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A case study of Tracie Morris's Project Princess

Tammie Jenkins
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

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A CASE STUDY OF TRACIE MORRIS’S PROJECT PRINCESS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Education

by

Tammie Jenkins
B.S., Southern University, 1992
M.A., Southern University, 2007
May 2014
This is dedicated to my parents Mrs. Valerie Brown Jenkins and the late Mr. Lionel Jenkins Sr. (August 2, 1945 – September 11, 2000) who took the time to instill morals, values, and the love of learning in me at a very young age.
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ABSTRACT

In this study, I explore the intertextuality in spoken word poetry using Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* (1998) as a case study. My hypothesis is that the intertextuality in spoken word poetry is derived from its genealogical contributions. Using narrative inquiry, I investigate *Project Princess* as page poetry and oral performance text anchored in the genealogy of spoken word poetry. The following research questions guided this study: How does intertextuality function in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*? What role does the genealogy of spoken word poetry play in understanding the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*? In what ways does the intertextuality in spoken word poetry play at the intersections of race, gender, and class in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*? What are the pedagogical implications for studying the intertextuality in spoken word poetry derived from its genealogical contributions in twenty-first century classrooms using Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* as an example?

The conceptual framework consisted of intertextuality theory, public pedagogy, and performance studies, to explore the ways in which sites of resistance emerge from the poet’s narrative of lived experiences and social realities. Data was collected from page poetry, spoken word poetry, video, an audio interview of Tracie Morris, essays written by or about Tracie Morris, and Tracie Morris’s website. I used narrative analysis to interpret the data using four interpretative models: structural analysis, thematic analysis, dialogic/performance analysis, and visual analysis. The findings revealed that intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* emerged as non-chronological storytelling, language and accepted meanings, signification (signifying), and created counter-narratives that opened discursive spaces as sites of resistance. The implications for education based on this study suggest that intertextuality in
spoken word poetry in twenty-first century classrooms may be used to uncover hidden transcripts contained in *Project Princess* or other spoken word poems; identify themes across Morris’s narrative or other spoken word poems and their connection to the genealogy of spoken word poetry; create safe-spaces for dialogical exchanges and social interactions; and facilitate meaningful dialogues and social interactions among participants.
I was a novice when it comes to spoken word poetry. Most scholars and artists in this genre might consider me a fake, a “wanna be,” with a hidden agenda, attempting to make a name for myself built on their hard work, dedication, and fidelity to this literary, cultural and musical art form. Some of those things may be true about me, to a certain extent; consequently, I consider myself an interested outsider with a desire to understand spoken word poetry as a literary, cultural, and musical movement, anchored in intertextuality. I explored the ways in which spoken word poets use their words, voices, and intonations to bring their works to life as they move their thoughts and ideas from the page through their bodies. However, in order for me to better explore my interest in the intertextuality in spoken word poetry, I revisited my earliest exposure to this literary, cultural, and musical movement.

The late 1980s witnessed the rise of hip-hop culture and rap music; by this time I was enjoying most of it. I listened to artists such as A Tribe Called Quest, Public Enemy, Eric B. and Rakim, and Big Daddy Kane. These rappers possessed a lyrical style that encouraged me to think deeply about my life and experiences as a young, black woman searching for my place in the black community and the larger society. I was looking for an identity, and in their words, I found a “home” anchored in currere which Kissel-Ito (2008) describes as “a framework for autobiographical reflection on educational experiences from a subjective and narrative perspective” (p. 1). Each of these words afforded me a varied voice in my own internalized discourses of identity, sexuality, and womanhood derived from larger societal conversations. “Home” served as a space for me to revisit my lived experiences and social realities with currere, offering me a way to frame, understand, interpret, and articulate these dialogues in the
larger society. Through the use of “home” and currere, I uncovered hidden pieces of myself suppressed by my unconscious desire for voice and agency, in my internalized discourses of identity. I used the lyrics of rap songs to give myself the words and the language to appropriate my understandings of blackness and womanhood in spaces where I felt silenced or marginalized, in larger societal conversations. These conversations became part of my lived experiences and social realities as I began to counsel adults and teach students.

By 1993, hip-hop culture and rap music were transformed into mainstream discourses among youth, especially African Americans. Although there were several women (Queen Latifah, M.C. Lyte, Monie Lyte, and Roxanne Shante), most of the artists, in early hip-hop culture and music were men. I enjoyed their music, but I felt as though my gender and issues were being neglected by their misogynistic discourses. This was the year (1993) I fell in love with spoken word poetry. I was on my way to class, listening to a woman on the radio with a deep alto voice and a brazen attitude towards relationships recite the lines, “if that’s your boyfriend, he wasn’t last night” (Ndegeocello, 1993a). Meshell Ndegeocello’s songs on her Plantation Lullabies CD (1993) integrated larger societal discourses with personal narratives set to a hip hop, jazz beat. This was the first commercial offering of Meshell Ndegeocello, on Madonna’s record label, and this CD was part of my liberation from my Christian upbringing and values.

For instance, I’m Diggin’ You (Like an Old Soul Record) reflected the attitude of participants in the 1960s black political movements, through Meshell Ndegeocello’s language use, word choice, use of metaphors, and cultural references. Meshell Ndegeocello (1993b) wrote:

Remember back in the day
When everyone was black and conscious
And down for the struggle.
Love brought us together
Just sittin’ back and talkin’
Cultivating a positive vibe
Blue lights in the basement
Freedom was at hand, you could just taste it
Everything was cool, Diggin’ on me, Diggin’ on you
Everything was cool, and brothers were singing
Ain’t no woman like the one I got. (Plantation Lullabies, Maverick Records)

It may have been her choice of words with multiple meanings like “diggin’” and “cool” to describe the perceived mood of the participants in these American political movements that drew me into her textual web. The way she incorporated figurative language into her narrative fascinated me. I loved her description of the culmination of the late 1950s and early 1960s political unrest, which resulted in the passage of the American Civil Rights Act of 1964. That description supplied a social commentary on male/female relationships. Meshell Ndegeocello’s works encompassed a variety of dialogues in her crisp narratives. I found her text intriguing; however, the track Soul on Ice (1993c) moved me and deepened my understanding of this CD. Meshell Ndegeocello (1993c) lamented:

    My brothers attempt to defy the white man’s laws and his system of values
    Defile his white woman, but my mum, master’s in the slave house again
    Visions of her virginal white beauty,
    Dancing in your head
    Your soul’s on ice. (Plantation Lullabies, Maverick Records)

It was at this moment I was baptized by the intertextuality in spoken word poetry, although I did not realize it at the time. I did recognize that this song made allusions to the American Civil Rights movements, Eldridge Cleaver and his book of essays Soul on Ice (1968), the institution of slavery, the devaluation of enslaved women, and Victorian concepts associated with the cult of true womanhood (also referred to as the cult of domesticity). This song covered a lot of territory in about four minutes that I would experience again years later.
In 2004, I enrolled in an English course titled *Black Culture/Black Consciousness on the Modern/Postmodern Divide*. The instructor combined music from the genres of hip hop, rap, rhythm and blues, and spoken word poetry, with novels by black authors. The texts (written or audio) selected for this course contained themes which were in conversation with one another, as evident in Randall Keenan’s (1989) *A Visitation of Spirits*, and Meshell Ndegeocello’s (2002b) *Barry Farms* (Cookie: The Anthropological Mixtape, Maverick Records). Who knew that Meshell Ndegeocello’s work would reenter my life? Randall Keenan’s novel and Meshell Ndegeocello’s spoken word poem explore teenage homosexuality as well as the social isolation and shame, experienced by these individuals in larger societal discourses. The overarching theme in both texts was the concept of escape. In Randall Keenan’s novel, the main character commits suicide, while Meshell Ndegeocello’s protagonist becomes empowered as she acknowledges and embraces her sexual orientation. The instructor paired novels with song lyrics to illustrate the inter-relatedness of lived experiences and social realities by situating themes contained in each text in the present day context. This course provided me with some personal insights, into my own lived experiences and my friendships with persons who were lesbian or gay, and prompted me to question by opening my eyes to the possibilities of using spoken word poetry as an instructional tool in counseling sessions, and later in the classroom curriculum.

In 2006, I enrolled in a graduate seminar course titled *Popular Culture and Educational Hip Hop*. The instructor suggested that texts by black women rappers were part of the black women’s blues tradition established by Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday. I was able to draw parallels between spoken word poetry texts and rap lyrics by black women artists. For instance, Eve’s rap song *Love is Blind* (1999) and Ursula Rucker’s *Return to*
Innocence Lost (1999), a spoken word poem, both contain themes of domestic violence and integrate the storytellers’ emotions into their narratives. Eve (1999) rapped:

Hey, yo I don't even know you and I hate you
See all I know is that my girlfriend used to date you
How would you feel if she held you down and raped you?
Tried and tried, but she never could escape you
She was in love and I'd ask her how? I mean why?
What kind of love from a nigga would black your eye?
What kind of love from a nigga every night make you cry?
What kind of love from a nigga make you wish he would die?
I mean shit he bought you things and gave you diamond rings
But them things wasn't worth none of the pain that he brings
And you stayed, what made you fall for him?
That nigga had the power to make you
Crawl for him. (Let There Be Eve...Ruff Rider’s First Lady, Interscope Records)

Eve was an outsider describing the physically and sexually abusive relationship of her friend, which resulted in her friend’s untimely death. She repetitiously uses the word “nigga” to define the behavior of her friend’s abuser by making him verbally inhuman. On the other hand, Ursula Rucker’s Return to Innocence Lost (1999) described a scene of domestic violence between the protagonist’s parents in which:

Muffled sound of fist on flesh
Blows to chest
No breath
Air gasps
You ain't nothing but white trash, bitch!
With each hit, each kick, each...broken rib
Crack, Crack!
Bones are crying
Mommy's crying and bleeding
And pleading. (Silver or Lead, K7!)

Ursula Rucker’s (1999) text verbalized the physical abuse of the protagonist’s mother at the hands of her father, by giving the mother’s body a voice. But, Ursula Rucker’s text differed slightly from Eve’s in that she used short phrases to articulate the physical pain being inflicted upon, and experienced by, the body of the protagonist’s mother. Although Eve’s and Ursula
Rucker’s protagonists appeared powerless in their relationships, the authors’ lyrics and word choice affected me on many levels, because I had been a victim of, worked with survivors of, and mourned those who died during an episode of, domestic violence. After this course, I began to listen only to socially conscious music with my preference being spoken word poetry. I looked at this genre as affordable therapy, assisting me in working through my issues of identity and belonging.

By this time, I had reached a turning point in my life as I transitioned from a career as a Case Manager servicing women, who were recovering drug addicts and/or victims of domestic violence, to a career in the field of education. I became a special education teacher, in the fall of 2005. As a special education teacher, I was primarily responsible for providing remediation in the area of English Language Arts, specifically Reading, as well as addressing the goals and objectives of the students’ Individual Educational Plan (IEP). My district had adopted the Reading First Program to improve the proficiency of our students in the area of reading. This program included five components identified by the National Reading Council as essential for struggling or non-readers to master.

My English Language Arts curriculum was primarily geared to the five components of reading, which are: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. Therefore, I began looking for new and more creative ways to engage my students in the district’s curriculum. Most of my students enjoyed rap and hip-hop music; however, I was no longer a fan of these genres. I decided to return to spoken word poetry and use lyrics from specific artists to bridge the gaps in my students’ learning and promote critical thinking. Now the tasks I was faced with in using spoken word poetry were deciding whose works to use, how to use them, and, most importantly, how to slip them past the watchful eyes of the school...
administrators during their walk-throughs, review of my lesson plans, and formal classroom
evaluations. I also realized that my own lack of knowledge regarding spoken word poetry would
have to be addressed if I was really serious about infusing this genre meaningfully into my
classroom curriculum. These tasks were difficult, but not impossible. Therefore, I included
spoken word poetry in my lesson plans under the heading “enrichment activity.”

Although my decision to incorporate spoken word poetry into my classroom instruction
made perfect sense to me, it was an uphill battle in the beginning to move my students past the
music and rhythm into the word choice and the language of the spoken word poets’ texts. In
order to do this, I had to stop singing the chorus to the songs and trying to dance to the delight of
my students. I decided I had to become part of the learning curve in my classroom. I needed to
understand the difference between spoken word poetry and other types of similar poetries, such
as poetry slam (slam poetry), performance poetry, and page poetry. If I were going to have any
success using spoken word poetry as an instructional tool, I had to immerse myself as much as
possible in spoken word poetry as a genre by reading books and articles on the subject, watching
videos of selected artists, reading their lyrics as texts, analyzing their lyrics as texts, and
connecting the district’s English Language Arts curriculum with spoken word poetry texts. This
marked the beginning of my journey towards the exploration of intertextuality in spoken word
poetry. However, before I begin the task of describing the three theoretical lenses that will frame
this study, first I must explain other poetries that possess characteristics similar to spoken word
poetry.

I opened this chapter with a brief autobiographical reflection on my personal journey to
spoken word poetry. In the next section, I briefly describe how spoken word poetry is distinct
from page poetry, performance poetry, and slam poetry, before I establish the conceptual
framework for this study, considering intertextuality, public pedagogy, and performance studies. Follows a discussion of the connection between this conceptual frameworks and narrative inquiry, and why narrative inquiry is the most appropriate approach for this study. The last segments include: the statement of the problem; the research questions and the purpose/significance of the study and research questions; summary; chapters outline; and the definitions of key terms.

**Spoken Word Poetry is Not Page Poetry, Performance Poetry, or Slam Poetry**

I did not know what made spoken word poetry distinct from similar types of poetry. I had been asked the following questions: What is spoken word poetry? How does spoken word poetry differ from poetry slam, performance poetry, and page poetry? But, at the time these questions were asked, I did not have any appropriate responses for myself or for the person making the inquiry. When it came to spoken word poetry, my excitement was undeniable; however, I lacked any fundamental knowledge about this literary, cultural, and musical movement. This was a situation that I needed to remedy soon if I were going to continue to include spoken word poetry in my lesson plans as an enrichment activity. I did some research and discovered that spoken word poetry is actually a term used before “performative poetry” or “slam poetry” to describe poems that are read and/or performed before an audience (Eleveld, 2003; Sparks & Grochowski, 2002; Weinstein, 2010). Spoken word poetry is a diverse art form comprised of literary, cultural, and musical movements (e.g., the Blues or hip-hop; Sparks & Grochowski, 2002). This genre borrowed many of its attributes from other discourses and genres, but places its emphasis on the spoken word poet’s delivery of his or her texts.

Similar poetries such as page poetry, performance poetry, and slam poetry are written in everyday language for an audience to enjoy and/or interpret. Each of these forms of poetry has
its roots in the oral tradition. However, page poetry is traditional poetry that contains verse and prose written to be read (Goody, 1987; Strachan & Terry, 2000). The oldest known page poetry text is the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which dates back to the fourth millennium B. C. (George, 1999).

On the other hand, performance poetry as well as slam poetry share several commonalities with spoken word poetry, in that each permits its poets to read or recite their poems, all are open to youth and adult participants, and all attract audiences from diverse backgrounds (Gregory, 2008; Somers-Willett, 2005). Performance poetry texts are composed for an audience and include: oral readings, literature, performing arts (such as singing and music), and the use of theatrics (Camangian, 2008; Graebner, 2007; Wheeler, 2008). According to Graebner (2007), performance poetry is “poetry that mobilizes not a reading, but a speaking voice, and which puts the word in contact with music, non-musical sounds, visual elements, and theatrical devices” (p. 78). Performance poetry developed simultaneously with mainstream spoken word poetry of the 1970s and 1980s, although it did not reach prominence until the 1980s with the work of Hedwig Gorski (Camangian, 2008; Graebner, 2007; Wheeler, 2008). Still, performance poetry, like spoken word poetry, may include the use of music and visual representations (props, gestures, bodily movements, etc.) in the delivery of the performance poet’s texts.

Unlike page poetry and performance poetry, slam poetry was established as an offshoot of spoken word poetry by Marc Smith, in 1984, in a white middle-class area of Chicago (Algarin & Holman, 1994; Aptowicz, 2008; Gregory, 2008; Somers-Willett, 2005; Wheeler, 2008). In slam poetry, poets read or recite their works from memory as part of a “competitive version of poetry readings” (Somers-Willett, 2005, p. 51) to be judged by the audience (Algarin & Holman, 1994; Aptowicz, 2008; Gregory, 2008; Somers-Willett, 2005). Participants of slam poetry are not
permitted to use props, costumes, or music in the delivery of their poems, although each poet is allowed the use of other forms of artistic conventions such as voice and intonations (Algarin & Holman, 1994; Aptowicz, 2008; Gregory, 2008). However, slam poetry uses a form of orality that is similar to spoken word poetry, like rhythm, rhymes, and instrumentality, but one main distinction is that slam poetry is a competition judged by the audience (Gregory, 2008).

From this research, I learned that spoken word poetry is situationally constructed, and its spoken word poets present diversity in their texts through the use of their voices, intonations, gestures, and body movements. Spoken word poetry texts open spaces between oral and written forms of creative expression by moving the spoken word poet’s voice from the paper through his or her body, thus serving as a bridge connecting the lived experiences and social realities of individuals through discourse (Dyson, 2005; Kinloch, 2005). This genre produces texts which are written to be performed through a combination of storytelling, poetry, and musicality, in the spoken word poets’ narratives. These texts, which typically use first-person pronouns, are delivered from the spoken word poet’s point of view, which includes current events, and delivers social commentaries.

Ultimately, spoken word poetry exists outside the mainstream literary, cultural, and musical genres. It acts as an outlet for the sharing of the spoken word poets’ lived experiences and social realities by enabling them to embed messages in their texts. Thus, spoken word poetry transforms the poets’ texts into aesthetics of creative expression and self-representation by evoking thoughts, ideas, and political activism in their listeners and audiences (Dyson, 2005; Kinloch, 2005; Wheeler, 2008). Over time, spoken word poetry has evolved as the social climate of the larger society began to change, but its spoken word poets continue to invent new ways to use their texts to open spaces as sites of resistance and cultural exchanges. Although spoken
word poetry shares some commonalities with page poetry, performance poetry, and slam poetry, spoken word poets have found ways through their texts and performances to maintain its unique traits, which separate it from its look-alikes. Once I learned to identify spoken word poetry, page poetry, performance poetry, and slam poetry, I needed to conceptually frame my understanding of intertextuality in spoken word poetry by grounding my study in theories that supported my newly found knowledge.

**Conceptual Framework: Establishing Boundaries**

In order to effectively use spoken word poetry in my future classroom instruction and research, I needed a way to articulate my understanding of this genre as a literary, cultural, and musical movement anchored in intertextuality. This was essential because I wanted a firm foundation on which to build my educational and pedagogical considerations. Therefore, a large portion of my study is contingent on the notion of intertextuality. Hence, I open this section with a discussion of intertextuality theory, and explain how the concept of intertextuality informs my study. I follow with a discussion of public pedagogy, then performance studies.

**Intertextuality**

Porter (1986) defined intertextuality as “the bits and pieces of text which writers or speakers borrow and sew together to create new discourses” (p. 34). In his study, intertextuality serves as what Minh-ha calls “grandma story” (1989, p.119 ), narrated fragments, passed down from one generation to another, that enable multiple meanings and interpretations to emerge from each generation’s engagement with those texts (Allen, 2000; Kristeva, 1986; Ott & Walter, 2000; Plett, 1991; Riffaterre, 1994).

According to Bakhtin (1984):

the life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another.
In this process the word does not forget its own path and cannot completely free itself from the power of those concrete contexts into which it has entered. (p. 201)

Spoken word poets use intertextuality to construct stories of their lived experiences and social realities by breaking down dominant discourses into smaller narratives and situating their retellings to fit their listeners or audiences. Intertextuality with roots in linguistic, semiotics, and literary theory, implies that language is situated by, and meaning is derived from, texts through the use of other texts (Allen, 2000; Kristeva, 1986; Ott & Walter, 2000; Plett, 1991; Riffaterre, 1994).

In this study, I use the term intertextuality to describe a system of interdependent codes in language and its meanings, which evolve and change across texts, but remain in conversation with those texts while engaging in dialogues with other works (Allen, 2000; Kristeva, 1986; Ott & Walter, 2000; Plett, 1991; Riffaterre, 1994). This is evident in the spoken word poets’ use of smaller narratives, in their “live” performances, oral texts, and visual representations, that enable the readers, listeners, or members of an audience to interpret their works, based on their own understandings, lived experiences, and social realities (Ott & Walter, 2000; Porter, 1986; Werner, 2004). In this study, I explore the intertextuality in spoken word poetry by connecting this literary, cultural, and musical movement to its genealogical characteristics.

According to Porter (1986), “all texts are interdependent: we understand a text only insofar as we understand its precursors” (p. 34), since all texts are products the “transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 201) which, according to Porter (1986) and Werner (2004), disrupts socially accepted interpretations of a given text. As a reader, listener, and member of an audience, I was free to juxtapose one text with another as well as frame its discourses based on my own understandings and lived experiences. This is a process in which
“meanings are thereby enriched as intertextuality is engaged” (Werner, 2004, p. 75) by the spoken word poet. Intertextuality is the process of reading texts, which connects texts to other works and their attached meanings across genres and discourses. Hence, the use of intertextuality opens spaces of unconscious sense-making in which texts are interpreted and new meanings are created based on the readers’, listeners’, or audiences’ lived experiences, social realities, and personal knowledge. This enables smaller texts to be traced through larger societal discourses “since a text exists within an endlessly expanding matrix of intertextual production, [and] readers continually bring new texts to bear upon their readings of that text” (Ott & Walter, 2000, p. 431).

As I seek to understand how intertextuality functions in spoken word poetry, I turn to the concept of public pedagogy.

**Public Pedagogy**

The theory of public pedagogy expands the concept of intertextuality in spoken word poetry beyond the scope of formally socially sanctioned educational institutions such as schools, which enables the inclusion of informal educational spaces like the home and the community to be used as sites of resistance and social interactions. I thought about the ways in which many spoken word poets use their physical spaces such as bookstores, nightclubs, *Def Poetry* stage, and libraries as locations of political transgression and dialectical exchanges. For that reason, I opted to make public pedagogy the primary theory of this study. Giroux (2000) asserted that “public pedagogy is defined through its performative functions, it is an ongoing work of mediation and its attentiveness to the interconnections and struggles that take place over knowledge, language, spatial relations, and history” (p. 354). Public pedagogy enabled me to view the intertextuality in spoken word poetry as a vehicle for the creation or reappropriation of physical or inanimate spaces as sites of resistance and cultural exchange (Frieshtat & Sandlin,
2010). This inspired me to use my classroom as a space not only for engaging the district curriculum, but also to bridge the gap between my students’ learning and their lived experiences. Sandlin, O’Malley, and Burdick (2011) maintain that public pedagogy disrupts traditional ideas of education, learning, and knowledge in larger societal discourses.

Initially, I used spoken word poetry texts to open spaces which challenge “traditional” notions of teaching and learning as prescribed by the school district curriculum, including for example the Reading First Program, state standards, and grade level expectations. However, the more I continued this practice, the more these spaces evolved into sites of resistance where understanding the world was being reconstructed in my classroom (Sandlin & Milam, 2008). I was not fully aware of the potential or pedagogical possibilities of spoken word poetry when I used it for the first time in my classroom instruction. On the contrary, I was strictly motivated by my desire to connect my students to the district’s English Language Arts curriculum, through the word choice and language in the spoken word poems selected for my enrichment activities.

Although spoken word poetry texts narrated a variety of discourses in my own knowledge, lived experiences, and social realities, at first I did not allow them to enter my classroom instruction or discussions. It was as if I had been saving those texts for myself to define my emerging identity while preserving the memories of my past. Hill (2009) found that texts were used to negotiate a generation’s identity in public spaces. Now, as I reflect upon the course that paired spoken word poetry texts with rap music and hip-hop culture as well as novels, I am more aware of the ways in which my instructors used their physical spaces (classroom, outdoors, coffee shop, or library) as locations of informal learning. Thus, each found ways to create unsanctioned educational environments within a socially endorsed institution of learning and knowledge. I realized that their courses were a form of public pedagogy.
Normally, I would not consider a classroom as a public space; yet, I was encouraged by my students to reconceptualize my beliefs regarding what constituted learning and knowledge, as well as how to reappropriate the physical space of my current and future classrooms for meaningful instruction. In that space, I had inadvertently used spoken word poetry to develop sites of resistance, which enabled my students to create new knowledge through social interactions and the sharing of lived experiences. Presently, I realized that I wanted my future classrooms to serve as spaces for the construction of new knowledge, and I wanted to encourage my students to resist socialization and hegemony, in a variety of public sites such as museums, popular culture, schools, mass media, and the larger society (Freishtat & Sandlin, 2010; Giroux, 2000; Nunley, 2008; Sandlin & Milam, 2008). My study explores the intertextuality in spoken word poetry by examining the use of poems as sites of resistance and negotiation in dominant discourses.

Public pedagogy disrupts traditional educational practices and curricula by using “negotiated space marked by historical, symbolic, and social mediations” (Giroux, 2000, p. 347) as embodied locations of multiple discourses that occur simultaneously. As a theory anchored in political action associated with performative and participatory practices, public pedagogy promotes the use of critical literacies and dialogical exchanges (Freishtat & Sandlin, 2010). Freishtat and Sandlin (2010) suggested that “public pedagogy is a crucial area for studying how social norms are encoded, transmitted, and taught” (p. 506) through dialectical and social interactions. This enabled me to view spoken word poetry as interpretive texts produced by the manipulation of language and its meanings, including the use of signs, gestures, and vocal intonations as well as symbolism to situate the spoken word poet’s dialogue in larger societal discourses.
I was encouraged by this concept to read spoken word poetry texts and performances as cultural products in which “public pedagogy assumes pedagogy is epistemic, and that pedagogy occurs across multiple sites and terrains” (Nunley, 2008, p. 338). Through the development of social relationships between spoken word poets and their listeners or audiences, sites of resistance and dialogical exchanges are created challenging larger societal discourses (Freishtat & Sandlin, 2010; Giroux, 2000; Nunley, 2008; Sandlin & Milam, 2008). Public pedagogy opens spaces for spoken word poets’ texts and live performances to become sites of resistance and spaces of cultural exchange (Freishtat & Sandlin, 2010). Because I analyze spoken word poetry as written and performed discourse, in the next section, I include a discussion of performance studies.

