critical ethnography played back-up, and other times when yPAR foregrounded itself in unison with ethnography. These aspects of control remained constantly in tension, providing dissonance and possibility. On a micro level the metaphor of the irreversible reaction represents only my roles as the author of this analysis and the band leader; yet on a macro level, I am but one of the players in the band and each of the youth could have authored their own analysis exploring their own shifting roles within our work.

## Tension: The (re)Birth of the Cool

In the Uhuru Youth Scholars program, the catalytic forces that produced an inevitable metamorphosis of identity in my students and me remained relatively stable as methodology, yet the reaction was dramatic and, in some instances, generatively violent within the tension-filled production of new paradigms, conflicts, and crises. The defining notion of this journey through methodology is one of democracy in all of its complexity. It is the about the attempt to reconcile the individual with the collective—the "I" with the "we." West (1996) describes the interplay between "I" and "we," related to the metaphor of jazz and democracy:

> The interplay of individuality and unity is not one of uniformity and unanimity imposed from above, but rather of conflict among diverse groupings that reach a dynamic consensus subject to questioning and criticism. As with a soloist in a jazz quartet, quintet or band, individuality is promoted in order to sustain and increase the *creative* tension within the group—tension that yields higher levels of performance to achieve the aim of the collective project. (p. 147)

As West explains, the "we" needs the "I" in order to mobilize conflict, which is the fuel that grows the collective. This necessary conflict can be thought of in terms of crisis (Kumashiro, 2002), which entails both intrapersonal and interpersonal moments of disjuncture. Without the tensions of crisis, stagnation normalizes, disrupting the movement of the collective. Yet crisis can also happen at an intergroup level, impacting the entire collective. In these instances, it is the clarity of vision among the "we" that can carry individuals through the chaos. The educational psychologist and Egyptologist Asa Hilliard, III (1995) wrote, "Without a sense of 'we' collective action is nearly

impossible" (p. 131). Times of intergroup crisis necessitate collective action. Notice that West, even as he juxtaposes individuality and unity, ultimately names the end goal as "achiev[ing] the aim of the collective project." In this case, the "I" cannot solely formulate the vision. It cannot set the conditions that dictate action. The "I" can only operate inside of the "we," yet the "we" will perish without the "I."

While most studies about yPAR focus on the specific research conducted by the youth themselves, I have decided to take a different approach. Rather than foregrounding the research design, methods, and outcomes the youth produced during the year, the sociocultural approach in this analysis highlights the aspects of social practice that are often beneath the surface of conscious thought and, thus, unspoken. In writing about the politics of radical black subjectivity, bell hooks (1990) quotes Paulo Freire, saying, "We cannot enter the struggle as objects in order to later become subjects" (Freire as cited in hooks, 1990, p. 15). This statement goes to the heart of this study, describing the struggles of people of African descent in the U.S. for a self-determined system of education. If we are to enter into the struggle at all, we cannot enter it through the lens of those who have historically sought and continue to situate black youth as *objects* to be educated. Black youth, adults, families, and communities must enter the struggle as subjects, by shaping and creating our own possibilities for what education can become.

hooks (1990) rhetorically questions how we go about this process. She writes, "How do we create an oppositional worldview, a consciousness, an identity, a standpoint that exists not only as that struggle which also opposes dehumanization but as that movement which enables creative, expansive self-actualization?" (p. 15). For hooks the answer lies in the development of a critical disposition that goes beyond various manifestations of resistance and "emerges as one comes to understand how structures of domination work in one's own life…as one invents new, alternative habits of being, and resists from that marginal space of difference inwardly defined" (p. 15). Like Morrell (2004) and Kinloch (2010), hooks describes the development of a critical disposition as an introspective process: one that emerges in each distinct individual.

However, yPAR is not an individual endeavor. It consists of individuals working in collaboration to collectively impact an issue. The jazz ensemble is constituted by the sum of its parts, but individually each musician must balance his or her own thoughts, ideas, and histories with that of the others. This is why participation is such a crucial aspect of the work of both jazz music and yPAR. Possibilities can only emerge as the ensemble can envision them, regardless of what the individual sees. The individual can make efforts to push the ensemble in new directions, or toward new possibilities through soloing, but cannot go there alone. Thus, much like a critical disposition, youth engaged in yPAR are pushed to develop a participatory subjectivity, which can be more challenging than understanding the "structures of domination" in our lives.

I began this study contemplating how I would conduct a critical ethnographic study of a course I was teaching with youth doing participatory action research. Along the way, I came to several counterintuitive realizations. From seeing the congruence of research and education to coming to understand crisis as a generative and necessary place for research, I have been transformed through this work. As I attempt to situate myself methodologically, perhaps Lather's (2007) suggestion of "telling stories that situate researchers not so much as experts 'saying what things mean' in terms of 'data'…[but] as witness giving testimony to the lives of others" (p. 41) is a wise consideration. Still, I think this statement makes too much of a delineation between myself as a "researcher" and the youth I spent a year with as the "participants." Yes, I am telling this story, but as Brother Gevonee Ford once told me, I am not speaking with one voice. As I reflect

on the journey these youth and I took through multiple methodological pathways the following passage from the Yoruban spiritual text, the *Odu Ifa*, as cited by Karenga (2006), speaks to me:

> *Let us not engage the world hurriedly.*
> *Let us not grasp the rope of wealth impatiently.*
> *That which should be treated in a mature manner,*
> *Let us not deal with it in a state of uncontrolled passion.*
> *When we arrive at a cool place,*
> *Let us rest fully.*
> *Let us give continuous attention to the future.*
> *Let us give deep consideration to the consequences of things.*
> *And this, because of our eventual passing.*
> —Yoruban Odu Ifa (1:1)

My time with these young people was a "cool place" to arrive, rest fully, and give deep consideration to the consequences of things. In many ways jazz music is about arriving at cool places and reflecting upon what we can see now that we may have previously missed. The learning is in the journey. The dissonance is the road. In attempting to define what this means for critical research, I believe it calls us to know that the catastrophic is the start rather than the end.

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**Brian D. Lozenski, Ph.D.** is an Assistant Professor of Urban and Multicultural Education at Macalester College in St. Paul, MN. His teaching and scholarship focus on critical pedagogy, critical research methodologies, and the black intellectual tradition in education. Dr. Lozenski works in affiliation with the Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD), where he coordinates the Uhuru Youth Scholars program for high school, community-based researchers.