**Performance Studies**

In exploring the intertextuality in spoken word poetry as a form of public pedagogy, I realized that I needed to look at the spoken word poets’ live performances as well as their oral or written texts. Furthermore, I needed to learn how to read their performances as texts marked by “visual aesthetics.” As a result, I recalled that my instructor in the *Pop Culture and Educational Hip Hop* course I had taken in 2006 used pictures and music videos as texts along with copies of song lyrics. The instructor paired images of popular female rappers such as Lil’ Kim, Missy Elliot, Queen Pen, and Eve with images of black female models, in various poses. We learned to read those images as text prior to watching the music videos of black female rappers selected for the course. We viewed pictures and were asked to write down our thoughts (the first thing that came to our minds); then, we discussed our interpretations of these images. These exercises were designed to encourage us to read images and words from various points of view as multidimensional texts. We were given the lyrics of selected songs such as Missy Elliot’s (2001)
One Minute Man, Lil’ Kim’s (1999) How Many Licks?, and Foxy Brown featuring Jay Z’s (1996) I’ll Be. We listened to each song and followed along with reading the written lyrics. Afterwards, we discussed the implied, inferred, and/or interpretive meanings in the rappers’ language use, word choices, accepted meanings, and reappropriated meanings. We viewed their music videos, discussed how the video images and their interpretations varied as we moved from studying written and audio texts to visual works. This enabled us to read the videos as textual performances of alternative social realities. I learned to read spoken word poetry as visual, written, and auditory texts in the same way as we had learned to read rap lyrics and music videos, in the course I had taken in 2006.

Prior to that course and this study, I always associated performance with mass media productions such as movies, videos, and television shows. I never thought to view spoken word poets as performers reciting their texts on a public stage. Schechner (2003) described performance as “creative practices” of aesthetics centered on specific events. Essentially, our lived experiences are performances displayed publicly for others to interpret and derive meaning. These performances include self-representations of our everyday lives in the form of personas, rituals or ceremonies, gestures and body movements, signs and symbols, voice and intonations (Schechner, 2003). During this study, I visually read and interpreted the spoken word poets’ use of their physical spaces as sites of protest, resistance, and performance, through the delivery of their oral texts and bodily articulations. Mason (2004) suggested that texts are multi-dimensional discourses of identity in which the “past and present social life are internalized and external” (p. 103) based on the interpretations of the performer and his or her audience. Through the use of their live performances, spoken word poets display alternative representations of their social realities as visual events “in which the user seeks information, meaning, or pleasure in an
interface with technology” (Mirzoeff, 1998, p. 5). In the case of spoken word poetry, these events include live performances in which spoken word poets construct intertextuality through the use of story, symbols, imagery, and other forms of creative expression which show the multiplicity of identity. These performances may be recorded on compact discs and videos.

Ultimately, performance is a form of expression which uses gestures and bodily movements, what Weinstein (2010) calls “physical text” (p. 7). It also includes words, voice, intonations, and non-verbal cues as part of its delivery. They all aid the audience with interpreting a performance as text. Spoken word poets are performers whose visuals are just as essential to the interpretation of their texts as their words are to the representations of alternative realities. For that reason, “any performance can be considered a performative text when the interpretative cooperation of the addressee desires (and is able) to ‘construct’ it as such” (DeMarinis, 2004, p. 233). The members of the audience read the images and words of the performer and draw their own conclusions. This provides added meaning and layers of interpretations by the performers and their audiences through “reciprocal relationships between the cultures of those who make and those who appreciate images” (Walker & Chaplin, 1997, p. 2-3). In other words, texts are performances associated with identity and its construction embedded with the audience’s or listener’s readings of these multi-layered oral and visual discourses (DeMarinis, 2004; Mason, 2004; Schechner, 2003; Walker & Chaplin, 1997).

The use of public pedagogy enabled me to explore the spaces of intertextuality created by spoken word poetry texts as sites of resistance. These sites were enhanced by the spoken word poets’ incorporation of sounds, gestures, bodily movements, improv, and vocal intonations. I use performance studies to examine the relationship between intertextuality in spoken word poetry and its role in the spoken word poets’ performances of their texts. It is the oral method of
delivery and expression used by spoken word poets that draw on its genealogy in literary, cultural, and musical movements in public discourses. As part of the conceptual framework for this study, I include the theoretical foundations of narrative inquiry in this chapter. This will enable me, as the researcher, to link the overarching conceptual frameworks of this study to the methodology by making connections between these research ideologies and their contribution to the exploration of the intertextuality in spoken word poetry.

**Narrative Inquiry: Connecting Methodology to Conceptual Framework**

As a qualitative research methodology, the conceptual history of narrative inquiry developed at the crossroads between the humanities (linguistics), social sciences (psychology, sociology), and philosophy (post-structuralism) as it relates to the deployment of power which emerges from “existing structural understandings of the world” (Youdell, 2006, p. 35) through relationships, discourse, language, and meanings. Narrative ways of knowing have emerged in the social sciences as a vehicle for the acquisition of knowledge through the interpretation of stories. This research approach has been developed especially by Andrews, Squire, and Tamboukou (2008), Chase (2005), Clandinin and Connelly (year), Denzin and Lincoln (2000), Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett (2008), Reissman (2008), Sandelowski (1991), and Youdell (2006). As defined by those authors, narrative inquiry is an interdisciplinary approach to research in which “the study of narratives has linked the sciences with history, literature, and everyday life to reflect the increasing reflexivity that characterizes contemporary inquiry and furthers the postmodern deconstruction of the already tenuous boundaries among disciplines and realms of meaning” (Sandelowski, 1991, p. 161). By organizing their understanding of a phenomenon or lived experiences, individuals or groups recontextualize their stories within larger societal conversations via storytelling. In other words, “narrative as an interactive and interpretative
product is the focus even before it becomes subject to the researcher’s purposes” (Sandelowski, 1991, p. 162), as part of individuals’ transmission of their interpretation of an event or lived experience.

Narratives connect individuals to the past while aiding them in envisioning a future of possibilities through their interpretation and articulation of these events or experiences. Reissman (2008) stated that “narratives are composed for particular audiences at moments in history, and they draw on taken-for-granted discourses and values circulating in a particular culture” (p. 3). In my study, I removed these barriers by using my “dual consciousness” as researcher and audience to collect and interpret the data by including my lived experiences in my interpretation as well as my engagement with the data after multiple exposures as suggested by (Chase, 2005). The narrative inquiry approach includes complex and expansive forms of story interpretation and analysis, which enables the listeners to draw multiple conclusions based on their understanding of the storyteller’s lived experiences. Therefore, “story-telling is only one form of oral communication; other discourses forms include chronicles, reports, arguments, and question and answer exchanges” (Reissman, 2008, p. 3) in which oral narratives are only a segment of our daily conversations. St. Augustine (1938) described narratives as a way for human beings to depict their thoughts and/or ideas about reality as they perceive it. Consequently, “oral narratives can emerge in naturally occurring conversations” (St. Augustine, 1938, p. 6) in which story is not “narrative,” but is an effect of our overall social interactions among people.

Narratives are a form of sense-making which provides individuals and narrative inquirers with alternative explanations for an event or experience through the use of rhetorical skills and positioning in the form of critiques or questions which serve to engage their audiences in these dialogical exchanges (Chase, 2005; Georgakopoulou, 2006; Hones, 1998; Reissman, 2008;
Sandelowski, 1991). This aids the researcher in the development of reciprocal relationships in which the storyteller and the narrative inquirer construct the narrative together, while uncovering “truths” regarding human experiences, and interrogating accepted stories by redirecting these conversations as data (Reissman, 2008). However, in my study, I construct the narratives based on multiple analyses and interpretations of the data through the use of primary sources (page poetry, oral performance, and textual transcriptions) and secondary sources (audio interviews, audio interview transcriptions, essays, and websites). Ultimately, paying attention to meaning behind the language, as opposed to its use as a product, and documenting an individual’s perception of his or her social realities, enable narrative inquirers to engage in an intensive review and analysis of the words used by the storyteller to retell an event or experience (Maynes et al., 2008). For that reason, a “narrative is always defined first of all as a kind of language” (Reissman, 2008, p. 8), framed by theories which encourage an exploration of the role that language, word choice, accepted meanings, and reappropriated meanings play in the conducting of narrative inquiry.

In narrative inquiry, data collection, analysis, and interpretation, are supported by a three prong theoretical framework that helps explore the role of language and accepted meanings: postmodernism, post-structuralism, and psychoanalysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The theories framing narrative inquiry aid in the development of complex conceptual understandings of ideas through the use of multiple lenses to explore the “truths” based on the storyteller’s memory of events or experiences as well as on the narrative inquirer’s interpretation of the data (Chase, 2005). In essence, the diverse theories underpinning narrative inquiry strengthen its integrity by connecting research methodology with data collection, analysis, and interpretation which include the use of multiple “truths” and provide alternative explanations of an event or experience. This
directly connects to my study of intertextuality in spoken word poetry by enabling me to explore it as a narrative of the lived experiences and social realities of the poet.

**Statement of the Problem**

The gap in knowledge I explore in this study is the lack of scholarship examining intertextuality in spoken word poetry, and the meaning of spoken word poetry in the context of pedagogy and education. So far, scholars have focused on the development of spoken word poetry using specific literary, cultural, and musical movements such as African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop. However, scholarship has yet to explore the relationship of each identified literary, cultural, and musical movement to the development of intertextuality in spoken word poetry. In this study, I hypothesize that the intertextuality in spoken word poetry (page poetry and oral poetry) is derived from its genealogical contributions.

**Research Questions and Purpose/Significance of the Current Study**

- How does intertextuality function in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*?
- What role does the genealogy of spoken word poetry play in understanding the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*?
- In what ways does the intertextuality in spoken word poetry play at the intersections of race, gender, and class in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*?
- What are the pedagogical implications for studying the intertextuality in spoken word poetry derived from its genealogical contributions in twenty-first century classrooms using Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* as an example?
Despite a growing interest in spoken word poetry, scholarly research has yet to seriously explore the intertextuality in spoken word poetry as an extension of its genealogical contributions from African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop. My study is part of the larger field of popular culture in education, in which I seek to add to this discourse by exploring the intertextuality in spoken word poetry. I explore the intertextuality in spoken word poetry using a poem by Tracie Morris because her work demonstrates the richness, diversity, and complexities of the intertextuality in spoken word poetry.

In this study, I trace the intertextuality in spoken word poetry as a subcategory of hip-hop culture and music, through its roots in African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop. I use narrative inquiry as my qualitative research methodology to investigate, analyze, and articulate the nuances that exist as part of the intertextuality in spoken word poetry. I accomplish this through a narrative analysis of the data which situates the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess* in larger societal conversations. I use intertextuality theory, public pedagogy, and performance theory to explore the ways in which poet’s narratives act as sites of resistance and open spaces for social interactions.

**Summary**

I began this chapter by reliving the experiences that were instrumental in my decision to explore intertextuality in spoken word poetry. As I acquired more knowledge regarding spoken word poetry as a literary, cultural, and musical movement, I learned to distinguish it from page poetry, performance poetry, and slam poetry. I described the conceptual framework instrumental in my understanding of intertextuality in spoken word poetry, which includes the concepts of
intertextuality, public pedagogy, and performance studies. A brief discussion of narrative inquiry and of its links with my conceptual framework established it as the best approach for this study. Then, I offered a statement of the problem, and articulated the questions guiding this research. Next, I addressed the purpose and significance of this study. I close this chapter with an outline of the subsequent chapters, and definitions of key terms essential for understanding my study.

**Chapters Outline**

Chapter One introduced my autobiographical, conceptual, and rationalization for studying intertextuality in spoken word poetry. In Chapter Two, I conduct a literature review tracing the genealogy of spoken word poetry. I articulate the methodology I used to locate data sources for this study. I also compiled a literature review to situate the use of spoken word poetry in education and pedagogy. Chapter Three, I discuss the research methodology used to collect, analyze, and interpret the data. I restate the problem. I introduce the context of the case study by introducing and describing Tracie Morris and *Project Princess*. I review and communicate the data sources I used to collect my data. I present the procedures used to collect the data, the research design, and the approach to data analysis. I explain the ethical considerations that arose during this study and explain ways in which this study was strengthened by the use of rigor, triangulation, and crystallization.

Chapter Four, I provide an overview of sound poetry and its use in the United States. I explore and analyze five poems that highlight Tracie Morris’s work from spoken word poetry to poems that include the use of sounds. I describe Tracie Morris’s use of sounds in *Project Princess*. Chapter Five, I analyze *Project Princess*. I sequentially present research questions, data, and analysis of the data using excerpts from *Project Princess* as page poetry and spoken word poetry texts. Chapter Six, I submit an overview of the study. I restate the
purpose/significance of the study. I discuss the findings from my analysis in the context of previous research in sequential order based on each research question. I suggest implications for the field of education. I draw, discuss, and explain the conclusions of this study based on the findings. I describe and explain the limitations of this study. I extend suggestions for further research in this area. I conclude my study with an epilogue in which I reflect on my journey from the beginning to end of my research.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**aesthetics**: “a discourse of the body” (Eagleton, 1988, p. 327) in the context of spoken word poetry.

**agency**: “the linking of capacities to the ability of people to intervene in and change social forms – offering hope and a site for new democratic relations, institutional formations, and identities” (Giroux, 2000, p. 353).

**case study**: “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (Stake, 1995, p. xi).

**counter-narratives**: “are the stories which people tell and live which offer resistance, either implicitly or explicitly, to dominant cultural narratives” (Andrews, 2004, p. 1). “act to deconstruct the master narratives, and they offer alternatives to dominant discourses in educational research” (Stanley, 2007, p. 14).

**crystallization**: “combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts” (Ellington, 2009, p. 4).

**cultural aesthetics**: “the dialogic relationship between people and their environment [which leads] to a way of experiencing the world that is reflected in the art that they produce” (Mitchell, 2010, p. 608).
currere: “indicates a framework for autobiographical reflection on educational experiences from a subjective and narrative perspective” (Kissel-Ito, 2008, p. 1).

dominant discourses: are “master narratives derived from tradition, and they typically constrain narratives of personal experiences, because they hold the narrator to culturally given standards, to taken-for-granted notions of what is good and what is bad” (Bamberg, 1996, p. 225).

genealogy: “a historical narrative that explains an aspect of human life by showing how it came into being” (Bevir, 2008, p. 263).

hidden transcript: “represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant” (James, 1990, p. xii).

hybridity: “is an association of ideas, concepts, and themes that at once reinforce and contradict each other” (Kraidy, 2005, p. vi).

intertextuality: “the bits and pieces of text which writers or speakers borrow and sew together to create new discourses” (Porter, 1986, p. 34).

lived experiences: “man’s experience of life, with main characteristics of authenticity, instantaneity, fluid, integrity, and non-mystique” (Chang & Liu, 2010, p.114, original use of gender).

narrative: “a conventional form, transmitted culturally and constrained by each individual’s level of mastery and by his conglomerate of prosthetic devices, colleagues, and mentors” (Bruner, 1991, p. 4).

nommo: “the magic power of the word to call things into being, to give life to things through the unity of word, water, seed, and blood. (Hadley, 1995, p. 677).
non-chronological storytelling (non-lineal narrative): “breaches the ‘classical’ sequential narrative. A non-linear story may have different endings depending on the user interaction taking place during story consumption” (Spanoil, Klamma, Sharda, & Jarke, 2006, p. 252).

page poetry: poetry “written primarily to be read on the page” (Weinstein, personal communication, June 10, 2013).

pedagogy: is “empowerment [that] comes from acting on one’s own behalf” (Wright, 1993, p. 26).

representation: “an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture” (Hall, 1997, p.15).

rigor: “the means by which we show integrity and competence: it is about ethics and politics, regardless of the paradigm” (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 390).

safe spaces: describes “classroom climate[s] that [allow] students to feel secure enough to take risks, honestly express their views, and share and explore their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors” (Holley & Steiner, 2005, p. 50).

sampling: “the incorporation of previously recorded works into new musical compositions” (Brown, 1992, para 1)

scat singing: “vocal improvisation using phonetic sounds similar to the instrumental sounds of jazz.” (Janer & Loscos, 2005, p. 1).

signification – signifying; signify: “within the African American community means to speak with innuendo and double meanings, to play rhetorically upon the meaning and sounds of words, to be quick and often witty in one’s response.” (Lee, 1995, p. 359).
**situated knowledge**: “understandings of the world that recognizes that knowledge is always produced from a specific social location and is always aimed towards a specific audience or audiences” (Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008, p. 98).

**small story (small stories)**: “focus[es] on the stories ‘we tell in passing, in our everyday encounters with each other’ or ‘narratives-in-interaction’” (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008, p. 64).

**social reality**: “constructed by the participants involved in interpersonal interaction” (Jussim, 1991, p. 54).

**sound poetics**: “is as much about silence as it is about speaking” (Morris, 2012b, p. 389).

**sound poetry**: is the space “where voice and mouth are no longer (just) instruments of speech or musical sounds but becomes themselves the vehicle or, more exactly, events of art” (Bruns, 2012, p. 8).

**spoken word poetry**: “poetry written to be performed; that is, its primary intended form of publication is on stage, in front of a live audience” (Weinstein, personal communication, June 10, 2013). In this report, refers to a genre which includes both page poetry and oral performance.

**storied texts**: “serve as evidence for personal meaning, not for the factual occurrence of the events reported in the stories” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 9).

**text**: “function is to represent past events in the form of a story” (Patterson, 2008, p. 23).

**validity**: “pertains to the relationship between an account and something outside of that account, whether this something is construed as an objective reality, the construction of actors, or a variety of other possible interpretations” (Maxwell, 1992, p. 283).
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW
PAYING HOMAGE, BOWING DOWN, AND RISING FROM THE ASHES

I began this study with the impression that spoken word poetry was a narrow, well-researched genre. Needless to say, I was more wrong than I was right. Learning about spoken word poetry was like peeling an onion without the tears, not as painful. I had this vision of spoken word poetry which was only enhanced by my viewing of some of its poets on Def Poetry, in 2001. This program was my visual initiation into spoken word poetry as performative text. I had been listening to spoken word poetry for years, but Def Poetry put a face on some of the poets to whom I had been listening, while introducing me to new ones. A turning point in my relationship with spoken word poetry occurred in 2002, when I viewed Taylor Mali’s performance of What Teachers Make on Def Poetry. I am a teacher now, but at the time I heard this poem, I was considering a career change. Mali’s poem opened with a vignette which states:

He says the problem with teachers is, what’s a kid going to learn from someone who decided his best option in life was to become a teacher? He reminds the other dinner guests that it’s true what they say about teachers: Those who can, do; those who can’t, teach. (Def Poetry, Season 1, Episode 2)

I was dismayed by these comments; yet, I was undeterred – after all, these were not new ideas, they were simply regurgitated conversations serving as a satire and humor in my childhood. My father was a public school bus-driver who used to say those things about the so-called bad teachers. It was Mali’s poem that, for me, drove home the larger society’s disdain towards the teaching profession. Mali had found a way to “flip the script” in a way which inspired my career change from the field of social services to education. For me, it was his response to the person who was making these negative comments that motivated me. Mali quipped:

I make kids work harder than they ever thought they could. I can make a C+ feel like a Congressional medal of honor and an A+ feel like a slap in the face. How dare you waste my time with anything less than your best. (Def Poetry, Season 1, Episode 2)
Mali’s poem continued along this line for the remainder of the text; however, this passage was what solidified my decision to become a teacher. This was also the moment when I discovered the power of spoken word poetry as a visual, performative, and auditory aesthetics which engages its audiences or listeners through the poet’s oral delivery of his or her narratives.

Since then, I have embarked on studying the intertextuality in spoken word poetry. I have discovered that scholars such as Meta Du Ewa Jones (2003), Susan B. Anthony Somers-Willett (2006), and Felicia R. Walker and Viece Kuykendall (2005) have found the term “spoken word poetry” problematic, due to the poet’s blending of music and poetry which are then marketed to mainstream audiences. The “use of the term ‘spoken word’ came about in the early twentieth century as a way to refer to the recorded, performed text of broadcast radio as opposed to written journalism and radio plays” (Somers-Willett, 2006, p. 74). On Def Poetry, spoken word poems were often political texts that discussed issues of identity and its construction, with poets attempting to authenticate the genre by drawing distinctions between spoken word poetry, and hip-hop music and culture through social commentaries and critique. This literary, cultural, and musical movement is used by marginalized groups to construct identity while acquiring voice and agency in dominant discourses. For that reason, “African American poets operating in these venues may be and often are received as embodying the illusion of racial authenticity surrounding black speech, gestures, situations, or themes which can ultimately be limiting for both the artist and the work” (Somers-Willett, 2006, p. 73).

Spoken word poetry began as a grassroots, underground political movement incorporating hip-hop culture and rap music into its poets’ delivery of their narratives or social commentaries in urban areas of the United States (Somers-Willett, 2006; Walker & Kuykendall, 2005). However, it is the cross-over of spoken word poetry into mainstream that has contributed
to its comparison to hip-hop from which “the image of the black spoken word poet grew out of, and thereby is often iterated in reference to, the hardcore, rapper’s image” (Somers-Willett, 2006, p. 75). Spoken word poetry operates through the use of hip-hop music, language, and idioms which also contributed to the desire of contemporary spoken word poets to search for ways to authenticate the genre of spoken word. Before I could fully explore the intertextuality in spoken word poetry in my study, I first had to construct its “family tree” by exploring its roots in the literary, cultural, and musical movements identified by scholars in the field.

**Methodology**

My online database search consisted of Google Scholar, Web-feat, Journal Seek, Questia, Jstor, EBSCO host, Worldcat.org, and Project Muse. The following keywords were entered into each of the identified search engines: spoken word poetry, hip-hop poetry, jazz poetry, rap music, Tracie Morris, poetry slam, performance poetry, page poetry, poetry reading, and poetry-read-to music. I searched these sites for specific scholars who had conducted research similar to that of my current study such as Susan B. A. Somers-Willett, Meta Du Ewa Jones, Imani Perry, Tricia Rose, bell hooks, Angela Davis, Susan Weinstein, Gwendolyn Brooks, Tony Medina, Felicia R. Walker, and Viece Kuykendall. Many of the works used in the literature review were available online for printing; those unavailable online were documented in a notebook and located in the electronic journal catalog of the Louisiana State University library. In addition, I pulled several books, book chapters, and journal articles from my personal library. I identified and researched well-known spoken word poets such as Saul Williams and Maggie Epstein whose works resonated with and/or exemplified the topic of the current study and printed their lyrics. Eventually, I selected a spoken word poem by Tracie Morris as the subject of this case study. In *Project Princess*, she addresses issues associated with urban life, black female awakenings, and
identity. I discuss scholars whose research explored the relationship between hip-hop culture and music as well as the intricate relational dynamics used to construct the intertextuality in spoken word poetry.

**A Genealogy of Spoken Word Poetry**

The origins of spoken word poetry as a genre, movement, and discourse are highly contested due to its multiple roots in the African oral tradition (Brown, 1999; Smethurst, 2002; Stapleton, 1998; Sutton, 2004), the Harlem Renaissance (Aptowicz, 2007; Fisher, 2003), Jazz Poetry (Brown, 1999; Fisher, 2003; Smith-Alexander, 2004; Thomas, 1992; Wallenstein, 1980; 1982), the Blues (Brown, 1999; Fisher, 2007; Neal, 2003), the Black Arts Movement (Brown, 1999; Clarke, 2005; Henderson, 1982; Madison, 1993; Smethurst, 2002; Sparks & Grochowski, 2002; Stoval, 2006), and hip-hop (Aptowicz, 2007; Brown, 1999; Sparks & Grochowski, 2002). Because of these overlapping origins, spoken word poetry has evolved into a politicized forum used by poets in dialogue with larger societal discourses. In this study, I decided to draw on these genres to explore the intertextuality in spoken word poetry because there has been extensive research conducted which explored the relationship between spoken word poetry and these literary, cultural, and musical movements.

Furthermore, I discuss each of these identified genres in this literature review of spoken word poetry, with additional aspects explored to tease out the nuances in these overarching discourses. I give special attention to the relationship between the areas identified by scholars and expand their conversations to include spoken word poetry. Although for the purpose of my study I focus on providing an overview and discussion of each of the movements scholars have identified as contributing to the development of spoken word poetry, in fact, they are not compartmentalized as may be inferred from table two. In describing these diverse movements, they have to be pried apart for obvious practical and logistical reasons. However, the lived
process is anything but categorical, linear, or hierarchical. They are actually closely interrelated, informing and enriching one another. First, I trace the intertextuality in spoken word poetry through its origins in the African oral tradition of storytelling before I discuss the Harlem Renaissance. Third, I explain Jazz Poetry. Then I present the Blues. Fifth, I explore the Black Arts Movement and its concept of a “Black Aesthetic.” Next, I review hip-hop. Finally, I examine the pedagogical and educational implications for studying the intertextuality in spoken word poetry. I drew on these movements because there are similarities between hip-hop and spoken word poetry which have been mentioned in previous research, but have not been extensively studied by scholars in the field of spoken word poetry.

**African Oral Tradition**

My first encounter with the African oral tradition was in a religious studies course titled *Afro-Caribbean Religions of the Diaspora*, in the spring of 2005. The instructor described the use of oral tradition in Africa as a way for a tribe or a civilization to connect with the divine. According to Banks-Wallace (2002), “the griot, was the oral historian and educator” (p. 412), who used stories based on the daily lives of his society to teach survival skills as well as to empower his listeners through the retelling of the lived experiences of himself and others. This enabled griots to introduce self-reflexive dialogues into their stories through the inclusion of their “social and physical environments [as] both the sources of the stories we take in and the foundation that we use for understanding them” (Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 413). These traditional African religious practices were later transported by enslaved Africans to the Americas during the diaspora as a “response to changes in the lived experiences of the people” (Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 413). Banks-Wallace (2002) explained that the oral tradition of Africa was a way for enslaved populations in the New World to preserve the culture and identity of their tribes or civilizations as social narratives traditionally delivered by griots or storytellers. In the Americas,
griots were replaced by lay storytellers, who continued this tradition of storytelling by providing narratives of survival situated in their present day contexts.

In the New World, the African oral tradition evolved into an encoded system of symbolic representations articulated as narratives of lived experiences that reconstructs the same stories from multiple points of view, often incorporating the original language, meanings, and situations in which the account or the event being preserved occurred (Smethurst, 2002). By maintaining these texts, storytellers like griots did, not only preserved personal recollections of witnesses, but also collected historical knowledge handed down from generation to generation (Finnegan, 1970a; Vansina, 1985).

In Africa, griots, were the keepers of the historical documents and folklore of their villages and civilizations. With roots in traditional religious practices, the African oral tradition preserved the cultural artifacts of a tribe or civilization through story and the implementation of *nommo*, or the generative power of the word (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Finnegan, 1970b).

The concept of *nommo* exists in African and black American cultures as a communal experience which gives meaning to, and derives meaning from, the rhythmic power of the word (Clarke, 2004; Cummings & Roy, 2002). Cummings and Roy (2002) suggested that “language constitutes the life force, the productive power of African American culture” (p. 63) exhibited in the art of storytelling and ingrained in the black American poetic tradition (Brown, 1999). The use of *nommo* expands and evolves across time and space as intersubjective transformation deployed across the boundaries and intersections of race, gender, and class, signifying the power of language by focusing on the collectivity and mastery of the art of naming (Brown, 1999; Cummings & Roy, 2002). Through the use of creative oratorical practices such as call and response, signifying, toasts, and boasts, *nommo* is used in black American culture to construct
identity by using language and discourse as sites of resistance and as spaces of social interactions (Clarke, 2004). For that reason, in the African oral tradition, *nommo* is important because of “the shades of meaning they convey to those who ponder them and learn them with care so that they may transmit the wisdom they contain as the culture’s most precious legacy to the next generation” (Vansina, 1971, p. 442).

After the diaspora, enslaved Africans in the New World began to reappropriate their lived experiences through their retellings of traditional African folktales. Gates (1988) stated that black oral tradition borrowed from other genres and reappropriated their discourses as markers of differences in which “a blackness of the tongue” (p. ixx) was used to encode the language derived from African enslavement. Using encoded messages in their narrative texts, each succeeding generation was able to retell these stories based on their lived experiences, social realities, and personal understandings (Scheub, 1985; Smethurst, 2002). The African oral tradition is a form of storytelling that functions through the use of a non-chronological delivery system which preserves the history of a group of people through narratives that include metaphors, imagery, and other literary devices during each retelling of social narratives (Finnegan, 1970b).

Note that typically, the storytellers or griots of Africa were men; however, women were also allowed to participate as distributors of narratives, first in Africa and then in America. Elderly women were often used as storytellers and were permitted to deliver specific types of texts such as dirges, laments, and ceremonial recitations, as well as leaders of work songs in the public spaces (Finnegan, 1970b; Funnis & Gunner, 1995). Generally, women were restricted to “meaningful cultural space[s]” (Finnegan, 1970b, p. 13) located on the margins of oral literary compositions where they were represented as mothers or fallen women modeling acceptable
and/or unacceptable attributes of womanhood (Funnis & Gunner, 1995). Black women, in the present day context, particularly spoken word poets, have begun to use their words as vehicles to convey aspects of their lived experiences to the larger society. Funnis and Gunner (1995) suggested that “women are constantly redefining the terms by which they are signified within broader social discourses” (p. 5).

Using aspects of the African oral tradition, spoken word poets infuse visual descriptions constructed by their words as part of the intertextuality in spoken word poetry. Performers of spoken word poetry use storytelling as a basis for generating knowledge through the rearticulation of their lived experiences and social realities for their listeners or audiences. Thus, this form of storytelling situationally constructs knowledge which contains themes of a common history and similarities among lived experiences and social realities (Finnegan, 1970a, 1970b). Lord (1991) pointed out that “the ‘theme’ in oral literature is distinctive because its content is expressed in more or less the same words every time the singer or storyteller uses it” (p. 27). As a result, the performance of the storyteller is just as important as the texts in terms of voice, facial expression, body movements, intonations, rhythm, symbolism, reciprocity, and the use of literary devices (Finnegan, 1970b; Okpewho, 1992; Vansina, 1971). Because these texts are performed publicly, the visual appearance of the performers is significant in regards to their dress, gestures, bodily movements, and accoutrements (Finnegan, 1970b). Performative texts, such as spoken word poetry, connect the lived experiences and social realities of a group by reinterpreting the “original meanings or perceptions that an audience might have of them” (Scheub, 1985, p. 3). In essence, the African oral tradition contains generational texts (Finnegan, 1970a, 1970b; Vansina, 1985), which Finnegan (1970b) stated:

[are] passed down word for word from generation to generation and thus reproduced verbatim from memory throughout the centuries; or, alternatively, the oral tradition is
something that arises communally, from the people or the “folk” as a whole so that there can be no question of individual authorship or originality. (p. 442)

Hence, the African oral tradition is situationally constructed communal knowledge (Finnegan, 1970a, 1970b; Vansina, 1985), “delivered by word of mouth” (Okpewho, 1992, p. 3).

In the public sphere, spoken word poetry uses non-verbal cues as part of the poet’s oral and textual delivery. Finnegan (1970b) contended that “oral literature is by definition dependent on a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion – there is no other way in which it can be realized as literary product” (p. 2) containing characteristics which are both stylistic and structural by nature.

By drawing on the African oral tradition, the intertextuality in spoken word poetry emerges through conversations with larger societal discourses, in which spoken word poets are part of a new generation of storytellers using intertextuality to create new cultural identities which redefine notions of blackness in dominant discourses. Each succeeding generation of spoken word poets works towards empowerment through the use of their own texts as a method for opening spaces within dominant discourses. Fanon (1965) maintained that “the storyteller responds to the expectations of the people by trial and error and searches for new models, national models, apparently on his own, but in fact with the support of his audience” (p. 174-175, original gender use). Spoken word poets, drawing on the African oral tradition, emphasize the intertextuality in spoken word poetry through storytelling that enables their narratives to engage in larger societal discourses based on their lived experiences and social realities. Therefore, the intertextuality in spoken word poetry explores, interprets, and adapts historical narratives or experiences from multiple points of view which are then “passed down from generation to generation by specialists whose duty it is to recite and transmit them accurately” (Finnegan, 1970b, p. 197), a tradition that spoken word poets would incorporate into their narratives of lived
experiences and social realities in dominant discourses. This would become a customary practice as individuals one or more generations removed from slavery began to include elements of African oral tradition in their written texts, beginning during the Harlem Renaissance.

**Harlem Renaissance**

The Harlem Renaissance (1920s –1930s) writers and poets were youths whose texts provided alternative portrayals of *blackness* in dominant discourses. Singleton (1982) maintained that the Harlem Renaissance was a catalyst for “the flowering of black literature” which “looked to the future” (p. 31). Originating in New York City although many of its contributors lived in other cities in the United States the Harlem Renaissance was the moniker assigned to this literary and cultural movement. Nash (2005) asserted that “the term ‘Harlem Renaissance’ refers to the efflorescence of African American cultural production that occurred in New York City in the 1920s and 1930s” (p. 153), emphasizing black empowerment and political activism in the black community. Many scholars contended that the Harlem Renaissance was initiated with the publication of Claude McKay’s (1919) poem *If We Must Die* (Carroll, 2005; Keller, 1968; Nash, 2005; Osofsky, 1965; Singleton, 1982). Claude McKay, whose full name is Festus Claudius McKay, was born in Claredon Parish, Jamaica, on September 12, 1889, and by 1919, he had moved to Harlem where he met Crystal and Max Eastman, the editors of *The Liberator*, a monthly magazine that published articles about philosophy, politics, and art, from 1918 to 1924 (Long & Collier, 1985). *The Liberator* published Claude McKay’s poem *If We must Die* for the first time in 1919 (Long & Collier, 1985). This poem includes the following lines:

> If we must die, let it not be like hogs
> Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
> While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
> Making their mock at our accursèd lot.
> If we must die, O let us nobly die, (McKay, 1919, p. 43)
It contains violent metaphors, imagery, and language which address racial issues and dominant discourses associated with black masculinity.

Claude McKay’s poem acted as an anthem for the black cultural and political resistance which later became the foundation for the overall ideology of the Harlem Renaissance regarding unity and political empowerment in the black community (Carroll, 2005; Keller, 1968; Long & Collier, 1985; Nash, 2005; Osofsky, 1965; Singleton, 1982). As a result, the Harlem Renaissance writers and poets integrated elements of “black life,” black folk tradition, and black cultural expression into their texts in the form of the “blues, spirituals, and vernacular speech” (Nash, 2005, p. 154). Coming into existence on the cusp of the 1920s intellectual awakening, the Harlem Renaissance combined militancy, consciousness raising activities, cultural rebellion, and resistance against dominant discourses, and heralded in the jazz age while accessing the marketability of stories of black life in the larger society (Keller, 1968; Osofsky, 1968). That led some members of the Harlem Renaissance to create texts that glamourized the “underbelly” of urban life in which, for example, illegal gambling, prostitution, and drug use, are featured as characteristic of black identity in their lived experiences and social realities.

Hence, contributors to the New Negro movement texts presented cultural and artistic portrayals of blackness along with their interpretations of the lived experiences and social realities of urban blacks. According to Osofsky (1968), the Harlem Renaissance was a quest for identity in which the texts of its writers and poets were important elements of black cultural and artistic expression in larger societal conversations.

While researching in the area of the Harlem Renaissance, I developed an understanding of the contributions the writers and poets of this movement have made to other literary, musical, and cultural movements of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Nash (2005) suggested
that the Harlem Renaissance created cultural spaces for blacks to express the thoughts and ideas of their communities in dominant discourses as evident in the works, for example, of Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Zora Neal Hurston, James Weldon Johnson, Claude McKay, and Nella Larsen. Messages of resistance and empowerment are expressed in their texts as a form of artistic expressions of \textit{blackness}, racial pride, and other forms of expression of black political liberation. Furthermore, writers and poets in the Harlem Renaissance advocated black culture as well as positive depictions of \textit{blackness} in their texts by establishing connections between aesthetics and racial politics as part of their literary search for a self-defined black identity (Nash, 2005). Ultimately, a goal of the Harlem Renaissance was to develop acceptable, to the black community, portrayals of \textit{blackness}, black life, and black lived experiences and social realities in dominant discourses across the intersections of race, gender, and class.

The members of this movement looked to the past to define their present and open a future of possibilities by modifying black cultural traditions in their texts. Keller (1968) concluded that the Harlem Renaissance laid the foundation for the development of a self-defined black image through the promotion of black culture and African heritage. Reviewing key ideas from selected texts by prominent figures in the Harlem Renaissance such as James Weldon Johnson, George S. Schuyler, Wallace Thurman, and many others, Osofsky (1968) found that the “New Negro” was socially constructed by larger societal discourses of \textit{blackness}. Carroll (2005) asserted that the Harlem Renaissance texts, whether written or visual, are important aspects for gauging the success of its members in their public portrayals of \textit{blackness}, black lived experiences, and social realities. In several magazines, members of the Harlem Renaissance published written and visual texts. Using a variety of genres – such as essays, fiction, poetry, music, black-and-white drawings, reproduction of visual arts, and literary and artistic works –
participants in the Harlem Renaissance contributed to the awakening of a new racial consciousness for urban blacks in the United States. Carroll (2005) analyzed the pairing of those texts (written and visual) as culturally collaborative discourses. Her study examined four illustrated works published from 1910 to 1930: *The Crisis* (magazine), *Opportunity* (magazine), *Survey Graphic* (magazine), and Allain Locke’s *Fire* (anthology), all of which contained “visual texts, drawings, paintings, and sculptures with written texts such as news stories, essays, editorials, fiction, poetry, drama, transcriptions of music and folklores, biographical sketches, and bibliographies” (Carroll, 2005, p. 4). Through the use of magazines and an anthology published during the Harlem Renaissance, Carroll (2005) explored the relationship between written texts and visual images from the Harlem Renaissance as vehicles for the development of black forms of self-representation and presentation of their concepts of a self-defined black identity.

Originally, the Harlem Renaissance excluded women from active participation in its discourses; therefore, women’s issues and texts were relegated to marginalized spaces, not only in this movement, but also inside larger societal discourses (Hull, 1987; Stavney, 1998; Wall, 1995). According to Hernton (1984), in spite of efforts to ignore their lived experiences and social realities black women writers and poets of the Harlem Renaissance continued to construct texts that addressed “racial and sexual self-definition” (Hull, 1987, p. 212). In spite of this, women writers and poets of the Harlem Renaissance continued to construct texts that addressed “racial and sexual self-definition” (Hull, 1987, p. 212) as evident in Marita Bonner’s *On Being Young, A Woman, and Colored* (1925), which addressed sexism and racism through the promotion of strong racial and gender identities among blacks. Her text included an autobiographical account of the lived experiences and social realities of black women and the
black community as each group encounters racism, segregation, marginalization, and oppression in the larger society. This text by Bonner influenced women like Ann Petry (The Street, 1946) and Gwendolyn Brooks (Annie Allen, 1950) whose texts blended generational dialogues of blackness with ideas of self-representation as evident in their strong female protagonists (Hull, 1987).

In the midst of the Harlem Renaissance:

black women writers are consciously exploring their ancient wisdoms and spiritual selves, their relationships with other women (such as mothers, sisters, friends, lovers), their ties to their black communities and culture, their place in the African diaspora, their multivalent eroticism, their personal relationships to the politics and history of their age, and so on. (Hull, 1987, p. 215)

Consequently, black women writers and poets in the Harlem Renaissance were on a “quest for self-hood” (Stavney, 1998, p. 534) through their written texts. Hull (1987) examined works produced by three poets of the Harlem Renaissance. In her study, she used texts by Angelina Grimke, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Alice Dunbar-Nelson. According to Hull (1987), Grimke’s, Johnson’s, and Dunbar-Nelson’s works included “history and folklore (both rural and urban), satire, issues of identity and power [which] all found expression in the Harlem Renaissance work, which, on the whole, came more assuredly from an ethnic center” (p. 3). By including narratives of their lived experiences and social realities in their texts, women of the Harlem Renaissance emerged on a quest for a personal and literary aesthetics of their own.

Moreover, women in the Harlem Renaissance were marginalized by their male counterparts as well as by the larger society, and they were given “the backburner status of female writers” (Hernton, 1984, p. 139), which placed literature written by black women on the fringes of dominant discourses. Nevertheless, women of the Harlem Renaissance recorded their texts, performed their works publicly, and toured the country as lecturers and public intellectuals.
(Hernton, 1984; Stavney, 1998; Wall, 1995). Stavney (1998) used texts published circa 1990 to analyze the contributions of women to the Harlem Renaissance. This study by Stavney (1998) highlights the endeavors by women scholars to contextualize works by black women writers and poets in the early twentieth century. Stavney (1998) stated that further research in this area is needed in order to recognize the extent to which the New Negro women’s writing was encoded in the dense semiotics of its historical moment and geographical site – indeed, fully to comprehend the representation of black women which their texts interrogate, revise, and refract. (p. 534)

As a result of this marginalization, black women in the Harlem Renaissance texts resisted matriarchal discourses by creating autonomous female protagonists through the deconstruction of stereotypical depictions of motherhood. Stavney (1998) found that in the “1920s black women writers attempted to create a geographic and discursive space for sexual, yet childless black women in masculinized Harlem” (p. 534), while continuing to address issues of race, particularly those they considered important to the black community as evidenced in Jesse Redmond Fauset’s novel *Plum Bun: A Novel with No Moral* (1928) and Clarissa Scott Delany’s poem *The Mask* (1925).

Fauset’s *Plum Bun* (1928), as it is often referred in the literature of the Harlem Renaissance, contains an autobiographical account of her life as the backdrop for the fictionalized story of Angela Murray (the protagonist). In the novel, the character of Angela decided that the only way for her to achieve her idea of the “American Dream” is to pass for white. During her experiences of life as a white woman she discovers that the only way she can achieve agency in larger societal discourses is to reclaim her personal identity as a black woman and use it as a source of her personal empowerment. The concept of empowerment through identity construction and self-representation is a theme which surfaced in Clarissa Scott Delany’s
poem *The Mask* (1925) in which she uses language and accepted meanings to vent the anger and frustrations of black women with their oppression and marginalization, not only in the black community, but also the larger society. She wrote:

> So detached and cool is she  
> No motion e’er betrays  
> The secret life within her soul,  
> The anguish of her days. (Delany, 1925)

As a form of cultural expression, Clarissa Scott Delaney used the symbol of a “mask” as a metaphor for the lack of recognition black women received in larger societal conversations of womanhood and sexuality. Consequently, in this poem the “mask” serves as a symbol of strength and a site of resistance with Clarissa Scott Delany’s language use, word choices, accepted meanings, and reappropriated meanings attributed to the black woman’s ability to negotiate her place and space in the larger society.

The tradition of including narratives of lived experiences and social realities in the storyteller’s texts continued to evolve throughout the Harlem Renaissance. This is a tradition that has been regenerated in spoken word poetry as extensions of its intertextuality in larger society discourses. Similarly, spoken word poets are typically young men and women who incorporate street vernacular and imagery as strategies for the development of self-representation through oral and rhetorical forms of creative expression in larger societal conversations. However, the intertextuality in spoken word poetry anchored in texts produced during the Harlem Renaissance integrates a variety of styles and themes in the spoken word poets’ narratives. Due to its importance in these literary, cultural, and musical movements, I provided a longer more detailed discussion of the Harlem Renaissance because it serves as the turning point in the methods used by black writers and poets to have their voices heard in dominant discourses of *blackness*. To varying degrees, the Harlem Renaissance was responsible for the development of other genres in
the genealogy of spoken word poetry such as Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop.

**Jazz Poetry**

The origin of Jazz Poetry has been traced to black plantation churches where language and music were merged during the preacher’s sermons. Wallenstein (1991) referred to Jazz Poetry as raps with roots in the African oral tradition in which “both poetry and jazz-with-lyrics are arts of indirection, often extremely ironic constructs, and funny at the same time” (Wallenstein, 1991, p. 598). He further explained that

in a manner of speaking, poetry has always craved the company of music in which tone, rhythm and cadence, and lyricism, too, are the property of both. It is the music inside the poet’s head that determines the meter and often the mood of the words as they fall off the page. (Wallenstein, 1991, p. 595)

Often, in the African oral tradition, the narratives of the griots were accompanied by drumming, a custom that evolved during the Harlem Renaissance as black poets such as Langston Hughes and Sterling Brown began to include in their texts musical rhythms produced by popular jazz artists.

Coinciding with the jazz age, Jazz Poetry as did the Harlem Renaissance and the Blues, emerged as an extension of the 1920s musical experimentation which evolved into new jazz musical styles embraced by poets such as Langston Hughes and Sterling Brown, and by musicians like Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway (Feinstein, 1992; Thomas, 1992; Wallenstein, 1991). Jazz Poetry is a product of the Harlem Renaissance’s experimentation with jazz music as a backdrop during poetry readings by some of its poets (Feinstein, 1992; Thomas, 1992; Wallenstein, 1991). I discovered Jazz Poetry while watching the film *Love Jones* (1997). The character of Darius performs a poem titled *Brotha to the Night* (retitled in the film as *A Blues for Nina*) as a cello and a saxophone deliver a low, mournful, slow musical interlude. Darius’s voice
syncopates above and against the musical backdrop of these instruments as he incorporates his intonations, gestures, and other bodily movements into the delivery of this poem. Using the same improvisational techniques as the character from the film *Love Jones* (1997), early jazz poets integrated wordless sounds, scat singing, and call and response in their live performances, which is evident in the Blues tradition; thus, marking the marriage between poetry and music (Bolden, 2004; Brown, 1999; Davis, 1995).

Early jazz poets adopted aesthetics of storytelling derived from the African oral tradition as part of the syncopation of their words with blues rhythms (Feinstein, 1992; Wallenstein, 1991). Their words and music set the mood and imagery for their listeners or audiences as political aesthetics anchored in musical rebellion and satire (Feinstein, 1992; Thomas, 1992; Wallenstein, 1991). Jazz Poetry, as it has been referred to in the literature, is a musical and literary genre informed by jazz music, which developed during the 1920s along with the Harlem Renaissance as a product of the jazz age (Feinstein, 1992; Thomas, 1992; Wallenstein, 1991). It is an aesthetics rooted in the African oral tradition of storytelling which responds to the musicians, the music, and other forms of social interactions in public spaces through the use of rhythmic syncopation and call and response (Feinstein, 1992; Wallenstein, 1991). Drawing on a “blues rhythm scheme” between the words, Jazz Poetry breaks its rhythm through intonations, informal pronunciations, idioms, and improvisation (Brown, 1999; Feinstein, 1992; Wallenstein, 1991). Jazz Poetry is a discourse which uses imagery in the form of words, accentuated by music, as a site of resistance through musical rebellion and satire as part of its political aesthetics (Feinstein, 1992; Thomas, 1992; Wallenstein, 1991).

Jazz poets such as Langston Hughes are interested in word sounds which contextualize “a relationship between poetry and jazz concerned [with] the integration of exuberance and despair”
(Feinstein, 1992, p. 1). In the early days of Jazz Poetry, black Americans were the innovators
with Langston Hughes emerging as the first recognized jazz poet of the twentieth century
(Feinstein, 1992; Thomas, 1992; Wallenstein, 1991). Langston Hughes, who was influenced by
the works of Carl Sandburg and Vachel Lindsay, began experimenting with reading his poetry to
jazz music and recording it. The *Weary Blues* (1923) by Langston Hughes is thought to be the
quintessential jazz poem of the twentieth century. Written in free-verse, *Weary Blues* (1923)
contains the use of shout-outs, symbolism, imagery, and wordplay. The narrator of the poem
revisits a past experience in the present day context through his retelling of listening to a blues
piano player at a local night club. Using the word “blue” as a metaphor for sadness, Langston
Hughes incorporated this discourse into the text of his poem through language and accepted
meanings to describe the musicality of the human body as evidenced in the opening stanza:

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Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,
Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon
I heard a Negro play.
Down on Lenox Avenue the other night
By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light
He did a lazy sway….
He did a lazy sway….
To the tune o’ those Weary Blues. (Hughes, 1925)
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Hughes use of repetition in the lines “he did a lazy sway…he did a lazy sway,” verbally
describes the body movement of the piano player during his performance. Elongating words
through the omission of letters and sounds shows Hughes’s effort to capture on paper the
everyday speech patterns of some of his readers or audiences. In the verses “Droning a drowsy
syncopated tune, / Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon” (Hughes, 1923), Hughes’s
language use and word choices adds depth to the emotion of his poem and gives the reader an
indication of the narrator’s internalized thoughts as he retells his lived experiences and social
realities.
Along with Sterling Brown, Langston Hughes established the connections between jazz and black American culture by portraying the roots of Jazz Poetry in black American expressive culture and “began performing his poetry with music is the 1920s and continued to do so throughout his career” (Wallenstein, 1991, p. 603). By the 1960s and early 1970s, Jazz Poetry had lost much of its steam and had disappeared into obscurity with “many of the jazz poetry recordings [acting] as a form of Black Nationalism, as statements of protest” (Feinstein, 1992, p. 78) as substantiated by Gil Scott-Heron’s *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* (1970). Some scholars identity Gil Scott-Heron as a Black Arts Movement poet, but he identifies himself as a jazz musician (Scott-Heron, 2012). In this poem Scott-Heron chanted:

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You will not be able to stay home, brother,
You will not be able to plug in, turn on and cop out,
You will not be able to lose yourself on skag and
skip out for beer during commercials,
Because the revolution will not be televised.
The revolution will not be televised. (Scott-Heron, 1970)
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This poem contains cultural references from the late 1960s and it used a slogan made popular during the 1960s black political movements. In the body of the text, Scott-Heron vents the anger and frustration of inner-city blacks with mainstream discourses of substance abuse in the black community, politics, the economy, consumerism, and television. The lyrics of *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* (1970) featured Gil Scott-Heron chanting over drumbeats in the original 1970s version. It followed the tradition of 1960s political ideology by encouraging social change and political activism among black Americans. Later, this poem was re-released with the inclusion of a full band which included improv from a horn blowing as Gil Scott-Heron used his voice and intonations to syncopate against the musical rhythms of the recorded text.

Initially, Jazz Poetry was considered a “masculine discourse” (Jones, 2011, p. 129) in which its women artists were relegated to a space where “the most honored women in jazz have
been singers” (Jones, 2011, p. 130). The inclusion of women’s voices in Jazz Poetry enabled the exploration of the relationship between corporeality, sexuality, race, and gender which increased their negotiation of stereotypical representations produced by dominant discourses. Jones (2011) found that women sexualized their bodies in stereotypical terms through the use of personas. He noted that “black jazzwomen negotiated the patriarchal commodification of women’s bodies in uncompromising and often inventive ways” (Jones, 2011, p. 131); thus, adding their lived experiences and social realities to discourses of women’s bodies and sexuality. In essence, Jazz Poetry served as a space where singers and poets used music as a vehicle into dominant discourses of blackness. Spoken word poets use improvised vocalizations set to musical rhythms in ways that enable their voice to function as an instrument in their oral delivery. This enables spoken word poets to move their words from the page through their bodies through the use of syncopation and call and response. By engaging with their audiences or listeners through narratives, spoken word poets open spaces for the negotiation of stereotypical representations as sites of resistance, social interactions, and identity construction in dominant discourses which are also present in Blues music.

Blues

Developing almost simultaneously with the Harlem Renaissance and Jazz Poetry, the Blues provided an alternative avenue for black artists to enter larger societal conversations. Scholars have suggested that the Blues is an African American music genre that originated in the black communities of the Deep South at the end of the nineteenth century (Bolden, 2004; Davis, 1995). This genre is a mixture of spirituals, work songs, field hollers, shouts, chants, and narrated ballads developed during slavery, which expanded into the Blues and its varied musical stylizations. The Blues were made famous by W. C. Handy, a black composer who used improv
connecting a twelve bar blues chorus with three line stanzas mirroring call and response that became popular during the 1920s and 1930s (Davis, 1995). Traditionally, early blues singers used song/talk patterns, lyrical repetitions, riffs, and non-chronological storytelling in the delivery of their texts (Bolden, 2004; Brown, 1999; Davis, 1995). Davis (1995) traced blues music from its development in the Deep South through its migration to, and evolution in, Chicago. He found that blues music was part of an underground movement in the South that was “reserved for stolen moments” (Davis, 1995, p. 2) by enslaved and impoverished black populations. Davis (1995) stated that early blues musicians and performers “were men exempted from picking cotton by virtue of blindness or some other handicap, or wastrels for whom music was a way of avoiding back-breaking labor” (p. 2) and later on became a form of entertainment and community building among blacks in the Deep South.

The Blues “is a musical form, a stanzaic pattern, an attitude, and an ethos or way of life” (Brown, 1990, p. 74), borrowed by poets to extend their narratives into testimony, affirmations, or universality of lived experiences and social realities through the expression of raw emotions in their texts that emerged circa 1911. Bolden (2004) analyzed the inventive ways in which black music and poetry have been integrated in the vernacular culture and artistic expression of black people. He maintained that the Blues were instrumental in the development of black poetry and black vernacular culture as sites of resistance. Blues music provides situated discourses through the use of unstructured verses that connect emotions with sounds and language by using syncopation, varied repetition, musical refrain, and call and response. Bolden (2004) stated that “poets wrote either banal imitations of traditional poetry or misrepresentations of black culture” (p. 9). In essence, black cultural expression began to manifest the anger and frustration of urban blacks for whom “the blues became an inspiration rooted in sadness, but with a complex mixture
of humor and spiritual uplift” (Feinstein, 1992, p. 43), which coincided with the Harlem Renaissance and Jazz Poetry (Davis, 1999).

The Blues originated as a source of entertainment and a space for social interaction in the black community of the Deep South during the 1920s. Early blues singers used music as a way to expand their testimonials of lived experiences and social realities into their songs as vehicles for entering larger societal discourses. Their lyrics included language games that inserted humor and emotions into their lyrics through the use of sounds. The Blues tradition produced songs that emphasized the use of the singers’ voice and intonations as part of their narrative of lived experiences and social realities to express the internalized emotions of their listeners and audiences. Many of these songs contained unstructured melodies syncopated with repetition and musical refrain as part of the singer’s oral delivery of the text. An important aspect of blues music of the 1920s was the way singers manipulated language as well as their reappropriation of its accepted meanings in dominant discourses. In addition, blues singers such as Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughn, and Nina Simone often improvised verses to their songs and set them to music with explicit lyrics that included the use of ritualized language, sounds, and musical rhythms.

When I think of the Blues, I recall the music of B. B. King, Johnny Taylor, Mel Waiters, KoKo Taylor, and the late Jackie Neal. My mother made us listen to the Blues and Classic Soul music on the days when there was no gospel music playing on the local radio stations. The Blues have been a part of my home-life probably much longer than I can remember. This genre development overlaps with that of the Harlem Renaissance and Jazz Poetry which contributed to its complex and diverse construction (Davis, 1995; Feinstein, 1992; Thomas, 1992; Wallenstein, 1991). Early Blues singers of the 1940s used language games such as wordplay, snaps (the dozens), toasts, boasts, and signifying (verbal put-downs) in the retelling of their lived
experiences and social realities (Davis, 1995; Gates, 1988; Smitherman, 1977, 1986). Using song/talk patterns, lyrical repetitions, riffs, and non-chronological storytelling adopted from the African oral tradition, blues singers used unstructured verses to connect their emotions with sounds and language through the use of syncopation similar to that used in Jazz Poetry, mixed with varied forms of repetition, musical refrain, and call and response as a form of jazz talk. Blues music artists manipulated language and reappropriated its accepted meanings as they improvised lyrics to music (Bolden, 2004; Brown, 1999; Davis, 1995).

The use of language games, especially boasts and toasts, became popular during the Blues era of the 1950s and reemerged as an essential component of rap and spoken word poetry. Boasts and toasts began as a genre of urban street culture in which young men (Davis, 1995; Gates, 1988; Smitherman, 1977, 1986), “in the most hyperbolic manner, affirm their worth in terms of physical strength, sexual prowess, and the ability to inflict harm” (Brown, 1999, p. 84). Lieberfeld (1995) discovered that blues culture was interwoven in discourses of masculinity and identity, but possessed an “allure of the erotic [which] is fundamental to the appeal blues culture hold[s] for the mainstream” (p. 219). Using explicit language and masculine performance styles, the blues performer placed oral emphasis on rhythms, rhymes, and profane word play which evoked emotions while giving voice to marginalized groups as was the case of Abel Meeropol’s poem *Bitter Fruit* (1937).

*Bitter Fruit* (1937) written by Meeropol, a white, Jewish teacher under the pseudonym Lewis Alan captivated the world by drawing attention to racism and the lynching of black Americans in the Deep South. Renamed *Strange Fruit*, in 1939, Meeropol’s poem served as a protest song through the use of imagery, symbolism, testimonial, explicit language, and language
games. Abel Meeropol’s text described a Southern lynching by connecting it to its roots in racism in the lines:

    Southern trees bare a strange fruit,
    Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
    Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze,
    Strange fruit hanging from the popular trees. (Meeropol, 1937)

Rearticulating the tree as a manifestation of racism, this poem explores these intergenerational discourses as evidenced by Meeropol’s use of the words “leaves” and “roots.” As a result, his use of the word “tree” serves as a metaphor symbolizing life and death reminiscent of the biblical references to the tree as a source of knowledge and nourishment. Consequently, in this poem, the tree is transformed into a place of hatred and death which are brought to the surface through Billie Holiday’s singing of the lyrics of this poem during her public performances.

   Early blues women used their voices and performances as community building activities by presenting the unique aesthetics of working-class black women to their audiences. The narratives of black blues women enabled their texts to negotiate dominant discourses through social critique as rearticulations of social constructs of womanhood and sexuality (Funnis & Gunner, 1995; Jones, 2011; Stavney, 1998). Their choices of venues served as locations of discourse where black American culture became sites marking the origins of the Blues as gendered, political, and social discourses transmitted as ideology through the performer’s voice and intonations; thus, opening spaces of power grounded in emotions and other forms of creative expressiveness (Lorde, 1984).

   Originally, women were not encouraged to boast in public; however, those who did toss off “an occasional self-praising couplet” (Brown, 1999, p. 84), typically provided sexualized representations of their female identity which distorted their lived experiences and social realities through the performers narratives (Lieberfeld, 1995). Davis (1999) asserted that black women
blues singers opened cultural spaces inside public discourses through encoded messages in their lyrics. These women performed in small venues and used their public appearances as an oppositional gaze reflecting the expectations of the larger society (hooks, 1989). Blues women used their songs to convey the lived experiences and social realities of black women in metropolitan areas through the inclusion of overarching sexualized themes in their lyrics. Davis (1999) analyzed the works of three early blues women for hints of the “feminist attitude” as it related to patriarchal discords in early blues music, and their role in the history of popular culture and music in the United States. She studied the ways in which the recordings of early blues women reflected the feminist consciousness of working-class black people.

Considering the stringent taboos on representations of sexuality that characterized most dominant discourses of the time, “the Blues constitutes a privileged discursive site” (Davis, 1999, p. xvii) used to create spaces for social interactions and open sites of resistance as incorporated into Billie Holiday’s rendition of *Strange Fruit* (1939). Billie Holiday, a famous blues singer of the twentieth century, recorded *Strange Fruit*, in 1939, and it became one of her best loved recordings and was often used as her closing song to end her performances. The epitome of the 1930s and 1940s blues woman, Holiday used the natural bravado of her voice and intonation to introduce emotion into her oral delivery of this song. She incorporated the use of theatrics such as an improvised introduction, darkened room with a spotlight on herself, standing still with her eyes closed until the right moment when Holiday began to sing in tune with the music. The most heart wrenching lines of the poem were delivered by Billie Holiday as her voice trembled; during its ascension and ebbs she sung the words:

Here is fruit for the crows to pluck,
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop. (Holiday, 1939)
There is a pain in Billie Holiday’s voice, and despair in its intonations. She looks straight ahead with a sullen expression on her face which she uses as an extension of her narrative, accompanied by a piano mixed with *a cappella* vocalization syncopated against the solemn sound of the music. Relying on the art of elongation of words and the manipulation of sounds, Billie Holiday extends the singing of the words “crows,” “gather,” “wind,” and “sun” while shortening the pronunciation of the words “pluck,” and “suck.” However, she elongates each word in the phrase “trees to drop” which also receives additional vocal stress on the pronunciation of each word. In Holiday’s delivery of the final line of the poem, she uses breath pauses between the words “strange” and “and” as well as between “bitter” and “crop,” but the word “crop” is elongated and stressed as her voice and intonation rise and fall prior to ending the song on a low intense note.

By blending discourses of lived experiences and social realities in their texts, members of the Harlem Renaissance, in conjunction with Jazz poets and Blues musicians, opened spaces for black people to use their words to acquire agency. Spoken word poets have used their narratives as testimonials of their lived experiences and social realities by introducing their emotions into each retelling. They also use public venues as spaces of artistic expression in which their texts manipulate language and reappropriate its meanings through the use of language games in their lyrics. Employing ritualized language, sounds, and musical rhythms such as wordplay, banter, and verbal humor, which spoken word poets like jazz singers have “through the use of gestures and verbal manipulations reworked vacuous lines for new significance” (Leonard, 1986, p. 156), is a tradition that began during the Black Arts Movement and its search for a “Black Aesthetic.”
Black Arts Movement and “Black Aesthetic”

The Black Arts Movement was brought to my attention for the first time in an article that discussed the relationship between this movement and hip-hop music and culture, much like I learned about Jazz Poetry from a movie. I began researching this movement, hoping to find a link between it and spoken word poetry. As I began working with a writing tutor, I learned about Amiri Baraka’s poem (1965) *Black Arts* and how it was a rallying cry for the black community to become empowered and politically active in larger societal discourses of *blackness*. Although the text of this poem contained violent metaphors and profanity, it retold narratives of lived experiences and social realities of inner-city blacks from multiple points of view, by introducing new language and new meanings into dominant discourses of *blackness* and fine arts. Using words as weapons accompanied by jazz music Amiri Baraka’s poem *Black Arts* (1965) reintroduced discourses of empowerment, identity, and self-representation first seen in works produced during the Harlem Renaissance. Throughout the life of the Black Arts Movement, its members revisited the notion of a “Black Aesthetic” which had first been discussed during the Harlem Renaissance (Gayle, 1971; Hill, 1980; Neal, 1968). Many male poets in this movement, such as Amiri Baraka, Keorapetse Kgositsile, and Askia Toure, used their concept of a “Black Aesthetic” to establish a relationship between fine arts and politics in their poems as a rationalization for their rejection of larger societal discourses of *blackness* (Hill, 1980; Reed, 1970; Warren, 1990).

After the opening of the Black Arts Repertoire Theatre and School (B.A.R.T.S.) in 1964, in Harlem, New York, Amiri Baraka, Johnny Moore, Charles Patterson, William Patterson, Clarence Reed, and other black artists sparked the beginning of the Black Arts Movement and its search for a “Black Aesthetic” (Neal, 1968). They used B.A.R.T.S as a space for black men to
interact with other black men as well as a location for the development of the iconology outlined by Amiri Baraka and the other male members of the movement (Neal, 1968). Amiri Baraka recognized that black politics were tied to fine arts, and that art was a socializing influence on black people because it had a strong impact on black oppressive discourses at the intersections of race, gender, and class (Neal, 1968). As a result, B.A.R.T.S. hosted plays and other events opened to the public like town hall meetings, lectures, movies, study groups, jazz sessions, exhibits, concerts, and poetry readings in the black community (Neal, 1968; Reed, 1970; ya Salaam, 1997).

Thus, members of B.A.R.T.S., and later the Black Arts Movement, expressed their creativity and disdain for oppressive discourses of the 1960s, through fine arts in the form of poetry, music, drama, dance, and literature (Neal, 1968). In 1968, Larry Neal documented the identified essence of the Black Arts Movement, especially its notion of a “Black Aesthetic.” As a literary and cultural movement, the Black Arts Movement’s rejection of dominant discourses of art as a static form of static portrayals of blackness constructed an idea for aesthetics anchored in the Black Power Movement, Black Nationalism, the teachings of Malcolm X, and the rhetorics of the Black Panther Party, all of which contributed to the development of Black Arts Movement (Hill, 1980; Warren, 1990).

Instead, the Black Arts Movement spoke within dominant discourses by rearticulating Western notions of what constitutes art in the United States through an exploration of the connections between fine arts and politics using the concept of “Black Aesthetic” (Gayle, 1971; Neal, 1968; Reed, 1970; ya Salaam, 1998). Yet, there was an agreement among participants that a “Black Aesthetic” should include elements of protest in the form of written words and oral poetry readings (spoken word poetry) designed specifically for black people by black people,
which was inclusive of men and women (Clarke, 2005; Hill, 1980; Neal, 1968; Reed, 1970). Nevertheless, there remains multiple meanings for the phrase “Black Aesthetic” rooted in both the black cultural traditions of Africa and the desire for the deconstruction of white ideologies of art and culture, with one important aspect for the “Black Aesthetic” being the implementation of a code of ethics as a system of social change designed to transform the larger societal discourses of blackness (Gayle, 1971; Neal, 1968). The Black Arts Movement became an extension of B.A.R.T.S., and through the founding of black publishing houses such as Broadside Press and Third World Press, members of the Black Arts Movement enabled spoken word poets such as Gil Scott-Heron, the Last Poets, as well as poets like Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, Haki Madhubuti, and Sonia Sanchez, to develop a new language and new meanings anchored in political activism and empowerment through their texts (ya Salaam, 1997). Like early blues singers, some female members of the Black Arts Movement specifically Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, and Jayne Cortez used explicit language, as part of their masculine performance styles, and syncopations similar to that of Jazz Poetry to articulate their narratives of lived experiences and social realities. For example, Jayne Cortez’s poem *If the Drum is a Woman* (1982) states:

F the drum is a woman  
Why are you pounding your drum into an insane babble  
Why are you pistol whipping your drum at dawn  
Why are you shooting through the head of your drum  
and making a drum tragedy of drums  
Don’t abuse your drum, don’t abuse your drum  
don’t abuse your drum. (Cortez, 1982)

This recorded poem begins with the opening line “f the drum is a woman” being recited *a capella* by Jayne Cortez; however, the remaining is accompanied by drumming. At the beginning of the poem Cortez’s voice is monotone, but the intonation of her voice changes with the beats of the drum fluctuating in speed and intensity particularly when she says the words “f your drum is
a woman” the absence of the letter “i” from the word “if” in the first line of the poem elongates the word by stressing the pronunciation of the word “if.” Speaking over drumming, Cortez uses repetition in the line “don’t abuse your drum” which is repeated a total of three times in her poem. She uses her voice as an instrument by allowing it to rise and fall as she connects the physical abuse of women to the beating of a drum. The Black Arts Movement was a literary and cultural movement which promoted the use of aesthetics as a vehicle for obtaining social positioning in dominant discourses.

Initially, the Black Arts Movement placed women in the role of helpers and/or supporters of men by epitomizing motherhood and highlighting the “fact” that women were responsible for the reproduction of future artists. However, by 1968, women had begun obtaining recognition in larger societal discourses across the intersections of race, gender, and class. This was the year (1968) when Gwendolyn Brooks broke away from the rhetoric of the Black Arts Movement regarding the role of black women in the arts with her ground-breaking poem *In the Mecca* (1968), which marked the beginning of black women poets in the Black arts Movement and beyond, using their words to address issues and concerns of women across the intersections of race, gender, and class (Clarke, 2005). While other women poets in *Black Arts* Movement such as Carolyn Rodgers, June Jordan, and Gwendolyn Brooks used their words as written texts creating counter-narratives that challenged dominant discourses of black life. For instance, through the story of Mrs. Sallie, Gwendolyn Brooks’s *In the Mecca* (1968) narrates the lived experiences and social realities of blacks living in the Chicago housing facility known as the Mecca. Brooks wrote that:

Suddenly, counting noses, Mrs. Sallie sees no Pepita. “Where Pepita be?” (Brooks, 1968) In this narrative poem Brooks describes Mrs. Sallie’s search for her missing daughter Pepita.
The first person to whom Mrs. Sallie speaks about the missing Pepita is Great-great Gran who stated:

I ain seen no Pepita. But I remember our cabin. The floor was dirt.  
And something crawled in it. That is the thought  

The next person Mrs. Sallie spoke to about her missing daughter Pepita was Loam Norton.

Although he has not seen Pepita, Loam Norton considers Belsen and Dachau,  
Regrets all old undkindnesses and harms.  
…The Lord was their shepherd. Yet did they want. (Brooks, 1968)

These character introductions and narratives of their lived experiences and social realities prior to moving into the Mecca would continue until the climax of the poem. Using multi-vocalizations in a single text, Gwendolyn Brooks articulates the conversations in which Mrs. Sallie engages with the other tenants living in the complex as she searches for her daughter.

As Mrs. Sallie encounters each resident, they share stories of their lived experiences and social realities with her prior to stating they have not seen her missing daughter, Pepita. At the end of the poem Mrs. Sallie locates her missing daughter Pepita under the bed of Jamaican Edward, dead. Brooks wrote:

The murderer of Pepita  
Looks at the Law unlovingly, Jamaican  
Edward denies and thrice denies a dealing  
of any dimension with Mrs. Sallie’s daughter,  
Beneath his cot  
A little woman lies in dust with roaches.  
She never went to kindergarten.  
She never learned that black is not beloved. (Brooks, 1968)

It is at that moment that Mrs. Sallie realizes that she had forgotten to explain to Pepita the facts of black womanhood and sexuality as perceived in larger societal discourses as evident in the use of the words “little woman” to describe Pepita. Gwendolyn Brook’s narrative poem of Ms. Sallie’s search for her daughter Pepita was instrumental in creating a hybrid version of cultural
nationalism and revolutionary ideas among black women poets. This became part of the aesthetics of self-representation incorporated into narratives of black women writers and poets post-Black Arts Movement (Carroll, 2005; Hull, 1987; Gayle, 1971; Neal, 1968; Reed, 1970; Stavney, 1998).

According to Hill (1980), the idea of a “Black Aesthetic” is controversial because it promoted notions of a black collective consciousness as a result of psychological enslavement, in which poetry is used to express the emotions as well as describe the lived experiences and social realities of black life in the United States. However, the Black Arts Movement does not include the lived experiences and social realities of black women as a group in its aesthetics discourses (Clarke, 2005). This aesthetics, as articulated in Amiri Baraka’s (1965) poem Black Arts, expresses the social liberation that fine arts provide individuals, specifically blacks, as aesthetics. Therefore, the “Black Aesthetic,” as conceived during the Black Arts Movement, helped promote social change, social justice, and positive self-representation among blacks, through the use of poetry. The “Black Aesthetic” provided the black community with a “mirror” which enabled it to see itself from multiple points of view and perspectives in dominant ideologies surrounding blackness (Hyde, 2012).

In an effort to develop a “Black Aesthetic,” the Black Arts Movement introduced a new language and new meanings for words such as “Black Aesthetic” and Black Arts as extensions of this cultural and literary movement through poetry readings, street theatre, and art workshops (Warren, 1990). In this movement, poets recorded albums featuring their poetry accompanied by jazz music as seen in the works of Amiri Baraka, Jayne Cortez, Nikki Giovanni, and Sonia Sanchez. The ideology behind the concept of a “Black Aesthetic” was to promote a rediscovery of African cultural heritage to instill a sense of pride in the contributions of Africa to the entire
world. Incidentally, aesthetics in the Black Arts Movement provided a here-and-now consciousness to the black community through their texts which promoted Africa as an essential element for blacks to gain an understanding of their lived experiences and social realities in the United States (Harper, 1993; Hill, 1980; Reed, 1970; Warren, 1990). The Black Arts Movement was a liberation movement which used fine arts to produce texts that politically dramatized dominant discourses of blackness, and cultural forms of self-representation challenging dominant discourses of blackness. The intertextuality of spoken word poetry infuses politics with artistic expression, in the tradition of the Black Arts Movement; spoken word poets use their texts to establish aesthetics of community uplift and enrichment. Works by spoken word poets use words as weapons to protest dominant discourses, while establishing a self-defined version of a “Black Aesthetic.” The search for a “Black Aesthetic” would re-emerge during the 1970s, as hip-hop music and rap began to enter mainstream discourses.

**Hip-hop**

I was introduced to hip-hop as a young girl, watching Don Cornelius’s *Soul Train* (1971-2006) in the late 1970s. The first hip-hop song I heard, on this television show, was *Rapper’s Delight* (1979) by the Sugar Hill Gang. But, it was the success of *The Message* (1982) by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five that contributed to the shift of hip-hop from house party music made popular years earlier by the Sugar Hill Gang, to a politically active discourse in which urban youth entered with stories of their lived experiences and social realities (Alridge & Stewart, 2005, p. 2005; Rose, 1994; Stephens & Wright, 2000). Hip-hop is a multifaceted art form encompassing the music and culture of urban youth. However, by the 1990s, the phrase hip-hop had become synonymous with the word rap, and the two expressions will be used interchangeably throughout this study (Stephens & Wright, 2000). Originating in the early 1970s

Initially, rappin’ began as a masculinized form of self-introduction and an approach to dating that drew on the inventive use of language. Rap music became a ritualized form of storytelling containing narratives that included the use of braggadocio as evident “in the toasts, long-standing narrative epics from oral tradition” (Smitherman, 1997, p. 12), usually centered on the rapper’s lovemaking or verbal skills. For example, the Sugar Hill Gang’s (1979) Rapper’s Delight blended narratives of braggadocio with language games of toast, boast, wordplay, repetition, and signifying in the following lyrics:

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Check it out, I'm the C-A-S-A, the N-O-V-A,
And the rest is F-L-Y,
You see I go by the code of the doctor of the mix,
And these reasons I'll tell you why.
You see, I'm six foot one, and I'm tons of fun
When I dress to a T,
You see, I got more clothes than Muhammad Ali
and I dress so viciously.
I got bodyguards, I got two big cars
That definitely ain't the wack,
I got a Lincoln Continental and a sunroofed Cadillac.
So after school I take a dip in the pool,
Which is really on the wall,
I got a color TV, so I can see
The Knicks play basketball. Hear me talk about
Checkbooks, credit cards, mo' money
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Than a sucker could ever spend,
But I wouldn't give a sucker or a bum form the Rucker
Not a dime 'til I made it again. Everybody go
Ho-tel, Mo-tel, Whatcha gonna do today? (Say what?)
'Cos I'm a get a fly girl,
Gonna get some spank n' drive off in a def OJ. Everybody go
Ho-tel, Mo-tel, Holiday Inn,
Say if your girl starts actin' up,
Then you take her friend. (Sugarhill Gang, Sugar Hill Records)

Using mediated narratives, hip-hop artists such as the Sugar Hill Gang incorporated language games into their narratives to challenge dominant discourses of masculinity (Dimitriadis, 1996). The inclusion of encoded messages in their narratives regarding sexual prowess was anchored in the desire for “identity and self-affirmation” (Brown, 1999, p. 87) among urban youths through displays of lyrical skills in public spaces.

Later, borrowing ideas embedded in protest music of the 1960s and 1970s blended with discourses of urban youth in the present day context, hip-hop served as part of their hidden transcripts situated in their narratives’ lived experiences and social realities (Stapleton, 1998). Stapleton (1998) explored the way hip-hop culture and music used hidden messages to challenge dominant discourses and provide social critique as evident in Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five’s (1982) *The Message* which rearticulated the anger and frustration of youth living in urban areas in the United States with lyrics such as:

Broken glass everywhere
People pissing on the stairs, you know they just don't care
I can't take the smell, I can't take the noise
Got no money to move out, I guess I got no choice
Rats in the front room, roaches in the back
Junkies in the alley with the baseball bat
I tried to get away, but I couldn't get far
Cause a man with a tow-truck repossessed my car
Chorus:
Don't push me cause I'm close to the edge
I'm trying not to lose my head, ah huh-huh-huh. (*The Message*, record company)
Stephens and Wright (2000) studied rap music lyrics as extensions of the anger and frustration of urban males regarding their lived experiences in the United States. They used rappers or rap groups who were identified as contributing to the development and/or the evolution of rap music as a form of musical expression. These scholars selected rap lyrics based on the rapper’s ability to articulate their lived experiences and social realities in the inner-city of America. The lyrics were organized by themes based on how “a number of rap artists have chronicled urban life experiences through a variety of subgenres, styles, and mediums” (Stephens & Wright, 2000, p. 28). They concluded that rap reflected marginalized discourses through the artist’s delivery of social commentaries mixed with suggestions for resolution. Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five’s “The Message” became the first nationally recognized socially conscious rap song and it provided many young African Americans with an example of how to use their own lived experiences as a point of resistance while engaging the public in a passionate conversation using an emerging musical style that they loved. (Stephens & Wright, 2000, p. 29)

The lyrics of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five’s (1982) *The Message* contained the bitter frustration in its language and accepted meanings that were magnified by the visual images presented in the video for this song. I was twelve years old when this song appeared on the airwaves and I recall watching it for the first time on Casey Kassem’s *America’s Top Ten* (1970s-1980s) television show. I recall questioning my mother about the images depicted in the video for *The Message*. I could not comprehend the fact that the lyrics and visuals for this song were actually someone’s lived experiences and social realities. This was the year that hip-hop expanded my worldview beyond the small town where I lived to include the larger society. The years following my introduction into the “realness” of hip-hop that began with Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five’s (1982) *The Message* also saw my initiation into the use of multiple
narratives of lived experiences and social realities using a single text presented by one speaker, a skill that has become part of the intertextuality in spoken word poetry. Artists such as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, Grandmaster Melle Mel and Furious Five, and the Sugar Hill Gang lyrics featured black vernacular language as part of their mediated narratives with encoded messages that offered social critique of their lived experiences and social realities in metropolitan areas. By the 1990s, hip-hop had entered the mainstream of commercialization with rappers and rap groups like Public Enemy, Tone Loc, and M. C. Hammer finding success on the popular music charts. It was during this decade that hip-hop started to move away from its humble beginnings as a social movement towards commercialization. Initially, hip-hop was a masculine art-form that used musical expression to verbally construct space through public displays of the performer’s lyrical skills.

Early rap music lyrics used language that challenged dominant discourses associated with racism and oppression as evident in the ways in which rappers used “the language of nation to rearticulate a history of racial oppression and struggle that can energize the movements towards black empowerment and independence” (Decker, 1993, p. 54). Rap was a social movement created by historically marginalized groups in which “a number of rap artists have chronicled urban life experiences through a variety of subgenres, styles, and mediums” (Stephens & Wright, 2000, p. 28), thus using their lyrics to reflect their lived experiences and social realities and challenge dominant discourses (Hyde, 2012). Decker (1993) analyzed how the language in rap music empowered and established imagined communities between rappers and their listeners or audiences (Anderson, 1983). He found that rappers used past discourses to situate their lived experiences and social realities or that of their ancestors in the present day context as illustrated
in Public Enemy’s (1989) *Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos*, in which these artists explore the impact of slavery on blacks in the United States through these lyrics:

They got me rottin’ in the time that I’m servin’
Tellin’ you what happened the same time they’re throwin’
4 of us packed in a cell like slaves - oh well
The same motherfucker got us livin’ is his hell
You have to realize - what it’s a form of slavery
Organized under a swarm of devils
Straight up - word’em up on the level
The reasons are several, most of them federal
Here is my plan anyway and I say
I got gusto, but only some I can trust - yo
Some do a bid from 1 to 10
And I never did, and plus I never been
I’m on a tier where no tears should ever fall
Cell block and locked - I never clock it y’all
’Cause time and time again time
They got me servin’ to those and to them
I’m not a citizen
But ever when I catch a C-O
Sleepin’ on the job - my plan is on go-ahead
On the strength, I’ma tell you the deal
I got nothin’ to lose
’Cause I’m goin’ for the steel. (*It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*, Def Jam)

This song illustrates the use of music as a reaction to dominant discourses surrounding the lived experiences and social realities of historically marginalized groups, specifically black males, through the verbal construction of space as a site of resistance, social interaction, discourse, and social practice. Employing “polyrhythmic syncopations [to] embrace both the nuances and jagged edges of the collective Black Experience” (Henderson, 1996, p. 309), black youth created new dialogues by blending, sampling, mixing, and scratching into their narratives. Decker (1993) maintains that “rappers not only uncover but update a recent history of racial struggles for today’s black youth who otherwise would have little or no access to this empowering past” (p. 55). Using storytelling, especially during their live performances, rappers encouraged their
audiences to engage in its integrated aesthetics across dichotomies of difference through their language use and its accepted meanings.

From the 1990s hip-hop, L. L. Cool J materialized as the new face and sound of rap music which had become violent and misogynistic. Instead, L. L. Cool J released *Around the Way Girl* (1990) as a discourse of empowerment paying homage to the girls from his neighborhood of Bay Shores, New York. With lyrics such as:

I want a girl with extensions in her hair  
Bamboo earrings  
At least two pair  
A Fendi bag and a bad attitude  
That’s all I need to get me in a good mood  
She can walk with a switch and talk with street slang  
I love it when a woman is scared to do her thing  
Standing at a bus stop sucking on a lollipop  
Once she gets pumping it’s hard to make the hottie stop  
She likes to dance to the rap jam  
She sweet as brown sugar with the candied yams  
Honey coated complexion  
Using Camay  
Let’s hear it for the girl  
She’s from around the way. (*Mama Said Knock You Out*, Def Jam)

In this rap song L. L. Cool J describes his idea of attractive, streetwise girls with fashion sense in metropolitan areas. Using black vernacular language from the 1990s, he also deconstructs stereotypical representations of black females by highlighting their internal beauty.

As a rap song, *Around the Way Girl* (1990) opens with a sample of the chorus from the Mary Jane Girls, *All Night Long* (1983) with the lyrics:

You got me shook up/shook down; on your loving. (*Mary Jane Girls*, Gordy Records)

When analyzed in the contexts of the musical accompaniment, the words to *Around the Way Girl* (1990) are accentuated through L. L. Cool J’s use of sampling as he reappropriates language and accepted meanings in his present day context. With the implementation of sampling, L. L. Cool
J’s *Around the Way Girl* (1990) is transformed into ritualized storytelling with encoded messages set to polyrhythmic syncopation blending multiple narratives in a single text through the use of structural signification, refrain, and riffs. He uses his lyrics to deconstruct stereotypical representations of women and girls from his hometown. L. L. Cool J employs his voice as an instrument by differentiating his articulations of the word “hair.” He utilizes shorten pronunciations of the words “day,” “shorts,” and “crew” and in the “honey coated complexion” as well as elongating words such as “hair,” “earrings,” “attitude,” “slang,” “lollipop,” “jam,” “honey,” and “Camay.” He also uses breath pauses between the words “hair” and “bamboo” as well as “switch,” “and,” and “talk.” Each of these approaches enabled L. L. Cool J to use his voice, intonation, and sampling to introduce multiple narratives in a single text. Hip-hop artists, specifically rappers, are storytellers drawing on the griot tradition of Africa, with rappers using mediated narratives to share stories of their lived experiences and social realities, and public spaces as sites of resistance (Brown, 1999; Dimitriadis, 1996; Stapleton, 1998). By inviting other artists and discourses into its conversations,

> rap [has] quickly developed into a complex performance genre in which artists from lower and middle class backgrounds, different ethnicities, races, nationalities, and communities, combined politically conscious poetry with collages of musical beats that [speak], simultaneously, in opposition to the macro societal structure of the United States. (Stephens & Wright, 2000, p. 24)

This has enabled hip-hop to cross the intersections of race, gender, and class through the artist’s delivery of social commentaries tempered with suggestions for resolutions while reflecting marginalized discourses as sites of resistance and social interactions in larger societal conversations (Stephens & Wright, 2000). Embracing the discourses opened by hip-hop music in the early 1980s, black women began entering this genre with stories of their lived experiences and social realities. One of the earliest female rappers was Roxanne Shante who on 1984, she
issued a reply to UTFO’s (1984) song *Roxanne* titled *Roxanne’s Revenge* (1984) (Berry, 1994; Hobson & Bartlow, 2007; Keyes, 2000). Davis (1999) believed that women forged new territory by using their lyrics to express their discontent with the standards of womanhood established in dominant discourses. Black women rappers used their words to reject oppression and to verbalize their disdain regarding the representation, or the lack thereof, of women in hip-hop culture. Rose (1994) believed that black women hip-hop artists worked within the “system” of rap music to deconstruct the sexual and racial underpinnings of the genre. Employing a variety of techniques such as developing their own record labels and writing their own songs, black women rappers found ways to negotiate social boundaries associated with hip hop and rap music by creating their own identities discourses within it.

Since its inception in the 1970s, hip-hop has mixed music and poetry as part of the artists’ narratives of lived experiences and social realities derived from their daily lives. Serving as contemporary griots, metaphorically speaking, rappers are very close relatives of spoken word poets who also relay cultural and political information to their listeners and audiences. As part of hip-hop culture, rap music serves “to form a cohesive bond among urban youths” (Stapleton, 1998, p. 231). Drawing on the intertextuality in spoken word poetry derived from hip-hop, spoken word poets use their lived experiences and social realities set to music as public negotiations of dominant discourses.

**Spoken Word Poetry: Pedagogy, Pop Culture, and Education**

I recall the first time I was exposed to popular culture in the classroom. I was in tenth grade and my English II teacher used song lyrics to teach us how to diagram sentences. Mrs. H. chose a song by the black female group Klymaxx (1984), titled *Meeting in the Ladies Room*. She placed the lyrics on a transparency and projected the words on a white screen. We were asked to
read the words aloud, but most of us were familiar with this song and opted to sing instead, much to Mrs. H.’s dissatisfaction. What I remember about this activity is the fact that a teacher thought of using music as an instructional tool. Mrs. H. moved the lesson on diagraming sentences from the textbook to the real world for me. As I relived this moment in the context of my study, I recalled enjoying this lesson more than any of the others that Mrs. H. taught because Bernadette Cooper, a vocalist in Klymaxx, did not sing her lyrics, she spoke them in a sassy, alto voice. Cooper used her voice and intonation to articulate her narrative of lived experiences and social realities regarding a public outing with her boyfriend and the attention that he received from other women attending the event. This is substantiated by the opening stanza of the song:

I had to leave my condo to come to this
Well, this time I’m with my man
And these women are putting their hands all over his
Yamamoto Kanzai sweater that I bought
And I’m much, much unhappy about that
I’d hate to go back to their level and become a BW
A basic woman but if they
Don’t stop it’s gonna get scandalous. (Meeting in the Ladies Room, MCA Records)

While working on this study, I reflected on this experience and the ways in which this influenced my decision to use spoken word poetry in my counseling sessions and classroom instruction. I realized after listening to Meeting in the Ladies Room (1984) that many of the attributes that appear in spoken word poetry and were delivered in the lyrics by Bernadette Cooper are also present in Tracie Morris’s poem Project Princess (1998). Cooper spoken lines provided an emotion-driven, first-person testimony of her lived experiences and social realities that introduced new language and new meanings through ritualized storytelling syncopated against musical rhythms derived from African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop.
As I began studying, the intertextuality in spoken word poetry using Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess* as a case study, I drew on Mrs. H.’s lesson as a model for connecting spoken word poetry to pedagogy and education. I began contemplating the pedagogical implications of studying the intertextuality in spoken word poetry using its genealogical contributions as a guide in twenty-first century classrooms. Considering the impact of exploring the intertextuality in spoken word poetry in the context of pedagogy and education, I was hard-pressed to characterize the notion of pedagogy for the purposes of this study. I decided to use Wright’s (1993) description of pedagogy “as empowerment that comes from acting on one’s own behalf” (p. 26). I chose Wright’s (1993) work because it expressed the ways in which poets use their narratives of lived experience and social realities to manufacture a sense of belonging among their listeners or audiences. In this genre, poets use their texts to create sites of resistance and to open spaces for negotiating dominant discourses through the use of counter-narratives that integrate their personal knowledge, lived experiences, and social realities into a single text, during public performances (Andrews, 2004; Freishtat & Sandlin, 2010; Giroux, 2000; Hill, 2009; Jones, 2004; Kinloch, 2005; Nunley, 2008; Sandlin et. al., 2011; Sandlin & Milam, 2008).

Often, spoken word poetry texts include situated knowledge similar to the Klymaxx song; however, unlike *Meeting in the Ladies Room* (1984), poets use improvisation as part of their cultural aesthetics to construct their narratives of lived experiences and social realities in their present day context. Mitchell (2010) defines cultural aesthetics as “the dialogic relationship between the people and their environment [which leads] to a way of experiencing the world that is reflected in the art that they produce” (p. 608). He used ethnomusicology to explore the role of improv in the development of cultural aesthetics. This study proposed the establishment of an oppositional consciousness to promote the use of pedagogically meaningful relationships that are
communal, “intentional” (Mitchell, 2010, p. 627), and cultural, in which the social interactions are relevant to the lives, experiences, and realities of the participants (Mitchell, 2010).

In this study, Mitchell (2010) discussed improv as a form of cultural aesthetics used in Blues music. For the purposes of my study, I have expanded his idea to include spoken word poetry. However, the use of “improvisation as an aesthetic in everyday discourses rooted in [lived] experiences” (Mitchell, 2010, p. 616) and social realities of poets is an extension of African oral tradition and hip-hop in which the speaker’s narratives are both “reflexive and self-reflexive” (Mitchell, 2010, p. 619) as oral and written texts. This is evidenced in free-style rap and rap battles of the 1980s, as portrayed in the film 8 Mile, in 2002, starring Eminem and Mekhi Phifer. The character of Jimmy (portrayed by Eminem) possessed “the ability to tap into culturally informed ways of knowing” (Mitchell, 2010, p. 615), which was rap music, and “[infuse] the composition of existing knowledge with newly acquired knowledge subsequently constituting a pedagogically meaningful form of improvisation” (Mitchell, 2010, p. 615) adopted from Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Black Arts Movement. Jimmy (8 Mile), a young, white male used a predominately black art-form (hip-hop/rap) to articulate his narratives of lived experiences and social realities in which his “art [reflected] the experience of the artist” (Mitchell, 2010, 624), and to create a bond between him and his audience (Sutton, 2004). By sharing his narratives, even though the audience was initially against him because he was a white male, Jimmy was able to use cultural aesthetics in his performance to bring the audiences’ attention to his narrative through his oral delivery.

Like Jimmy (8 Mile), in their oral texts, spoken word poets oral texts include the “creative use of oral language for the purposes of socialization and cultural survival” (Sutton, 2004, p. 215) in which their public performances contain history, music, lived experiences, and
social realities as essential components of the poets’ texts (Sutton, 2004). The use of cultural aesthetics to explore the intertextuality in spoken word poetry enabled me to draw on my lived experiences and social realities while allowing other narratives to be heard, analyzed, and interpreted as counter-narratives. Sutton (2004) examined spoken word poetry as a literary event used to establish relationships between the poet and their audience or listener. Based on the contested origins of spoken word poetry (See p. 32), its intertextuality emerges in the poets’ texts as narratives of their lived experiences and social realities situated in their present day context centered on discourses of agency, self-representation, and self-expression (Fisher, 2005).

Spoken word poets recycle narratives of their lived experiences and social realities from multiple points of view as “linear interpretation of the past” (Sangari, 1987, p. 159) that blends learning, lived experiences, and social realities in a single text, an approach to storytelling acquired from African oral tradition and hip-hop (Fisher, 2005). Sangari (1987) explores the use of narratives as political texts by historically marginalized groups. She found that these groups used their texts to open “conceptual space[s]” (p. 157) for social interactions and political activism in which “the narratives return to fixed points again and again from different directions” (Sangari, 1987, p. 168), as used in Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Black Arts Movement. Using intertextuality poets, in this genre, provides contemporary articulations of their lived experiences and social realities by using hybridity which includes symbolism, metaphors, and other literary devices in their texts to relocate language and accepted meanings, and to construct new knowledge in the areas of “critical thinking, writing, and voice” (Camangian, 2008, p. 35). Incorporating literary devices into their texts, poets present complex and diverse discourses through the use of their voices, intonations, facial expressions, gestures,
and body movements to construct identities, socialize, and offer multiple “truths” using a single narrative.

Spoken word poets present their poems in public discussions as collaborative experiences in which they provide a narrative of their lived experiences and social realities situated in their present day context. Essentially, spoken word poems are thematic narratives delivered non-sequentially, a practice that began in African oral tradition in which “repetition is the mnemonic glue that binds the story as well as that which allows the stories a point from which to depart in a different direction” (Sangari, 1987, p. 168). Catteral (2005) and Dyson (2005) studied the ways in which individuals use their texts to tell “fictions” or stories in public spaces to engage their audiences or listeners in their narratives. Dowdy (2007) examined the way that spoken word poets use public spaces as venues. He found that spoken word poets used small venues as political spaces designed to create bonds between the poet and their listeners or audiences. He discovered that intimate spaces generate collective agency and a sense of belonging among participants while manufacturing ideas of empowerment first explored in African oral tradition and later during the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement. Dowdy (2007) concluded that small venues enable spoken word poets to develop aesthetics of self-representation through the sharing of lived experiences and social realities as visual, written, or oral texts which creates counter-narratives that challenge dominant discourses.

The use of physical or imagined spaces enables the poets’ to merge their voices and bodies during their public performances to develop a relationship with their listeners or audiences, through the sharing of lived experiences and social realities as aesthetics of self-representation by reinventing and manipulating language and accepted meanings in their present day context. Sparks and Grochowski (2002) suggest that spoken word poetry is used to construct
knowledge by negotiating dominant discourses and enabling poets to establish new identities. Poets use the intertextuality in spoken word poetry to give agency to marginalized groups by creating spaces that address everyday issues, create alternative constructions of reality through the use of counter-narratives which open new dialogues. Spoken word poems create hybrid spaces as locations of resistance, social interactions, and cultural practices, in which meaning is derived from historical accounts across time, thus opening transverse paths between fiction and reality as a form of self-representation among historically marginalized groups (Sangari, 1987). According to Sutton (2004), “poets craft their messages by means of their voice tone, speed, volume, and pitch” (Sutton, 2004, p. 227) to deliver social commentaries and explore social issues by allowing the poets and their audiences or listeners to make connections through sounds and dialogue. Relying on a connection between the poets, their narratives, and their audiences or listeners, intertextuality in spoken word poetry serves as an outlet for the sharing of lived experiences and social realities as aesthetics of self-expression used to evoke thoughts, ideas, and political action (Jocson, 2005).

Spoken word poetry is a form of self-expression and self-representation in which poets incorporate emotions in the delivery of their narratives, and rhyming is not an essential component of the poets’ written texts or public performances. Kinloch (2005) views spoken word poetry as a “lesson plan” for politicizing the thoughts, ideas, and experiences of individuals in a “classroom” setting. She proposed the use of a literocracy to unveil hidden truths through the poet’s public performances where language and accepted meanings are important components of social interactions. A literocracy promotes the development of reciprocal relationships in which a consciousness of difference is established during the exchange of information. This consciousness of difference presents the poets’ interpretation of reality and allows their texts to
have freedom from the constraints of Standard English grammar; thus, raising the consciousness level of the poets’ audiences or listeners. These poets incorporate the intertextuality in spoken word poetry to unveil hidden truths and to defamiliarize their lived experiences and social realities during their public performances (Jocson, 2005; Kinloch, 2005). Existing between the dichotomy of orality and written texts, spoken word poems are embedded with issues of interest to the poets, who incorporate literary devices into their texts. These poets present complex and diverse discourses through the use of their voices, intonations, facial expressions, gestures, and body movements which connect the poets and their audiences or listeners through dialogue.

Spoken word poetry is situated knowledge in which the poets share their narratives of lived experiences and social realities. Poetry is a form of expression that creates sites of resistance and open spaces that give agency to historically marginalized groups by shaping the consciousness of the poets’ audiences or listeners; hence, breaking silences and exposing the intensity of language and accepted meanings in dominant discourses. Jocson (2005) encouraged the use of “collaborative intervention” to enable silent voices and marginalized discourses to be heard in larger societal conversations. Using counter-narratives spoken word poets rearticulate narratives of their lived experiences and social realities from multiple points of view in a single text. Their use of improvisation during their public performances enables these poets to situate their narratives in ways that are meaningful to their listeners or audiences.

Incorporating popular culture to teach skills associated with English Language Arts is not a new idea; I experienced this phenomenon in Mrs. H.’s English II classroom. I drew on my engagement with Klymaxx’s (1984) *Meeting in the Ladies Room* as I considered the ways in which the intertextuality in spoken word poetry can be used in twenty-first century classrooms as pedagogy and education. I contemplated the ways in which spoken word poetry had been used to
create spaces of self-representation and self-expression as sites of resistance challenging
dominant discourses. Returning to Wright’s (1993) concept of pedagogy “as empowerment that
comes from acting on one’s own behalf” (p. 26), I realized the intertextuality in spoken word
poetry is a communal experience in which hybrid spaces (physical or imagined) are used to link
the poets, their narratives, and their audiences or listeners through cultural aesthetics and social
interactions.

Rationale for the Current Study

Given the recent scholarship conducted on spoken word poetry and its use as an
instructional tool within the last ten years, it is of paramount importance to study intertextuality
in spoken word poetry. In the current study, I trace the intertextuality in spoken word poetry as a
subcategory of hip-hop culture and music, through its roots in the African oral tradition, the
Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop. I focus this
study on a poem by Tracie Morris, Project Princess, because her work offers a solid context to
explore the richness, diversity, and complexities of the intertextuality in spoken word poetry. It is
also her most anthologized descriptive poem and is considered her first spoken word poem
featuring the use of sounds (Crown, 2002, 2003; Hume, 2006; Morris, 2007b, 2012b; Singler,
2010). My study is part of the larger field of popular culture in education guided by the following
questions: How does intertextuality function in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem Project
Princess? What role does the genealogy of spoken word poetry play in understanding the
intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem Project Princess? In what ways does the
intertextuality in spoken word poetry play at the intersections of race, gender, and class in Tracie
Morris’s spoken word poem Project Princess? What are the pedagogical implications for
studying the intertextuality in spoken word poetry derived from its genealogical contributions in
twenty-first century classrooms using Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* as an example?

I use narrative inquiry as my research methodology to investigate, analyze, and articulate the nuances that exist as part of the intertextuality in spoken word poetry. I aim to accomplish this through a narrative analysis of the data which situates the intertextuality of the selected spoken word poet’s text in larger societal conversations. I use public pedagogy, performance studies, and intertextuality theory to explore the ways in which the poets’ narratives act as sites of resistance and open spaces for dialectical and social interactions.

**Summary**

I was visually drawn to spoken word poetry after viewing the performance of Taylor Mali’s poem *What a Teacher Makes*, for the first time on *Def Poetry*, in 2002. Although I had been listening to mainstream spoken word poetry on compact disc since 1993, it was not a concrete experience for me until I began to consider its association with visual representations and no musical accompaniment. Using the cultural aesthetics contained in the African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Black Arts Movement, the intertextuality in spoken word poetry is framed by its oral interpretations of these spoken or written traditions (Mitchell, 2010).

Given the complex history and diverse origins of spoken word poetry, its intertextuality transitions across its genealogical influences and emerges as constantly evolving and expanding discourses. These discourses enable spoken word poets to use the art of storytelling developed by the griots of Africa to produce narratives of lived experiences and social realities which are also embedded in the texts produced during the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement. Integrating musical characteristics derived from Jazz Poetry and the Blues, spoken word poets
use their voices as instruments for rhythms and improvisational displays of musical expression. Educators are finding creative ways to introduce pedagogy contained in spoken word poetry into classroom instruction by utilizing intertextuality derived from its genealogy.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY
COUNTER-NARRATIVES, DADA POETICS, AND STORYTELLING

In this chapter, I present the research methodology chosen for this study. I open the chapter with a restatement of the problem and reintroduce the research questions before offering a biographical sketch of Tracie Morris, and a description of her spoken word poem *Project Princess*, the subject of this case study. Follows a review of the data sources, the procedures for data collection, then a discussion of the research design, and the analysis techniques implemented. I close the chapter with a consideration of ethical issues, and of the measures taken to strengthen the integrity of this research.

**Restatement of the Problem**

So far, scholars have focused on the development of spoken word poetry using specific literary, cultural, and musical movements such as African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, and hip-hop. Scholarship in this area has yet to explore the relationship of each identified literary, cultural, and musical movement to the development of the intertextuality in spoken word poetry and the meaning of spoken word poetry in the context of pedagogy and education. In this study, using Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* as a case study, I explore the intertextuality in spoken word poetry, employing narrative inquiry as my research methodology and drawing on my understandings of the literary, cultural, and musical movements that scholars identified as contributing to the genealogy of spoken word poetry.

**Research Questions**

This study addresses the following research questions:

- How does intertextuality function in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*?
What role does the genealogy of spoken word poetry play in understanding the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*?

In what ways does the intertextuality in spoken word poetry play at the intersections of race, gender, and class in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*?

What are the pedagogical implications for studying the intertextuality in spoken word poetry derived from its genealogical contributions in twenty-first century classrooms using Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* as an example?

**Context: Tracie Morris and *Project Princess***

In this study, I draw on the artistic culture of spoken word poets to explore the intertextuality in spoken word poetry. From this genre, I have selected one black woman spoken word poet, Tracie Morris, whose work exhibits the intertextuality in spoken word poetry as influenced by its roots in African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop. I analyze her most anthologized spoken word poem, *Project Princess*, as a case study.

**The Author: Tracie Morris**

Tracie Morris launched her career as a poet on the Nuyorican Poets Café stage, in the 1990s, which ultimately contributed to her collaboration with other spoken word poets on their albums and in worldwide tours, and led to the publication of her first two books, *Intermission* (1998) and *Chap-T-her-Won* (1993) (Angelesey, 1999; Crown, 2002, 2003; Hume, 2006; Lenhart, 2006; Morris, 2007a; Sengupta, 1998; Zapg, 2006). In 1993, she won both the National Haiku Slam Championship and the Grand Slam Championship (Angelesey, 1999; Hume, 2006; Jones, 2011; Sengupta, 1998).
Since then, Tracie Morris has become a force to be reckoned with as a poet and an academic for her work as a singer, sound artist, writer, bandleader, and actor (Hume, 2006; traciemorris.com). She holds the following degrees: a Bachelor of Art in Performance Studies, a Master of Art in Performance Studies, and a Doctor of Philosophy in Performance Studies from New York University, and a Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing – Poetry from Hunter College (CUNY) (prattinstitute.edu; traciemorris.com). Her dissertation, *Who Do With Words: Rapping a Black Tongue Around J.L. Austin*, was completed and defended in 2006. She was awarded a fellowship from the Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing from the University of Pennsylvania (2007-2008) (prattinstitute.edu; traciemorris.com). As an academic, Morris has held positions at the Pratt Institute (Associate Professor of Humanities and Media Studies, her current position), and at Temple University (Visiting Professor of English), and has taught at Sarah Lawrence College (Angelesey, 1999; prattinstitute.edu; traciemorris.com). She has served on the Board of Directors for the Pratt Institute Cave Canem Foundation as Coordinator of Performance and Performance Studies Program (2008-2010), and was Chair of the Benefit Committee for the Pratt Institute Cave Canem Foundation (2009-2011) (prattinstitute.edu; traciemorris.com).

As a self-taught poet, Tracie Morris is an American writer and multidisciplinary performance poet who uses stylized vocalizations and improvisational techniques (Crown, 2002, 2003; Hume, 2006; Morris, 2007b). She has participated in installations for the Whitney Biennial, the Ronald Feldman Gallery, the Jamaican Center for Arts and Learning, and the New Museum (Hume, 2006; Jones, 2011; prattinstitute.edu; traciemorris.com). According to Crown (2002), “Tracie Morris is a poet whose origins are thoroughly embedded in the Spoken Word movement, and most of her poems are meant for public performances, whether as monologues or
dialogues to be delivered in theatrical settings, or as ‘lyrics’” (p. 213). In the early days of her career as a poet, Tracie Morris used songs to introduce her spoken word poems which included the singing of certain words or stanzas. Morris’s poetry reflects “spoken word, hip-hop and rap” (Jones, 2011, p. 187) becoming a “subversive seat” (Jones, 2011, p. 188) of resistance and socialized interactions. It enables her spoken word poems to cross race, gender, and class discourses by combining multidimensional layers anchored in the literary, cultural, and historical origins of words, language, and accepted meanings through the use of sounds and improvisational techniques such as elongation, fragmentation, repetition, phrasal closure, wordplay, and versifying (Crown, 2002, 2003; Freishtat & Sandlin, 2010; Hume, 2006; Jones, 2011). This is substantiated in her most recent publications and audio projects such as *TDJ: To Do with John* (2011) published by Zasterle Press, *Rhyme Scheme* (2012c) published by Chax Press, The Tracie Morris Band, and *sharpmorris*, her collaborative work with composer Elliot Sharp (traciemorris.com).

Crown (2002) found that verbalization of words and sounds in Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess* delivered social commentaries and calls for political action in the form of storytelling as an extension of the African oral tradition situated in the present day context. Relying on the physicality of words and sounds in her spoken word poems such as *A Little* (2012a), *The Mrs. Gets Her Ass Kicked (a.k.a. Heaven)* (2005), and *Chain Gang* (2006), Tracie Morris has written, recorded, and performed these and other working-class and bilingual works such as *Las Brujitas* (1998) and *Morenita* (2003) (Crown, 2002, 2003; Hume, 2006; Jones, 2003, 2011; Morris, 2007b; Ramazani, 2011). Later, she began to use code switching, rhyme schemas, and sounds to deconstruct words while using her body as well as her voice as instruments in her poems; “this level of sound incorporation links directly to the blues, jazz songs, gospel songs,
and ring shouts, which all convey more than one meaning at a time” (Rankine & Sewell, 2007, p. 212).

**Case Study: Morris’s *Project Princess***

*Project Princess* is Tracie Morris’s most anthologized descriptive poem and is considered one of her first spoken word poem featuring the use of sounds (Crown, 2002, 2003; Hume, 2006; Morris, 2007b, 2012b; Singler, 2010). Set in an urban housing development, *Project Princess* is an ode and a rallying cry to young, black girls in Brooklyn where Tracie Morris was raised (Crown, 2002; Hume, 2006). Paying homage to her urban roots (Crown, 2002, 2003; Hume, 2006), it features “sassy hip-hop-derived rhymes, about sex and power” (Sengupta, 1998). The spoken word poem *Project Princess* video (2010) includes two adolescent black girls standing in a fenced area surrounded by several high-rise apartment buildings performing many of the same gestures and body movements as Tracie Morris when she acts her poem. This spoken word poem addresses issues of the 1990s misogynistic rap music by presenting images of “a confident, sartorially clever hip-hop chic instead of a subjugated hip-hop chick or ‘chickenhead’” (Jones, 2011, p. 190). The visual language of this poem provides the listener/viewer with racial narratives that juxtaposition the commonalities of lived experiences and shared social realities which exist between Tracie Morris’s lyrics and the girls in the video as each engaged with the text.

**Page Poetry Version.** As a written text, *Project Princess* has appeared in *Aloud: Voices from the Nuyorican Poet’s Café* (1994), *The Outlaw Bible of American Poetry* (1996), and *United States of Poetry* (1996). In this study, I use the 1998 version of *Project Princess* (Appendix B) often referred to as “the hip-hop version” available online (Morris, 2010). It follows traditional poetry standards with regards to the use of stanzas, verses, rhyme schemes,
couplets, figurative language, and multiple meaning words. It is written in American English language and contains street vernacular of the 1990s. As a written text, the length of this poem is forty-two lines, totaling 208 words. There are eleven stanzas with two to seven verses per stanza marked by blank spaces between each set of verses. There is a total of three consecutive external rhymes (rocks, socks; thighs, sigh; fists, persist), two non-consecutive cross rhymes (one line apart: face, place; twist, mist), and two slant rhymes (goddess, modest; plate, eighty-eight). Two apostrophes have been inserted into the text as place holders for missing letters or numbers (coolin’; ’88). This version of the poem is remarkably different from the spoken word poetry lyrics.

**Oral Performance Version.** In this study I used Morris’s oral performance of *Project Princess* because of one of my conceptual frameworks (performance studies) and two methods of data analysis (dialogic/performance analysis; visual analysis) suggest that the lyrics, performance, and images are to be analyzed and interpreted as independent texts working collectively as part of Tracie Morris’s narrative of lived experiences and social realities. Several recordings of oral performances of *Project Princess* were made. The video I use in this study was originally recorded in 1998, but was uploaded to *YouTube* on December 23, 2010. In this oral performance version of *Project Princess*, Tracie Morris begins with the chant of a children game limerick after which she repeats the opening verse of the poem twice and uses the last word as a sound cluster repeated five times. The chant is echoed as part of the chorus surrounding the first two verses of the poem. During the delivery of her text, Tracie Morris shortens the pronunciation of certain words, adds breath pauses between words, and allows her voice to fluctuate between the use of quick speech patterns and slower articulations of the lyrics. Oratorically manipulating the sounds, words, language and meaning embedded in *Project*
Princess, Tracie Morris’s voice serves as an instrument, breaking her text into sounds, elongating words, singing certain words, alternating song and talk, syllabicating words, and repeating sounds, words, phrases, or verses. This video version (2010) of Project Princess is significantly different from the page poetry version in that words have been omitted, changed, or added with an alternative verse added near the end of the song by Tracie Morris. In her public performance, near the end of this spoken word poem, Tracie Morris imitates hip-hop’s scratching and turntablism technique through the use of sound clusters, fragmentation, stuttering, and elongation of words.

Data Sources

I used Tracie Morris’s poem Project Princess because this work incorporates variations of improv, vocalized intonations and sampling, which engage with the genealogy of spoken word poetry in her oral delivery of this text, and provide social commentaries on larger societal discourses. One spoken word poet and one text were used for this study to enable me to conduct an in-depth analysis of the ways in which intertextuality in spoken word poetry emerges, how it is derived from its genealogical contributions, and in what ways it plays at the intersections of race, gender, and class. The poem Project Princess is used with written permission from Tracie Morris for dissertation purposes only. For this study, I collected data regarding Project Princess and Tracie Morris from the following sources: page poetry from the World of Poetry website (Appendix A); video from GRITV/Poetry Corner on You Tube and its transcription of the lyrics from the music video (Appendix B); audio interview on the Penn Sound website and its transcription from the Penn Sound website (see Appendix C); three essays (written by or about Tracie Morris) (see Appendix D); and the Tracie Morris webpage (see Appendix E).
**Page Poetry (Appendix A)**

I printed the 1998 version of *Project Princess* available on the World of Poetry website; however, the poem was published for the first time in *Aloud: Voices from the Nuyorican Poet’s Café* (1994). In the upper left corner, the United State of Poetry website has an image of a map of the United States with the letters USOP centered, in all capital letters. The title of the poem is lined up with the text centered on the page. The poem is written in Times New Roman font twelve in white upper and lower case letters. There are a total of seven pictures of Morris, the first one is repeated twice and the others once; they are flushed to the left with one of the poem lyrics quoted under each image in bold print italics. These three pictures and quotes are repeated for a total of six. In the top right corner of the page an audio hyperlink connects the viewer to an audio recording of this poem.

**Video and its Transcription (Appendix B)**

The video of *Project Princess* (2010) is available on *You Tube* through GRITv/Poetry Corner, and Daily Motion. I selected the version of the poem by GRITv/Poetry Corner posted on December 23, 2010. The video has a running-time of one minute fifty-eight seconds. It is in color and features Tracie Morris with two adolescent black girls standing in a fenced area near high-rise apartment buildings. Tracie Morris performs the poem without musical accompaniment, using her voice, intonations, gestures, and body movements as part of her narrative. At the end of the poem she sings the last line which concludes her retelling of her lived experiences and social realities. Using the video posted by GRITv/Poetry Corner (2010), I transcribed the lyrics of Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess*. 
Audio Interview and its Transcription (Appendix C)

There are two audio interviews available online between Tracie Morris and Charles Bernstein on “Close Listening.” One version is published on the Art on Air website, and the other is on the Penn Sound website. I used the interview on the Penn Sound website dated May 22, 2005 because it was segmented based on Tracie Morris’s poems and included a discussion of each text prior to her performances. The Penn Sound website has a light green background, a column on the left side with a menu, and on the right side of the page Tracie Morris’s name, with the title, location, and date. Under this information, the word “singles” appears, and each segment is listed and numbered from one to twenty-two with copyright information beneath the number twenty-two entry. The discussion of Project Princess is number twenty-one and Tracie Morris’s performance of the poem, number twenty-two. The running-time of the Penn Sound interview is twenty-eight minutes and ten seconds; however, the segment regarding Project Princess is thirty-eight seconds of discussion and one minute and twenty-five seconds of another oral rendering of the poem. The Penn Sound interview podcast on which Tracie Morris performed Project Princess (audio) was reviewed for this study, but for the video of the spoken word poem, I chose to focus my analysis on the version by GRTV/Poetry Corner (2010).

On the Penn Sound website, I selected interview number twenty-one to transcribe Tracie Morris’s description of her poem Project Princess. When I clicked on the blue play arrow, I was linked to a black screen with a taskbar in the center. In this portion of the interview, Tracie Morris explained that there are three recorded iterations of the poem Project Princess. She described this text as the first poem where she began to experiment with the use of sounds. Her rationale for performing this poem with alterations that include experimentations with sounds
was briefly discussed. Other materials were used for this study including three essays and a website. I describe each separately beginning with the essays.

**Essays (Appendix D)**

The first essay I used was an autobiographical account by Tracie Morris beginning her poetry career as a novice on the Nuyorican Poet’s Café stage in 1993. This essay appears in the chapter on “Ad-Libbing” (2007b) in Alix Olson’s edited book *Word Warriors: 35 Women Leaders in the Spoken Word Revolution*. A black and white picture of Tracie Morris holding a microphone in her right hand marks the opening page of the essay. Her name is in uppercase and lowercase letters with the title of the essay centered beneath her name. The essay is a four page recollection of Tracie Morris’s personal journey from novice to performance poet which is followed by two of her poems: *Apology to Pangea* (2007b) and *Las Brujititas* (2007b). I used this essay to verify the authenticity of Tracie Morris’s lived experiences and social realities contained in her poem *Project Princess*.

The next essay is a biographical account of Tracie Morris’s emergence as a poet in New York, published in Zoe Anglesey’s (1999) edited book *Listen Up!: Spoken Word Poetry* in the section titled Tracie Morris. A black and white picture of Tracie Morris is on the left hand side of the page. The image features her wearing a black outfit, her right hand is folded over her left hand, and her head is titled down with her eyes closed, there is a smile on her face. Tracie Morris’s name is written in uppercase and lowercase letters, on the page opposite her image. I used this three-page-long essay to gain some insight into Tracie Morris’s lived experiences and social realities as they relate to her life in an urban housing project.

The last essay I used was a recent autobiographical piece by Tracie Morris which contains no pictures of her. It is published in Caroline Bergvall, Laynie Browne, Teresa
Carmody, and Vanessa Place’s edited book *I’ll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women* (2012b). In this essay, Tracie Morris describes her work as a poet as an experimentation with sounds during her poetry performances. Her essay is four pages of written text and one page of notes. She discusses how she began blending sounds in her earlier poems such as *The Mrs. Gets Her Ass Kicked (aka Heaven)* (2005) and her more recent work *My Great Grand Aunt Speaks to a Bush Supporter* (2005). I used this essay to examine the way in which Tracie Morris incorporates the use of sounds in her oral delivery of *Project Princess*.

**Website** (Appendix E)

Another source used to collect data in this study is Tracie Morris’s website. It is maintained by the poet and, in the upper left corner of the page, features a picture of her in a black outfit, showing part of her face, holding a microphone in her right hand in the upper left corner of the page. In the upper right corner, there is a split image of a blue sky, with white clouds, and large yellow daisies. Under the pictures are fourteen informational squares, stacked in doubles on an angle. The background is mauve with grey writing. Her name appears in a yellow box in uppercase and lowercase letters situated on an aquamarine background. Flushed left is a disclaimer statement with a description of the website that includes a welcome and gratitude section. On the homepage, there is a list of engagements with dates, description of the event types, and the events location. Beneath this area, there is a search box viewers may employ to search the site for information not currently listed. I used this site to locate additional resources such as articles, book chapters, books, or interviews which could be useful in my study. It is through this site that I was able to locate Tracie Morris’s most recent essay featured in the edited book *I’ll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writings by Women* (2012b), and initiate contact with her to obtain her written permission to use *Project Princess* in my study.
Overall Procedures for Data Collection

I collected data from *Project Princess* by printing lyrics from the internet, reading the poem with audio, listening to the poem without the written words and transcribing what I heard, reading the poem with the audio, pausing between verses, replaying the entire section of the audio, and making notes on each section before moving on to the next verse, comparing the internet lyrics to the verses I transcribed and noted contradictions, viewing the video with both versions of the lyrics (page poetry and transcription), and identifying words that were stressed, omitted, or changed as well as sounds added from the page to the performance. Data was collected from the page poetry version of *Project Princess* through silent and oral readings of the text. First, I read the poem silently underlining words that rhymed and circling multiple meaning words. Then, I read the poem aloud and identified patterns in the text in the form of sound clusters, similar word endings, sound chunks which I highlighted using different colors (Appendix B). Finally, I examined the language and accepted meanings contained in the word choice and contextualized them in 1990s discourses. Throughout the data collection process, I returned to the visual, audio, and transcriptions of the poem, making any additional notes as needed as I viewed the video, read articles, and book chapters published about Tracie Morris and this poem. I watched Tracie Morris’s music video on *YouTube* and made notes on her performance by marking verses or words emphasized by her gestures, facial expressions, or body movements. I transcribed my notes into semi-narrative segments. As I reread other interpretations of Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*, I returned to the video and my notes to compare and contrast the data.

From the video, I took notes on Tracie Morris’s verbal and non-verbal cues as extensions of her poetry and its performance. I viewed the video multiple times during this study and made
notes on its setting, characters, plot, climax, and resolution studying how the video images engaged with the actual text of Tracie Morris’s poem and its performance. I wrote down the lyrics from the poem by playing the video, pausing, rewinding, and replaying segments of the video, comparing my written text to the words in the poem. Using the page poetry version (1998) and the transcription of the video (2010) of *Project Princess*, I noted her voice and intonations as well as what gestures or body movements occurred at which point during her oral delivery. In my notes, I also described how the images interact with the performance of the poem. I viewed the same *Project Princess* video (2010) continuously throughout this study, maintaining a running record of my reaction as audience and documenting any changes or modifications to the texts from the written version available online or my transcription of the lyrics during Tracie Morris’s recorded performances. I compared my transcription of the lyrics to the written and oral texts available that used excerpts of *Project Princess* before reading the data and the poem’s analysis by other scholars. I used data collected from this audio interview to refocus my attention on the way that she uses her voice and intonation. I listened only to the discussion of *Project Princess* and Tracie Morris’s performance of the poem.

I transcribed the discussion of *Project Princess* and compared her performance on “Close Listening” to the page poetry version and my transcription of the poem. I noted anything that was different on both documents. I used Times New Roman with a twelve font to transcribe the words of the poem as pronounced in the video, and italicized words, verses, or stanzas that were repeated. I viewed the video multiple times, making handwritten notes on the transcription after each viewing, looking for words that were elongated, omitted, added, or repeated by Tracie Morris (Appendix B). I also compared my transcription of the poem to the online version available on the World of Poetry website for accuracy. I recorded which words, verses, or
stanzas were repeated, which words or phrases were reduced to phonemes that imitated hip-hop’s scratching and turntablbing techniques, and rhyme schemes. I maintained a running record on the transcription in italics and handwritten notes, documenting echoes effects, shortened pronunciations of words, word choices, speech patterns, breath pauses between words, along with a line under the word, intentional stuttering, fragmentation, song and talk, vocal intonations, which words or verses were sung, and what lines were added, omitted, or changed from the page poetry version to the video I used to transcribe the lyrics of the spoken word poem. I collected data from this essay by underlining and highlighting relevant parts of the texts. Once all the data were collected from the spoken word poem selected for my study, I sorted them and organized them for further analysis based on the spoken word poetry genealogical categories represented in this poem (African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop).

Research Design: Narrative Inquiry

In this study, I used a narrative inquiry approach to explore the intertextuality in spoken word poetry through a case study of Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem Project Princess. As a qualitative research approach, narrative inquiry is an experience-centered methodology which enabled me to use storied texts as data for analysis and interpretation, and, through the use of narrative analysis, helped me identify counter-narratives for events, experiences, or phenomena presented in dominant discourses (Mukai, 1992; Reissman, 2008). Andrews (2004) wrote that counter-narratives are “the stories which people tell and live which offer resistance, either implicitly or explicitly, to dominant cultural narratives” (p. 1). Narrative inquiry is a form of discourse in which the researcher uses the language and accepted meanings attached to the storyteller’s text to provide counter-narratives for events, experiences, or phenomena derived
from that individual’s life (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008; Britzman, 1995; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000a, b; Georgakopoulou, 2006; Hones, 1998; Reissman, 2008). The storyteller’s narrative is situated in larger societal discourses in the present day context by the researcher’s analysis, interpretation, and rearticulation of the data (Andrews, 2004; Jones, 2004; Reissman, 2008; Sole & Edmundson, 2001).

Challenging “master narratives” (Andrews, 2004, p. 1), narrative inquiry as a research methodology enabled me to provide alternative explanations for a phenomenon, event, account, or experience based on Tracie Morris’s narrative of her lived experiences and social realities past and present in Project Princess (Andrews, 2004; Jones, 2004; Moen, 2006; Reissman, 2008). According to Reissman (2008), “narratives do political work” (p. 8), using story and storytelling to make sense of a phenomenon, event, account, or experience which situates the past in the present day context (Andrews, 2004; Andrews et. al., 2008; Jones, 2004; Reissman, 2008; Sole & Edmundson, 2001). For that reason, “stories must always be considered in context, for storytelling occurs at a historical moment with its circulating discourses and power relations” (Reissman, 2008, p. 8). Thus, establishing the sharing of lived experiences and social realities with others as sites of resistance through the use of story as a space of cultural exchange and social interaction, the intertextuality in spoken word poetry “[engages] audiences through modes of artistic expression, well-illustrated in writing, painting, and the performing arts”(Reissman, 2008, p. 9).

This enables the use of stories or narratives to situate knowledge through storytelling (Reissman, 2008; Sole & Edmundson, 2001) in which “a speaker connects events into a sequence that is consequential for later action and for the meaning that the speaker wants the listeners to take away from the story” (Reissman, 2008, p. 3). The storyteller uses counter-
narratives which include testimonials and other personal stories (written, visual, or spoken) that present commonalities of lived experiences and social realities across texts (Andrews, 2004; Jones, 2004). Using the storytellers’ narratives of their lived experiences and social realities as interpretive texts, the “speakers draw on cultural resources in producing narratives about their personal experiences” (Andrews, 2004, p. 169) as part of their marginalized discourses. Jones (2004) stated that counter-narratives are transgressive texts that reject dominant discourses through the use of unspoken cultural knowledge. From this perspective, counter-narratives are cultural artifacts that interrogate larger societal discourses in an effort to uncover multiple “truths” concerning human experiences (Reissman, 2008), hence, connecting a sequence of events or meanings for others to interpret, or derive meaning based on the researcher’s analysis, interpretation, and retelling of the original narrative.

According to Chase (2005), the “narrative is retrospective meaning making – the shaping or ordering of past experiences” (p. 656) in which the listener develops the dual consciousness of researcher and narrator. Using small stories to construct counter-narratives, narrative inquiry helped me uncover alternative stories and meanings embedded in Tracie Morris’s poem Project Princess through my recontextualization of the poet’s narrative and the social climate of the larger society across time and space (Andrews et al., 2008; Britzman, 1995; Georgakopoulou, 2006; Moen, 2006; Mukai, 1992; Reissman, 2008). Thus, it enabled me to explore the hidden meanings contained in the words of Tracie Morris’s retelling of an event, phenomenon, or experience as counter-narratives (Andrews, 2004; Britzman, 1995; Jones, 2004; Michielsen, 2000; Moen, 2006; Reissman, 2008). The narrative inquiry approach helped me make sense of Tracie Morris’s lived experiences and social realities as oral, visual, or written reflections of her everyday life in the present day context (Reissman, 2008; Sandelowski, 1991).
Data Analysis

Although data gathered using narrative inquiry lend themselves well to various interpretative techniques, for the purpose of this study, to evaluate and interpret the data, I used narrative analysis which “in the human sciences refers to a family of approaches to diverse kinds of texts, which have in common a storied form” (Reissman, 2005, p. 1). Narrative analysis is a multi-faceted approach to data interpretation that enabled me to implement the best model for the exploration of the selected text based on the data. As a system for investigating, narrative analysis examines the ways in which language is used, organized, and interpreted via the meanings associated with either written or oral forms of communication. By concentrating on “how and why” as the story is being told or retold, narrative analysis deepens the listeners’ understanding of written or oral texts, hence enabling the inclusion of counter-narratives to explain the events, phenomena, or experiences being narrated (Andrews, 2004; Jones, 2004; Reissman, 2005; Sandelowski, 1991; Smith, 2000). In essence, narrative analysis allows the examination of language and its role in the construction of knowledge, lived experiences, and social realities of the researcher and the storyteller.

Furthermore, narrative analysis uses several models for interpreting the data; however, for this study, I will identify and discuss only four, based on their suitability in the overall scope of the topic of my research, its research design, and the nature of the data (Cortazzi, 2001; Mishler, 1995; Mukai, 1992; Reissman, 2005). The models of analysis I used in this study are: structural, thematic, dialogic/performance, and visual (Reissman, 2008). I organized the data (page poetry, video and its transcription, audio interview and its transcription, three essays, and website) in ways which allowed a more accurate and detailed interpretation of the texts with regards to what is written or spoken as well as what is inferred (or unspoken). For this reason, I
chose to incorporate these four models of narrative analysis described below to classify the collected data for the selected work. First, I used structural analysis to organize the texts, based on the information presented and the language used by concentrating my attention not only on “what is said,” but also on “how it is said” (Maynes et al., 2008; Reissman, 2005, 2008). Next, thematic analysis helped trace the historical accounts contained in Tracie Morris’s narrative by reviewing documents (see data sources), reading other texts, viewing interviews with other individuals, and transcribing audio interviews. Third, I incorporated dialogic/performative analysis to address any lingering questions unanswered by structural analysis and thematic analysis in this study, and to analyze Tracie Morris’s video performance. Finally, visual analysis was used to explore the use of video images in Project Princess as part of Tracie Morris’s text.

**Structural Analysis**

As a model of narrative analysis, structural analysis is contingent upon the function of the text and is often embedded in the moments in which that text has been encountered. I used structural analysis to examine the language and accepted meanings in Tracie Morris’s poem Project Princess as it related to “how the words were said” as well as “what was said” (Maynes, et. al., 2008; Reissman, 2005, 2008). Reissman (2008) argued that “structural analysis provides tools for investigators who want to interrogate how participants use speech to construct themselves and their histories” (p. 80). For that reason, I used structural analysis to organize Tracie Morris’s narratives in such a way as to present her interpretation of her lived experiences and social realities as part of the data. Structural analysis enabled me to organize the data based on the information presented by Tracie Morris in her spoken word poem Project Princess, thus shifting the focus of my evaluation of the data from the poet to the poem. The poem was then critiqued for its relevance to the intertextuality in spoken word poetry in an effort to determine
which verses or stanzas, or parts thereof, to use or exclude from Tracie Morris’s narrative as data.

Tracie Morris determined the ways in which her poem was represented to the larger audience based on the language and accepted meanings she used to present her narratives of lived experiences and social realities to her listeners. Exploring the ways in which language and accepted meanings are traced to their points of origin, structural analysis was used to interrogate “the way that a story is told” (Reissman, 2005, p. 3). Using this form of narrative analysis, I examined the word choices and the position of the words in Project Princess as part of the data used to identify themes in this poem for evaluation and interpretation. This type of analysis is useful in the creation of “detailed case studies and comparison of several narrative accounts” (Reissman, 2008, p. 4). By analyzing synaptic and prosodic elements of language and intonations in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem Project Princess, structural analysis enabled me to contextualize the language and accepted meanings contained in this poem based on my interpretation of the data (Barthes & Duisit, 1975; Franzosi, 1998). Therefore, the use of structural analysis helped me determine what narrative, or parts of the narrative, were important to my interpretation and rearticulation of intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem.

Thematic Analysis

I used thematic analysis to explore the time and place of discourses in Tracie Morris’s poem Project Princess by tracing the lived experiences and social realities contained in her narrative. Thematic analysis enabled me to use oral or written data as well as social histories and folklore to retell the narratives of lived experiences and social realities contained in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem Project Princess. Reissman (2008) stated that “thematic analysis is the visual approach to letters, diaries, auto/biographies – documents historians and biographers
draw on” (p. 59). Typically, thematic analysis is used in case studies or vignettes as a tool for making generalizations across readings of collected data (Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Reissman, 2005, 2008). I used thematic analysis to explore the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* by examining the language and accepted meanings to organize her narratives as data based on commonalities of lived experiences and social realities as they relate to larger societal discourses. As a result, thematic analysis helped me trace the history of events, experiences, or phenomena articulated in Tracie Morris’s poem through a review of the documents and reading, or listening to interviews.

I explored the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s poem through the language and accepted meanings contained in *Project Princess*. I identified and grouped stanzas and verses according to their similarities or related themes. In essence, thematic analysis enabled me to tease out patterns and organize them across Morris’s text. This model of narrative analysis enabled me to view the events, phenomena, or experiences using the language and accepted meanings in Tracie Morris’s poem across her text, and provide counter-narratives based on the data (Andrews, 2004; Jones, 2004; Stanley, 2007).

**Dialogic/Performance Analysis**

According to Reissman (2008), dialogic/performance analysis explores storytelling that is infused with elements of thematic analysis and structural analysis; however, dialogic/performance analysis encourages the use of multiple interpretations of the data. Dialogic/performance analysis is interactively oriented and contingent upon audience participation and interpretation to construct the “truths” of the storyteller’s narrative. Dialogic/performance analysis explores written, oral, or visual texts used by storytellers to address questions associated with “who,” “when,” and “why” through the use of story and
storytelling in the form of stage plays, movies, music videos, books, and social interactions with others. This type of narrative analysis is often “acted-out” as the storyteller uses his or her text to respond to questions of identity. Reissman (2008) believed that “narratives (especially those that appropriate theatrical conversations) are polyphonic – multi-voiced; the author (speaker) does not have the only word, that is, the authority over meaning is dispersed and embedded” (p. 107), removing authority from the narrator and spreading it among the audience; hence, decentralizing the language of the performance and allowing the performance to emerge as a new source of interpretation for the researcher and audience.

I used dialogic/performance analysis to examine the video of *Project Princess* (2010) for oral and non-oral forms of communications between Tracie Morris and her audience (Labov, 1997; Madison, 1993; Reissman, 2005, 2008). Reissman (2008) explained that “stories are social artifacts, telling us much about society and culture as they do about a person or group” (p. 105). This method of narrative analysis enabled me to explore what was included and what was excluded from Tracie Morris’s narrative from her page poem to the oral performance version (video), and to explore *Project Princess* as Tracie Morris’s story of lived experiences and social realities in which she “moves an audience through language and gesture[s]” (Reissman, 2005, p. 5). Dialogic/performance analysis helped me explore the data beyond “what is being said” and “what has been omitted,” through an examination of precise details contained in Tracie Morris’s poem from multiple points of view as counter-narratives challenging dominant discourses.

Dialogic/performance analysis integrates thematic analysis and structural analysis to transfer the narrative authority from the storyteller to the audience; thus it invites others to engage as active participants in these smaller conversations, by “tapping” into oral, visual, or written narratives.
and expanding their discourses beyond language and accepted meanings to include contextual 
action in the forms of gestures, intonations, and body movements.

**Visual Analysis**

Images are used to “contextualize and interpret” (Reissman, 2008, p. 143) a storyteller’s 
narrative through an analysis of its discourses as text. In visual analysis “spoken and written texts 
examined alongside visual data show how identities can be revealed, concealed, or fictionalized 
through images” (Reissman, 2008, p. 179). Consequently, the storyteller using images as “visual 
representations of experiences – photographs, performance art, and other media – can enable 
others to see as a participant sees, and to feel” (Reissman, 2008, p. 142). This allows images to 
become visual representations of the storytellers’ narratives which enable the audience or listener 
to give meaning to the text based on their lived experiences, social realities, and understandings 
of the images being displayed.

In this study, I used visual analysis to “provide context for interpreting the images” 
(Reissman, 2008, p. 145) which enabled me to explore the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s 
spoken word poem *Project Princess* to establish an “interface between visual and textual data 
drawing a connection between an image and some kind of discourse” (Reissman, 2008, p. 145). 
The images contained in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* video, add depth 
and richness to the written text of this poem through the integration of structural analysis, 
thematic analysis, and dialogic/performance analysis into my evaluation, interpretation, and 
rearticulation of the visual data.

I used these narrative analysis approaches simultaneously as I placed the selected data 
into broad categories and sorted out those data into smaller groupings according to their role in 
Morris’s poem.
Ethical Considerations

“Ethical issues are present in any kind of research” (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001, p. 93) and my study is no exception. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote that ethics are “conditionally based on our interests and surrounding circumstances” (p. 179). In order to conduct this qualitative study using narrative inquiry, I was prompted to consider the role of ethics in my analysis, interpretation, and rearticulation of the data. One of the first ethical dilemmas I encountered during this study was the issue of authenticity with the question of: How could I accurately report the data without corroboration from Tracie Morris regarding the intent of her spoken word poem Project Princess? Verhesschen (1999) stated that “to be authentic on this level means that the researcher is out to do justice to the situation” (p. 8). Peshkin (2000) viewed research as a journey in which the researchers reflect on meta-narratives or the problematics of their research. Relying on my understanding of each attribute of intertextuality in spoken word poetry derived from its complex and diverse heritage, I used the literature review and my personal experiences to reflect on the dominant discourses of the 1990s and their representations in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem Project Princess as it related to the genealogical characteristics represented in this text.

The next ethical dilemma I encountered in this study was that of truthfulness. Verhesschen (1999) suggested that, in narrative research, issues of truthfulness emerge during the process of data analysis and interpretation. Was it possible for my study to have authenticity, but not truthfulness? How could I maintain the truthfulness of my study throughout the process of analyzing and interpreting the data? Conle and deBeyer (2009) assert that “the expectation of truth and truthfulness cannot be ignored” (p. 55). In this study, I did not have an interactive relationship with Tracie Morris; therefore, I allowed multiple “truths” to emerge from my
analysis, interpretation, and conclusions drawn from the data, based on my exploration of dominant discourses, understandings of Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem, and rearticulation of the data collected from the sources selected for my study. Remembering that the focus of my study was the intertextuality in spoken word poetry and that Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* serves as a case study of the genealogical roots of this genre, I was plagued by issues of validity.

The issue of validity emerged as another dilemma I encountered during this study. Although some in the field shun the use of the term “validity” in the context of narrative inquiry, others have argued that validity is determined by the type of data the researcher accumulates, and the ways in which these data are assembled and analyzed for interpretation (Golafshani, 2003). I was confounded by the question: How will trusting the authenticity and truthfulness of Tracie Morris’s lived experiences and social realities presented in the spoken word poem *Project Princess* affect the validity of my study? Maxwell (1992) stated that, “validity in a broad sense, pertains to the relationship between an account and something outside of that account, whether this something is construed as an objective reality, the construction of actors, or a variety of other possible interpretations” (p. 283). I realize that, as a narrative inquirer, I am responsible for the analysis, interpretation, and retelling of Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem from multiple points of view as it relates to the intertextuality in spoken word poetry with regards to its genealogy (Chase, 2005; Reissman, 2008). I endeavored to validate the narratives in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem systematically, while interpreting the data presented in *Project Princess*, looking for multiple “truths” using narrative analysis. Considering the ethical dilemmas I encountered in this study, I decided to employ rigor, triangulation, and crystallization to assist me in reducing the risks of personal biases and misinterpretation of the data during analysis.
Strengthening My Study with Rigor, Triangulation, and Crystallization

In order to strengthen the integrity of my study, I introduced the use of rigor, triangulation, and crystallization in analyzing, interpreting, and rearticulating the genealogical contributions to intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*.

**Rigor**

Rigor is helpful in monitoring the integrity, legitimacy, and competence of this qualitative study, reducing biases, and assessing the consistency of the storyteller’s “truths” as accurately as possible. Tobin and Begley (2004) defined rigor as “the means by which we show integrity and competence: it is about ethics and politics, regardless of the paradigm” (p. 390). By incorporating ethics into my understandings, I am continuously addressing rigor in my narrative, analysis, and interpretation of the data. Rigor is useful in confirming the findings of the researcher by providing a more in-depth view, here of Tracie Morris’s recollection of her lived experiences and social realities through a triangulation of my analysis and interpretation of the data.

**Triangulation**

Whether in quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods research, triangulation is a way of minimizing the risks of bias or misinterpretation by the researcher. However, the method used to introduce triangulation “must be deliberately chosen” (Begley, 1996, p. 122) because it contributes to the integrity of the collected data and their analysis. According to Begley (1996), triangulation may use observations, interpretation by the narrative inquirer, and accuracy checks. As a research technique, triangulation serves as a reflexive dialogue between the researcher and the storyteller, addressing notions of difference by offering completeness to narratives in the form of multiple realities, thus adding to the depth of the data and their interpretations (Begley,
1996). In this study, to explore the discourses in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*, I, as the researcher, use my multiple interpretations of the texts to develop counter-narratives that explain the lived experiences and social realities contained in the text based on her written, visual, and spoken narratives. I also engaged in exchanges with Tracie Morris using social media in which I obtained permission to use *Project Princess* and the title of her dissertation *Who Do with Words: Rapping a Black Tongue Around J. L. Austin* (2006) (Appendix F).

In addition to rigor, qualitative research such as narrative inquiry uses triangulation as “a strategy (test) for improving validity and reliability of research or evaluation of findings” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 603), in which the researcher returns to the storyteller and revisits his or her narrative for verification of his or her interpretation of the data. Triangulation relies on multiple research methods to authenticate collected data which enables the researcher to confirm his or her findings (Tobin & Begley, 2004). For example, interdisciplinary triangulation uses other discourses (such as sociology, psychology, history, etc.) to interpret data (Janesick, 1994); triangulation of communication skills interprets verbal cues, non-verbal cues, and the feelings of the storyteller simultaneously (Begley, 1996); conceptual triangulation uses mixed methods to conduct research (Foster, 1997); collaborative triangulation involves the researcher and storyteller gathering and interpreting the data and comparing their respective interpretations of the data (Tobin & Begley, 2004); and analysis triangulation enables the researcher to consciously observe the storyteller for clues, and to clarify his or her findings with the storyteller (Begley, 1996). In this study, I used triangulation of communication skills to analyze and interpret Tracie Morris’s verbal cues, non-verbal cues, and feelings in her spoken word poem *Project Princess*. Begley (1996) maintains that triangulation increases the depth, quality, and accuracy of narrative
inquiry, helping me, as the researcher, identify and minimize my biases by enabling me to acknowledge the existence of multiple “truths” and their role in the recontextualization of the data.

**Crystallization**

The use of rigor and triangulation in my study is further strengthened by the inclusion of crystallization. Crystallization is an eclectic method of data collection and interpretation that provides coherence in the data by viewing it through multi-dimensional lenses, thus enabling me, as the researcher, to explore, interpret, and articulate texts using a variety of approaches and/or perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Tobin & Begley, 2004). According to Ellingson (2009):

> crystallization combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts; building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers’ vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them. (p. 4)

Crystallization includes the use of interviews, observations, and clarifications in an effort to reflect the storyteller’s narrative from multiple points of view, thus allowing multiple “truths” to exist within a single story. I employed *Project Princess*’s lyrics, video and its transcription, audio interview and its transcription, essays, and Tracie Morris’s webpage to serve as data sources for this study.

By using rigor, triangulation, and crystallization in my study, as the researcher, I was able to strengthen the integrity of this study through the use of each of these methods in the collection, analysis, interpretation, and rearticulation of my data.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I described narrative inquiry as the research approach used in this study. I identified the data sources (page poetry, video and its transcription, audio interview and its
transcription, three essays, and Morris’s website) used to examine the intertextuality in spoken word poetry, using Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* as a case study. I introduced the four models of narrative analysis used in conjunction with narrative inquiry to analyze, interpret, and rearticulate the data. I addressed ethical considerations and implemented strategies to minimize risks of personal biases influencing my analysis and interpretation of the data. In the next chapter, I provide an overview of “sound poetry” and discuss the role of sound in five of Tracie Morris’s most representative poems.
CHAPTER FOUR: SOUND POETICS
TRACIE MORRIS, PROJECT PRINCESS, AND SOUND: SPOKEN WORD POETRY FOR A NEW GENERATION

The spoken poem emanates from one’s body (Wheeler, 2008, p. 60)

My earliest involvement with sound and its use in language and the accepted meanings of words predates my exposure to spoken word poetry and the work of Tracie Morris. The first recollection I have of my engagement with the use of sound is learning the letters of the English alphabet in kindergarten. I recall the teacher showing us the letter, having us repeat its name and sound after her until we had mastered all the letters of the alphabet. As I reflect on this memory, I recollect similar experiences with the use of sound which included learning to read using phonics related instruction. Even in my present day, I rely on the use of phonics to spell or pronounce unfamiliar words. These encounters with sound played an even greater role in my life than I realized as an elementary and secondary student. I would depend on my knowledge of sounds in the creation of language and accepted meanings when I became a special education teacher responsible for the implementation of my school district’s English Language Arts curriculum of which Reading First was its primary program.

In my classroom, I was responsible for working with emergent and non-readers identified through pupil appraisal services as having special needs which impeded their developmental, academic, or social skills when compared to their peers at the same grade level. The Reading First program was geared towards students in grades K-3 and focused on five areas: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. However, in my classroom, I only focused on phonemic awareness, phonics, and vocabulary, because these areas were identified as deficits on the students’ Individual Educational Plans (IEP’s), and were considered essential components for the development of pre-reading skills by the district’s Reading Interventionists.
This became my first opportunity to reengage with the use of sound in reading instruction. I taught students letter-sound recognition, blending sounds to make words, and the use of sounds to pronounce unfamiliar words. I acknowledge that Morris’s use of sounds exhibit the physicality of language in which “the performance dimension of [her] poetry has significant relation to text-based visual and conceptual art, as well as visual poetry, which extend the performative (and material) dimension of [her] literary text into visual space” (Bernstein, 1998, p. 5). This enabled me to understand sound as oral utterances that featured nommo as a precursor to the symbolic representations of marginalized discourses adopted from African oral tradition. Integrating the use of storytelling to accentuate the thoughts and ideas of the poets, sounds are performative articulations of their lived experiences and social realities.

Correspondingly, oral utterances have been captured as written texts as members of the Harlem Renaissance began to blend the musicality of sounds in an effort to raise the consciousness of their readers, viewers, or listeners. Through musical rhythms and cadence, jazz poets, during their oral performances, used sounds to syncopate their lyrics and to set the tone for their public performances. I realized that this created sites of resistance and opened spaces during the poets’ oral performance of their texts through breath pauses anchored in silences, which decenter language from accepted meanings of words spoken and unspoken, as part of the poets’ “aural performances, in many cases, activate any number of meanings, especially since the spacing (the visual equivalence of silence) ensures very slow reading” (Perloff, 1997, p. 140-141). The implementation of silences blended with the delivery of sounds was important to the pronunciation and understanding of language and accepted meanings as I began to incorporate the use of sound in my classroom instruction. This syncopation of sounds into poetic texts is evident in the scat singing used by blues singers as well in the “stanzic patterns” (Brown, 1990,
Employing the use of sound as part of their language games, poets create unstructured verses and stanzas which reappropriate language and accepted meanings adopted from the Black Arts Movement in the present day context. Relying on the verbal skills of the poets, sound in poetry is constructed through polyrhythmic syncopations of hip-hop in their voices and intonations during their public performances as aesthetics.

As I began my research, I discovered that the use of sound in poetry was not a new technique, but a more evolved form of artistic expression that began during the Symbolist Movement of France, which was later adopted and modified by members of the Beat Generation such as Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, Amiri Baraka (born LeRoi Jones), and Bob Kaufman (Campbell, 2001; Charters, 2001; Watson, 1998). I became enamored with the way William S. Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Amiri Baraka, and Bob Kaufman voiced their poems during their poetry readings and recordings. Wheeler (2008) argued that poems became voiced with the development of spoken word poetry in academic circles as a new form of cultural aesthetics (Mitchell, 2010). This marked progression of poets towards the use of sound in their poetic texts that became popular in larger cities in the 1950s, and reemerged on university campuses during the 1990s, during the same time span as when Tracie Morris launched her career as a spoken word poet (Wheeler, 2008). I wrote this chapter to explore the evolution of Morris’s poems from spoken word texts towards poems that include the use of sound in her public performances. It is my desire that readers of this chapter become aware of the complex relationship between sounds and poetry while acquiring an understanding and appreciation of Tracie Morris’s use of sound in her poetry. In this chapter, first, I provide an overview of sound poetry. Then, I discuss Tracie Morris and five of her most representative works.
\textbf{Sound Poetry}

Sound poetry began circa 1875 with the Symbolist Movement in France (Stephane Mallarme, Arthur Rimbaud, and Paul-Marie Verlaine) and evolved with the introduction of works by Russian Futurists, Italian Futurists, and Dadaists during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (McCaffery & Nichols, 1978). However, Hugo Ball has been credited with expanding the popularity of sound poetry, in 1917, with his poem \textit{Karawane} (1917) which contained German non-sense words as shown in the following excerpt (McCaffery, 1997):

\begin{verbatim}
jolifanto bambla o falli bambla
grossiga m’pfa habla horem
egiga goramen
higo bloiko russula huju
hollaka hollala
anlogo bung
blago bung
blago bung
bosso fataka
u uu u
schampa wulla wussa olobo
hej tatta gorem
eschige zunbada
wulubu ssubudu uluw ssubudu
tumba ba- umf
kusagauma
ka – umf. (Ball, 1917)
\end{verbatim}

\textit{Karawane} (1917) incorporated the use of multi-vocal expressions blended with human sounds through the use of sound patterns and phonemic structures to “break down language into vocal, predenotational texture” (McCaffery, 1997, p. 153). \textit{Karawane} (1917) was Hugo Balls’s attempt at loosening the bonds between language and accepted meaning through the use of sounds. However, the 1950s marked a significant phase in the development of sound poetry as poets performing in this genre in the United States began using their poems to bridge the gap between oral tradition and folklore (Bernstein, 1998; McCaffery, 1997; Wheeler, 2008). Through
revolutionary dialogues which produced new symbolic meanings situated in the speaker’s current day context, the use of sound in poetry became part of the poet’s language game in which sounding letters and words contributed to the quality of the poem, by enabling new meanings of words to surface. For that reason, I focused on sound poetry as it developed from 1950 to the present.

According to McCaffery (1997):

sound poetry prior to the development of the 1950s is still largely a word-bound practice, for while the work of the Dadaist, Futurists, and Lettrists served to free the word from semantic mandates, redirecting a sensed energy from themes and “message” into matter and force, their work nevertheless preserved a morphological patterning that still upheld the aural presence of the word. (p. 155)

Heavily grounded in phonics, sound poetry became an extension of the oral tradition as a form of storytelling and entertainment among marginalized groups (McCaffery & Nichol, 1978). Disrupting the text-sound dichotomy, sound poetry is an acoustic articulation of words that manipulates language and accepted meanings through the use of sonic speech rhythms featuring “poems without words” (Wendt, 1985, p. 11). Conversely, Higgins (1985) found that unlike nonsense poetry, sound poems serve as autonomous pieces of text in which “the language starts to live a life of its own” (p. 45). Reemerging in the 1950s, sound poetry began to integrate musical rhythms into the poet’s written and performed works through the use of improvisation. The 1950s marked the third phase of sound poetry and witnessed the marriage of the literary with music which was made popular by the poets of the Beat Generation.

A hybrid, experience-based, performance-oriented, and visual piece of text, sound poetry uses inventive language mixed with sounds referred to as tautograms. Typically, “in tautograms the vowel vary, but the consonants do not” (Higgins, 1985, p. 43). For example Cab Calloway’s (1932) *Minnie the Moocher* features the use of tautograms as call and response in the lines:
As performance-based aesthetics, sound poetry contains acoustic elements which enable it to exist in “in-between spaces” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2) of music and poem (Higgins, 1985). I am not defining Cab Calloway’s song *Minnie the Moocher* (1932) as a sound poem, I am using this work to show the relationship between spoken word poetry’s use of tautograms derived from its musical roots in the Blues (call and response; scat singing) and hip-hop (scratching). In the lyrics which illustrate tautograms as an element used in sound poetry, Cab Calloway’s (1932) text experiments with:

- isolating fragments of speech, shortening or increasing their duration, linking them together in a variety of permutations to build up multilayered structures of choral polyphonies, repeating voice patterns and producing retrograde (backwards) speech and pitch change are examples of non-real-time manipulation of speech. (Wendt, 1985, p. 16)

For that reason, I selected *Minnie the Moocher* (1932) because it contains components of spoken word poetry and sound poetry such as improv, alliteration, onomatopoeia, scat singing, as well as call and response.

Utilizing phonetically enhanced lyrics, sound poems are conceptual and free-verse dialogues in which “the sound generates its own sense through its patterns and by their reference to our experience” (Higgins, 1985, p. 42). According to Wendt (1985), these “vocalizations are projected off the page as a theatrical gesture and their existence as an acoustical event is the essence of the work” (p. 12) being performed publicly. The primary focus of the poets’ public performances is the use of their voices and intonations in the delivery of their texts. In this context, voice, along with the inclusion of sounds such as weeping, sneezing, and laughing, etc., is a political and linguistic form of aesthetics that serves as a “vehicle of meaning” (Dolar, 2006,
Sound poems are experimental language-based texts that disrupt the “natural speech rhythms” (Crown, 2002, p. 219) of the poet who uses his or her words, in much the same way as jazz poets, blues singers, and hip-hop artists, to situate their narratives in larger societal discourses. This enables the poet’s voice to become an instrument through the fragmentation of words or syllables into sounds, in which repetition of sounds is used to disrupt the poet’s voice and intonations during the public performances (Crown, 2002, 2003; Hume, 2006; Jones, 2003; 2011).

I began to think of the ways in which each of these genres incorporated elements of sound into their written and performed texts. I realized that each of these movements relied on the speakers’, singers’, or writers’ voices to express their thoughts and ideas to their listeners, audiences, or readers through the use of phonology constructed by phonemes that are written or sounded when read (Dolar, 2006). From this perspective, the voice features spoken and unspoken utterances as subjective signifiers of sounds mixed with silences and noises in which “the voice is the instrument, the vehicle, the medium, and the meaning is the goal” (Dolar, 2006, p. 15) in sound poems. This is a technique which becomes integrated in Tracie Morris’s work over time as she begins to include the use of sound in her spoken word poetry texts as her work becomes more experimental and conceptually oriented. Tracie Morris (2012b) describes sound poems and sound poetics as anchored in a dichotomy of silences in competition with speaking. She maintains that sound interchanges silences and noises as markers of hidden or marginalized discourses.

According to Morris (2012b), “some silences are valences in that sound substitutes the absence of one sound the hearer is accustomed to following by replacing it with another track of sound” (p. 389). In this essay, Tracie Morris (2012b) identified and explained two categories of
sound poetics: no sound and muffled sounds. She suggested that the use of sampling by hip-hop artists break these silences through the implementation of “microphone distortions” (p. 390) during their public performances. This custom was revitalized during the spoken word movement of the 1990s as poets sought to loosen the bonds between language and accepted meanings associated with their lived experiences and social realities in their current context. In 1998, with Project Princess, as a poet, Tracie Morris embraced the full integration of sound in her poetry. In order for me to fully understand Tracie Morris’s abilities as a poet, I needed a firm grasp on her works as spoken word poetry which include the use of sound.

**Tracie Morris: Conceptualizing Experimental Poetics**

Initially, Tracie Morris’s sound poems were influenced by hip-hop. Over time, she connected hip-hop rhyme scheme to Puerto Rican code switching in an effort to uncover the sounds “hidden within the rhyme” (Morris, 2007b, p. 210). As I listened to some of her works, post-Project Princess (1998) such as A Little (2012b), From Slave Sho’ to Video aka Black but Beautiful (2002), The Mrs. Gets Her Ass Kicked (aka Heaven) (2008), and Chain Gang (2006) as well as a pre-Project Princess (1998) poem titled You Startin’ Wif Me (1993), I began to discern that in her oral performances, she uses her voice and intonations to isolate words in a pattern originating in African oral tradition (Hinton & Hogue, 2011; Rambsy, 2003). Hrushovski (1980) explored sound patterns by analyzing stanzas or verses from poems published in English as well as in other languages. He found that, in these poems, the sounds differed based on the voices and intonations of the poets as well as on their use of silences and noises in the delivery of their work. He concluded that the type and quality of the sounds produced were situated and contextualized by the language contained in the poets’ texts.
Using sounds, Tracie Morris includes familiar words and discourses which enable her listeners or audiences to derive new understandings of language and accepted meanings situated in her present day context (Crown, 2002). Her manipulation of letters and word patterns through the use of sounds occurs in real-time; they connect her work to its roots in the Black Arts Movement’s idea of a here-and-now-consciousness (Crown, 2002; Sewell, 2007). In essence, “her sound-poems strip language down to its acoustical-rhythmic potencies and potentialities to engage with the world while traveling in it corporeally” (Hume, 2006, p. 415). Morris relies on the heavy use of phonics, improv, and language games drawn from Jazz Poetry and the Blues traditions in her performed texts (Angelesey, 1999; Crown, 2003; Hume, 2006; Jones, 2011). Her work includes the use of tautograms that resemble the scat singing used in the Blues and hip-hop’s scratching techniques which contribute to her work being both experimental and a conceptual form of cultural expression borrowed from the Harlem Renaissance (Angelesey, 1999; Crown, 2003; Ramazani, 2011).

**Doin’ a Solid: Drivin’ Like Ya Stole It**

In this section, I explore and analyze five of Morris’s main poems to highlight her work from spoken word poetry to poems that include the use of sound, and play with sounds and rhythms. *You Startin’ Wif Me* (1993), *A Little* (2012a), *From Slave Sho’ to Video aka Black but Beautiful* (2002), *The Mrs. Gets Her Ass Kicked (aka Heaven)* (2008), and *Chain Gang* (2006) contain verses that “are overtly sexual in subject, raw in expression, and not overtly complicated or delicate in treatment” (Lenhart, 2006, p. 124) of their subject matter, and typically contain hidden meanings embedded in their lyrics. According to Tracie Morris (2007b), her work is largely improvisational in nature, exemplifying her use of multiple narratives in a single text through the inclusion of sounds. She uses her narratives of lived experiences and social realities
to create sites of resistance by opening spaces between her poem and her listeners or audiences through her word choices, accepted meanings, and intended meanings.

Although Tracie Morris’s repertoire of poems is varied and vast, I selected five works that best represent her gradual progression towards sound poetics in her oral performances. In choosing *You Startin’ Wif Me* (1993), *A Little* (2012a), *From Slave Sho’ to Video aka Black but Beautiful* (2002), *The Mrs. Gets Her Ass Kicked (aka Heaven)* (2008), and *Chain Gang* (2006), I contemplated the ways in which Tracie Morris manipulates language and accepted meanings through the use of sound as a way of connecting past and present discourses to contextualize her narratives of lived experiences and social realities. Incorporating the performative theatrics contained in her voice and intonations, Tracie Morris is able to articulate politically active dialogues into her poems *The Mrs. Gets Her Ass Kicked (aka Heaven)* (2008), *From Slave Sho’ to Video aka Black but Beautiful* (2002), and *Chain Gang* (2006). Whereas in her other works such as *You Startin’ Wif Me* (1993), and *A Little* (2012a) she challenges the dichotomy of silence and noise through the use of sound in her poetry (Morris, 2012b).

**You Startin’ Wif Me**

The use of sound was not identified in Tracie Morris’s work until 1998 in *Project Princess* and it would be several years before she would create her first recognized sound poem *A Little* (2002, 2012) (Crown, 2002, 2003; Hume, 2006; Morris, 2007b). Yet, her earlier poem *You Startin’ Wif Me* (1993) integrated spoken word poetry through the use of sound patterns that reinforced rhythmic repetitions while enabling them to function independently in the text as evidenced in the lines:

[Horns blowing]
[Singing]
[Sounds of an old movie projector]
Life when we were kids
Was like playing giant steps
We were told to advance
We obeyed took a chance
[Chanting/Cheering/Song-Talk]

Go speed racer, go speed racer, go speed racer, go-oooh

[Laughter]
[Talking]

Go speed racer
Employing breathes heave [strong panting sounds]
Just a taste of it
It should not be hot; its fall after all school began
Could’ve ran to the store and back twice over
Finally, let you buy me a cherry soda
How we got to your house
I did not recall
Delicious treats and thoughts of sweets and all
Felt a need for a straw hat as well fall on those sheets
To cover the heat, in my face, this sun
Tongues around, little hands along necks and chest.

Using her poem as a forum, Tracie Morris explores the sexual awakening of an adolescent girl.

Her recitation is accompanied by horns blowing followed by her singing the opening stanza. She then chants the theme song of *Speed Racer* (1967-1968), a popular Japanese-inspired cartoon series introduced in the lyrics as in “go speed racer, go speed racer, go speed racer, go-ooh.” As if remembering her childhood, she laughs and says “go speed racer” before the listener hears sounds of heavy breathing and panting.

The text opens with horns blowing, the sounds of an old movie projector, and chanting reminiscent of the syncopation used in Jazz Poetry and storytelling from African oral tradition. The title of the poem pulls from the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, and the Blues with the word “startin’” which is elongated through the omission of the letter “g.” Morris uses a language game and inventive language from the Blues tradition and hip-hop as evidenced in the word
“wif” instead of “with,” thus creating new language and accepted meanings for a familiar word adopted from the Black Arts Movement. Beginning with the innocence of childhood, an adolescent female voice describes her curiosity about sex in the line “just a taste of it” as part of a language game derived from the Blues tradition.

Although this spoken word poem is not immersed in the full use of sound, the structure of You Startin’ Wif Me (1993) is significant in that “no meaning can be imputed to the sounds themselves” (Hrushovski, 1980, p. 41-42) present in the text, but they are retained by the ears of the listener as they emerge from the text when recited (Hrushovski, 1980). In her later works, Tracie Morris’s use of sound in her poetry became just as significant as the language and accepted meanings associated with the texts.

A Little

While the You Startin’ Wif Me (1993) narrator explored her sexual curiosity, the protagonist in A Little (2012a) used her words to articulate the violation and pain her body experienced when sexually assaulted. Tracie Morris’s first recognized spoken word poem to include the use of sounds, titled A Little (2012a), contains a single sentence narrative addressing the sexual abuse of little girls, in the home, as indicated in the line (Hume, 2006; Morris, 2007a, 2012b):

I am just a little girl.

Morris (2007b) stated that she “[believes] that any depictions beyond ‘I am just a little girl’ would just get in the way” (p. 211). This six-word poem was ultimately reduced from words to a combination of words and sounds during Tracie Morris’s public performance as verified in the lyrics:

I am just a little girl
and I am just a little [the words “just a little” are sung]
I am just a little girl
And I am just a little [lines are said at a higher pitch/almost yelling]

[a long blood curdling scream]
Lit-it-it-ittle/awe/awe
[sobbing sounds start slow and get louder and more intense]
[sounds of pain-induced utterances that are inaudible]

Little/little
I am just a
Little/little-eh-eh

[sobbing sounds start slow and get louder and more intense]
[sounds of pain-induced utterances that are inaudible]

I am just a little girl
And I am just a little girl [elongated and said in a high pitch voice]

I am just a little girl
Lee-tle/lee-tle

I am just a little girl [in a loud high pitch voice]
Little/lee-tle

I am just a little girl

I am just a
I am just a [older female voice, perhaps a teen-ager]

I am just a little-lee-t-tle
[throat clearing noises]

I am just a little
I said I’m just
I said I’m just [these lines are stated in an adult woman’s voice]

[inaudible sounds mixed with throat clearing noises]

The poem begins with the voice of a very young female articulating her disdain with having her childhood interrupted by unwelcomed sexual advances. The use of a high-pitched voice and the screaming indicate that the girl is being violated despite her protest and verbal reminders to the perpetrator that she is “just a little girl.” Over the course of the poem the protagonist’s voice ages
from that of a little girl to that of a woman who is attempting to articulate her past trauma of sexual abuse with the words “I am just/I am just”; at this point the audio ends.

Constructed on only six words, *A Little* (2012a) is driven by the “physicality of words” (Morris, 2007b, p. 211), which draws the listener or audience into the text as the victim, a witness, and a voyeur. The use of sounds in this spoken word poem “dramatizes a girl’s trauma of sexual abuse” (Hume, 2006, p. 420) as the lyrics are disrupted by breath pauses, screams, throat clearing, grunts, and fragmented stuttering acting as articulations of the moments between the words “I am just a little girl,” when the protagonist is being abused. Hume (2006) examined the power dynamics of the little girl and her abuser. She found that the narrator growth from childhood to adolescence to adulthood is marked by changes in the tone and tempo of the poem, which moves from jovial, to angry, then solemn. This is signified by adjustments made in the rhythm and pace of the oral delivery of the poem, as Tracie Morris’s speech changes from slow to fast, which “infuses the piece with psychological astuteness as it builds the narrative of abuse” (Hume, 2006, p. 420). At the end of the poem the audio becomes indecipherable after the lyrics:

I am just. I am just.

After which the text is left “unfinished” to open spaces as sites of resistance and cultural exchanges allowing the listener or audience to break the sounds of silence through social action (Crown, 2002, 2003; Hume, 2006). Hume (2006) maintained that “the unfinished quality of the sentence, Morris’s refusal to cinch the point, frustrates the telos of hearing in favor of irresolution” (p. 424). These repeated lyrics contain “cognitive inducing text” (Morris, 2012b) which deconstructs utterances through the use of sounds in which Tracie Morris breaks the sound of silence by replacing one sound with another as an alternative form of elongation used in texts from the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, and the Blues.
Using repetition, refrain, and riffs adopted from Jazz Poetry and hip-hop in the lyrics “I am just a little girl. And I am just a little,” Tracie Morris blends the scat singing and language games from the Blues tradition into this text as the word “little” becomes “lit-it-it-it-tle” and “lee-tle.” At various points in her text, Tracie Morris “works the word ‘lee-tle’ into a siren sound alerting us to the dangers of littleness – of mind (adult perpetrator’s) and body (child victim’s)” (Hume, 2006, p. 421). Introducing new meanings for familiar words through the inclusion of sounds that feature voice, intonations, and “syncopated throat noises” (Hume, 2006, p. 423) in which the little girl’s body is given a voice in the “whispered syllables” (Hume, 2006, p. 423), the perpetrator attempts to silence both during the physical assaults.

**The Mrs. Gets Her Ass Kicked (aka Heaven)**

As a counseling student and as a Case Manager serving victims of domestic violence, I learned that abuse has many “faces.” Listening to Tracie Morris’s poem *The Mrs. Gets Her Ass Kicked (aka Heaven)* (2008) for the first time brought upon me a wave of emotions that I had long suppressed. The narrator’s voice and intonations expressed the pain and anguish experienced by her body as the physical violence begins to become a part of her lived experiences and social realities. She conveys her disbelief at her overall acceptance of being physically abused as the incidents begin to occur more frequently and become more extreme during each occurrence, as attested to in the following lyrics:

```
Heaven, I’m in heaven
And my heart beats so that I can hardly speak
And I can’t describe the happiness that I seek
When we’re out/when we’re out/when we’re out/when we’re out

Hea-ven, I-I-I’m in heaven/and my hard bea’/my heart/my-my-heart
And I can’t describe the hap’/and I can’t describe/the
And I can’t describe/heaven/I-I-I’m in heaven
And my-my/my-eye-heaven/I-I-I’m in heaven
Hea-vin’/m-my-my/I-I-awe-awe/can’t hardly speak.
```
Marked by changes in tempo, voice, and intonations, Tracie Morris’s poem moves the narrative from fun-loving to somber as her words are disrupted and distorted to depict the physical abuse and the silencing being experienced by the narrator. Crown (2002) found that voice and intonations were essential components of Tracie Morris’s work elevated by her experimentation with the use of sounds.

Sampling Irvin Berlin’s (1935) song *Cheek to Cheek* featured in the film *Top Hat* (1935) starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rodgers as sung by Doris Day on her album *Hooray for Hollywood* (1958), the entire poem *The Mrs. Gets Her Ass Kicked (aka Heaven)* (2008) is sung with sounds strategically placed in the text (Crown, 2002, 2003; Hume, 2006; Morris, 2007b; Morris, 2012a) as Tracie Morris “[protests] against domestic violence” (Hume, 2006, p. 417). This poem shows the narrator’s and her abuser’s descent from public outings together to her social isolation as her happiness becomes despair as referenced by the words “and I can’t describe the hap’/and I can’t describe/the/and I can’t describe/heaven.” The physical violence takes its toll on the narrator as she begins to voice her body’s reaction to the pain being inflicted on her, substantiated by the line “and hard bea’” as well as “I-I-awe-awe/can’t hardly speak.” There is a shift in the lyrics as “heartbeat” becomes “hard-bea’” and “I” transitions to “awe,” as Tracie Morris attempts to use “humor to show horror” (Hume, 2006, p. 417), derived from the Blues tradition.

This is a poem in which the title *The Mrs. Gets Her Ass Kicked (aka Heaven)* (2008) “[provides] the narrative context and brutal tone” (Hume, 2006, p. 418) of the text. Silences are broken by the use of sounds that include the use of “multiple glottal stops” (Morris, 2012b, p. 391) as a method illustrating the syncopation used in Jazz Poetry and the polyrhythmic syncopations of hip-hop. Tracie Morris (2012b) defined glottal stops or the glottis as “the gap
between the folds that are closed” (p. 391). These locations are “stopped in order to create the utterances” (Morris, 2012, p. 391) as documented by Tracie Morris’s “shifting intonations of the ‘same’ words” which “reverberate multiple codes that feed off each other’s feedback” (Hume, 2006, p. 418). To “regain the texture of spousal abuse” (Hume, 2006, p. 418), Tracie Morris uses singing to unvoice sounds by introducing sonic sounds in their place, adopted from the polyrhythmic syncopations and scratching procedure used in hip-hop, attested to in the verses:

When we’re out/when we’re out/when we’re out/when we’re out.

and

he-eav/my-my-my/I-I-awe-awe/can’t hardly speak.

Interspersing multiple glottal stops throughout The Mrs. Gets Her Ass Kicked (aka Heaven) (2008), Tracie Morris’s work employs the “sound of a ‘pretty laugh’ and other sounds” (Morris, 2012b, p. 391) to refocus the attention of the listener or audience to the issue of domestic violence in a non-accusatory manner.

Instead, sounds in her poetry open sites of resistance through disruptions in her use of flow or riffs during her public performances. Hume (2006) maintained that “Morris’s sound work encourages mis-hearings that dilate our engagement with its ideological imperatives” (p. 421); hence, creating spaces where “song is poetry’s arche and telos, what it was and what it might aspire to be” (Ramazani, 2011, p. 719).

From Slave Sho’ to Video aka Black but Beautiful

Morris, in her public performances of the poems The Mrs. Gets Her Ass Kicked (aka Heaven) (2008) and From Slave Sho’ to Video aka Black but Beautiful (2002), uses language games, similar to those used in the Blues tradition, by transposing language and accepted meanings to address the intersections of race, sexism, and class in this poem. The words “slave
sho’” adopted the use of elongation through the omission of the letter “w,” a technique from the Harlem Renaissance and Jazz Poetry. The inventive language of hip-hop, and the utilization of “ain’t” instead, of “isn’t” change the meaning of the lyric “ain’t she beautiful” from an external dialogue to an internal understanding of beauty.

The use of signification enabled “Morris to reorder syntaxes – rewiring language and identity – until words evacuate their signifying functions” (Hume, 2006, p. 430). Conversely, Jones (2011) stated that “she enlivens her verbal art through multidimensional and improvisational performance” (p. 187) which “extracts the epistemic and epidemic layers built into the literary, musical, and political history of the words ‘black,’ ‘blue,’ and ‘beautiful’” (p. 188). Tracie Morris uses signification to manipulate language and accepted meanings through her inclusion of sounds; thus enabling new meanings and understandings to transpire. Rambsy (2003) explored the ways in which black poets evoke ancestral spirits in their texts. He maintained that black poets drew on other genres and traditions in the construction of their narratives during their public performances. Furthermore, he asserted that oral delivery offered black poets a way to give voice to their ancestors through the use of sounds; hence, reappropriating language and accepted meanings in larger societal discourses.

For example, Tracie Morris traces the historical marginalization of black women in dominant discourses anchored in Western beauty standards in the present day context. She explores the chronological expansions of larger societal conversations regarding black women beginning with the institution of slavery; then, she transitions to a specific area of the black woman’s body popularized in mainstream music video. She begins with the words “ain’t she beautiful/she too black/she too beautiful/boo-boot/bootyful” in which the color of the black woman’s skin determined her beauty before being replaced by the size of her buttocks emerging
as the “gold standard.” Tracie Morris’s poem *From Slave Sho’ to Video aka Black but Beautiful* (2002) contains the lyrics:

Ain’t she beautiful  
She too black/she too beautiful/boo-boo/bootyful  
She too black/ain’t she/beau-beau-ti-ful  
She ain’t beautiful/she too/she too/bootyfull/too/too/bootyful  
Too/too/too-bootyful/ain’t she/she ain’t she/is she beautiful  
Ain’t she beautiful.

Using repetition, scat singing, and riffs derived from Jazz Poetry, the Blues, and hip-hop, Tracie Morris recites the lyrics of *From Slave Sho’ to Video aka Black but Beautiful* (2002), blending language games with phonetic fragments and multi-vocal expressions in the form of words with sounds in the lines:

She too black/she too beautiful/boo-boo/bootyful  
She too black/ain’t she/beau-beau-ti-ful  
She ain’t beautiful/she too/too/bootyful/too/too/bootyful.

Featuring overlapping rhythms, pauses, and tonal inflections between the words “she,” “bootyful,” “beautiful,” and “black,” Tracie Morris “then moves quickly into a rhythmic echo chamber of erasure, and expansion, sounding out a spectrum of emotional shadings” (Hume, 2006, p. 425); thus, allowing “the historical auras around the words become part of their schema” (p. 425).

Rearticulating the Black Power slogan “Black is Beautiful,” Tracie Morris (2002) uses the words “black but beautiful,” with alliterations and slippages centered on the opening words of the text “beau-boot/beautiful-booty-ful/too.” This challenges dominant discourses “about black women’s bodies and endemic bifurcated constructions of ‘black women’ as objects of repulsion and appeal” (Hume, 2006, p. 427). The poem ends with Morris alternating the pitch and rhythm of her voice and intonations in the lyrics “ain’t she beautiful” as a form of call and response from the Blues tradition echoing the words “too/too/too-booty-ful”; hence, marking
“her return to phrasal closure at the end of her sound performance piece [underscores] the blues dimensions of versifying experience within the black aesthetic” (Jones, 2011, p. 189). Tracie Morris uses riffs mimicking the improvised syncopations, language games, scat singing, scratching, and polyrhythmic syncopations extracted from Jazz Poetry, the Blues, and hip-hop respectively as part of her cultural aesthetics or “the dialogic relationship between people and their environment [which leads] to a way of experiencing the world that is reflected in the art that they produce” (Mitchell, 2010, p. 608).

**Chain Gang**

Revisiting ancestral dialogues of enslavement in the present day context, Tracie Morris examines the interconnectivity of oppression and marginalization of the individual in the poem *Chain Gang* (2006). Using the personae of an inquisitive observer, Tracie Morris uses her voice and intonations to explore the history of this long-standing practice as originating in Africa. Rambsy (2008) stated that “the personae or masks that black poets regularly choose to adopt allow them to provide commentary on African American history and society and participate in the longstanding tradition of speaking in tongues” (p. 549), to enable black poets to give voice to their ancestors. The integration of sounds in poetry continues in Tracie Morris’s protest poem *Chain Gang* (2006), which samples a line from Sam Cooke’s (1960) song *Chain Gang* as written below:

> That’s the sound of the men working a chain gang. (Cooke, 1960)

Revising this line from Sam Cooke’s (1960) song, from plural (men) to singular (man), Tracie Morris transposes the text to include the use of improvised masculine stylizations in which she interchanges poly-phonic vocalizations and intonations that alter the “ages, gender, and lifetimes” (Rankine & Sewell, 2007, p. 212) of the poem’s protagonists (Hume, 2006; Morris,
Tracie Morris improvised the poem *Chain Gang* (2006) to “[protest] the reintroduction of chain gangs in the United States” (Hume, 2006, p. 436) with words added “outside of the texts that weren’t extrapolations of the original words” (Morris, 2007b, p. 212). Crown (2002) maintained that Tracie Morris uses verbal cues, non-verbal cues, gestures, and body movements to articulate sounds in her spoken word poetry by deconstructing words into fragments of sounds such as in her poem *Chain Gang* (2006), which opens with the line:

That’s the sound of the man working on the chain gang.

and continues with the verses:

that’s the sound of the man working on the ch-hahah-chai-ga-ang
don’t you know that’s the sound of the man working on the ch-hah-hah-hah-h

that’s/that’s’ the sound of the man working on the chah-gah-hahah
don’t you know that’s/that’s

the sound of the man working on the
ch-hah-gah-/workin’ it/workin’ it/cha-hah-guh/cha-huh-guhah

that’s the sound of the man working on the
ch-hah-g-hahah/g-gah-guh/chah-guh
workin’ it/ch-ch-tahah-gah-guhah

that’s the sound of
workin’ on the man/sound to the man
sound of the man

sound of the man/workin’ it on the
cha-gah-hahah

sameSAME-chain
sameSAME-chain
see that nigger sittin’ on a chain

sameSAME-chain
sameSAME-chain

isn’t that Kunta sittin’ on a chain
same-same-chain
same-same-chain

isn’t that Kizzy sittin’ on a chain

same-same-chain
same-same-chain

isn’t that Agun sittin’ on a chain

[inaudible sounds chanting and heavy breathing]

Employing her voice and intonations, Tracie Morris reconfigures her normal speech patterns to syncopate the chugging sounds of a train moving on the railroad tracks while inserting names and words connected to the history of blacks living in America (Crown, 2002, 2003; Hume, 2006; Jones, 2003, 2011).


Same-same-chain
Same-same-chain

See that nigger sittin’ on the chain
Same-same-chain
Same-same-chain

Isn’t that Kunta sittin’ on a chain

Same-same-chain
Same-same-chain

Isn’t that Kizzy sittin’ on a chain

Same-same-chain
Same-same-chain

Isn’t that Agun sittin’ on a chain.

Using heavy breathing as she recites the words “same chain,” Tracie Morris blends whispering, chanting, and repetition as she articulates the words “same-same-chain/same-same-chain” in overlapping pronunciations obscuring the spaces between the words. She uses elongation through the omission of the letter “g” in the words “sittin,” and sings the word “chain” as “chai-ga-ang” as she incorporates song and talk into her citation of the lyrics:

Isn’t that Agun sittin’ on a chain
Isn’t that Kunta sittin’ on a chain
Isn’t that Kizzy sittin’ on a chain
Isn’t that Agun sittin’ on a chain.

This enables the rhythm in Tracie Morris’s recitations to become more intense as the words of the text become overpowered by her voice and intonations imitating the sound of a train traveling along its tracks. The poem *Chain Gang* (2006) captured black people’s historical experiences from the African religious traditions in the words “isn’t that Agun sittin’ on a chain,” to slavery in the lines “isn’t that Kunta sittin’ on a chain,” and in “isn’t that Kizzy sittin’ on a chain,” to prison labor camps known as chain gangs (Curtin, 2000; Orshinsky, 1997). Tracie Morris referred to one of the chain gang workers as a “nigger” in the line “see that nigger sittin’
on a chain.” This derogatory word was used during the institution of slavery and is still used by some groups to refer to blacks in the United States.

Typically, the workers of chain gangs, particularly in the South, were black men accused and convicted of a crime (Curtin, 2000; Foucault, 1979; Orshinsky, 1997). From African religious tradition, Tracie Morris presents Agun, who is the African deity of iron, hunting, politics, and war (Barnes, 1997; Olmos & Paravisini-Gerbert, 2003). Agun is the patron saint of blacksmiths, and is depicted in divining ceremonies as a machete (Barnes, 1997; Olmos & Paravisini-Gerbert, 2003). Whereas, Kunta and Kizzy are references to father and daughter slaves from the film Roots: The Saga of an American Family (1977), based on Alex Haley’s novel of the same title published in 1976. The chain connecting Kunta and Kizzy is their bloodlines while Kunta’s chain is connected to Africa, his “birthplace” as well as that of Agun. To show a continuum of what Na’im Akbar refers to as mental servitude in his book the Chains and Images of Psychological Slavery (1984), Tracie Morris employs the image of a train through the use of sounds in which her words move around the black experience in larger societal discourses.

The symbol of a train and the sounds it makes illustrate the ways in which past and present discourses overlap in the present day context indicated by:

That’s the sound of the man
Workin’ on the man/sound to the man
Sound of the man
Sound of the man/ workin’ it on the
Cha-gah-hahah.

These lyrics rearticulate historical discourses of incarceration and punishment as a 1995 movement to reintroduce chain gangs into the penal system was adopted in Arizona and
Alabama (Curtin, 2005; Orshinsky, 1997) as a source of free labor similar to that of African enslavement.

Through the use of repetition, patterned variations, and language games, Tracie Morris’s public performance of the stanzas in *Chain Gang* (2006) embodies the “innovative absorption of blues and jazz idioms” (Jones, 2011, p. 187), which deconstructs words into fragments of sounds denoted in the line “cha-gah-hahah” (Morris, 2006). Crown (2002) suggested that “the hard ‘ch’ and ‘g’ sounds of ‘chain gang’ evoke the physical sounds of clanking chains and the grunts and heavy-breathing rhythms of physical labor” (p. 213). According to Hrushovski (1980), “any sound patterning in poetry breaks up the habitual, automatic link of the signifier and signified, undermines the transparency of the sound in referential language, simply by autonomizing the sound itself and making it conspicuous” (p. 49). In this case, repetition is usually lyrical, or of sounds in the poem, and “repeats certain musical tone; repeats them in certain combinations, or chords, and repeats them in certain patterns, or melodies” (Perrine, 1982, p. 153) as a continuum of previous discourses in the present day context.

**Siren Verbose Bring Da Noize: Sound in *Project Princess***

Internalizing the literary, cultural, and musical contributions to spoken word poetry which are continuously being redefined during each of her public performances, Tracie Morris uses sounds in her poetry which “offer an alternative reading of the poems’ plain content that could potentially assuage” (Jones, 2003, p. 22). Drawing on the African oral tradition, Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop, Tracie Morris negotiates language, words, and letter sounds as part of her public performances in which “she strains the audience to listen within patterns of rhythmic phrasing” (Hume, 2006, p. 423). By shifting her voice and intonation in a way similar to the syncopations of Jazz Poetry, the
polyrhythmic syncopations of hip-hop, and the musical improv of the Blues, Tracie Morris’s poems before and after Project Princess show her progression towards the full use of sounds in her spoken word poems as she begins resituating her narratives of lived experiences and social realities in the present day context. Incorporating sounds blended with “repetition, refrain, and rhyme” (Ramazani, 2011, p. 718), in her narrative of Project Princess, Tracie Morris uses free-verse mixed with poetry and song containing “performative properties” (Ramazani, 2011, p. 718) which includes multi-vocalizations of interconnected narratives in a single text to produce counter-narratives during her public performance (Andrews, 2004; Jones, 2004; Ramazani, 2011).

In her early work, such as You Startin’ Wif Me (1993), Tracie Morris uses chanting and singing to introduce her spoken word poems, and “this level of sound incorporation links directly to the blues, jazz songs, gospel songs, and ring shouts, which all convey more than one meaning at a time” (Rankine & Sewell, 2007, p. 212). Her use of music and sampling serves multiple functions in Project Princess’s (1998) traditional verses and prose, through the inclusion of lyrics of popular songs integrated with hip-hop language and idioms. Ultimately, she began to use sound to deconstruct words and manipulate them while incorporating her body as well as her voice into her texts (Ramazani, 2011). Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem Project Princess uses “familiar speech [which] sets in motion something close to glossolalia by way of accent, slur, stutter, backtracking, striation, and telescoping tempo” (Hume, 2006, p. 421), through the manipulation of letter sounds and words as a form of the Blues’s scat singing and hip-hop’s scratching.

In addition, Project Princess includes audio experiences embedded in its words in which: her vocal delivery of “Project Princess” conjures sound clusters instead of aural lines since she repeats groups of words within a line while modulating her tone, speed, and
breath’s pauses (and lack of pauses across syntactical and stanzaic units. (Jones, 2003, p. 20)

Hinton and Hogue (2002) suggest that “Morris incorporates features of African American oral discourse into her poetic language” (p. 11), blurring the lines between verbal and non-verbal discourses, which enables Tracie Morris’s voice to serve as an instrument using syllabication of letters, words, and sounds (Crown, 2002). Fragments of sounds contribute to Tracie Morris’s multi-vocalization of her narratives during her public performances of Project Princess.

Each time I read or listen to the lyrics of Project Princess, I detect the influence of hip-hop as well as the ways in which the use of sounds in poetry influence me as the listener and audience. I realized that Project Princess is a product of her musical influences derived from jazz, popular music, and hip-hop, in which Tracie Morris’s includes the singing of certain lines or words at varying speeds during her public recitations, thus providing breaks in flow in the form of fragmentations of words through the use of sounds as signifiers (Anglesey, 1994). She rearranges some words while deleting or replacing others, sounds, or whole lines in her poems (Crown, 2002, 2003; Hume, 2006; Jones, 2003, 2011; Morris, 2007b, 2012 a, b; Ramazani, 2011). Project Princess incorporates the use of song/talk described by Leonard (1986) as a form of Black English blended with encoded lyrics and idioms used to develop a communal identity as a product of jazz life and en vogue language.

A part of everyday vernacular in which verbal expressions are displayed as musical evocations and jazz talk, uses ritualized language, sounds, and musical rhythms such as wordplay, banter, and verbal humor, in which jazz vocalists like spoken word poets “reworked vacuous lines for new significance” (Leonard, 1986, p. 156). Hume (2006) examined the ways in which Tracie Morris incorporated sounds into her spoken word poems, specifically Project Princess. She found that many of Tracie Morris’s poems are improvised performances in which
“Morris releases the physicality of words, plays with sonic associations, and funnels the referential residue of language into more visceral, more estranging and ethical function” (Hume, 2006, p. 417). In the lyrics of *Project Princess*, Tracie Morris chose to introduce techniques associated with Jazz Poetry such as the use of her voice and intonations to mimic musical instruments, the use of hip-hop language and idioms in her narrations, or scat singing as found in the Blues tradition. Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* contains narratives of lived experiences and social realities blended with the use of syllabifications connected to the beats associated with hip-hop free-styling or the Blues’ scat singing. Anglesey (1999) suggested that Tracie Morris “is clearly a musical poet influenced by jazz, blues, rock ‘n’ roll, hip-hop, funk, avant garde, Afro-Cuban music, and spirituals” (p. 77). This contributes to her speed of recitation, enunciation of words, and her use of musical accompaniment during her public performances where she “recites in sync over articulated rhythms” through the use of syncopated phrases in which “Morris epitomizes the spoken word artist” (Anglesey, 1999, p. 77).

I realized that *Project Princess* contained lyrical stylizations that explored the relationship between words and sounds which ignored the conventions of Standard English grammar and punctuation. Tracie Morris eliminated the use of personal pronouns in her spoken word poem *Project Princess*; hence, conceding “the univocal lyric I and replaces the narrative-driven poem with multiple, public, and disjunctive voices” (Crown, 2002, p. 215). Instead, Tracie Morris’s text possesses language games that enable the rhythm of the words to emerge from the page when the poem is read aloud. Incorporating the use of sounds or sound effects during her public performance of *Project Princess*, Tracie Morris disrupts language and accepted meanings commonly associated with familiar words in this poem. Jones (2003) studied the diverse methods Tracie Morris employed in each of her recitations of the poem *Project Princess.*
He found that “she adds and extracts words, lines, even whole stanzas in various versions of Project Princess in other contexts” (p. 20), such as public performances or recordings.

Consequently, he concluded that Tracie Morris used improv, her voice as an instrument, and stylized intonations in the form of “half-spoken, half-sung recitative style that will go on to inform her sound poems” (Hume, 2006, p. 416) with different types of rhymes and sound clusters. This enables her to use sounds, voice, and intonations to create “an undertone of echo without the echo effect” (Morris, 2007b, p. 214) which allows negotiated sites of resistance and cultural exchange in this text (Freishtat & Sandlin, 2010). Tracie Morris’s page poetry version of Project Princess possesses distinct characteristics that separate this work from her spoken word rendering. For instance, her page poetry text is jazz influenced stanzas with elements of orality, whereas her spoken word adaptation contains sounds, sound effects, repetitions, and improv. Jones (2011) stated that “on the page, Morris’s adept use of rhyme (rocks, socks; goddess, modest), slant rhymes (gear, hair), alliteration (slick, slide; popping, piping), and complex internal rhyme (flunkies, junkies; clinking, rings, link, fingers) present a densely layered sound field” (p. 191). This is reflected in the visual (written) and audio version of Project Princess as “visual and aural aspects of her aesthetic” (Jones, 2011, p. 191) in which Tracie Morris uses “procedural play – adding, extracting, and protracting syllables, words, lines, and even entire stanzas – in varying live and recorded versions of Project Princess” (Jones, 2003, p. 21).

**Summary**

I opened this chapter with a discussion of my early exposure to sound and its role in human communication. I continued with a description of how I was able to use these experiences to assist my students in acquiring pre-reading proficiencies using sound to teach phonemic awareness, phonics, and vocabulary skills. From my previous exposure to the use of sound in the
form of phonemes and phonics to the acquisition of early reading proficiency, I embraced Morris’s poem *You Startin’ Wif Me* (1993) which shows her early experimentation with the use of sound in her poetry.

Incorporating the use of sound to interrupt her audiences’ and listeners’ understandings of social issues, for example domestic abuse, child molestation, sexual abuse, objectification of women, and the reintroduction of chain gangs in the United States, Morris uses her voice, intonations, screams, breath pauses, grunts, and syllabication of words in the poems *The Mrs. Gets Her Ass Kicked* (aka *Heaven*) (2005), *From Slave Sho’ to Video aka Black but Beautiful* (2005), *A Little* (2002, 2012), and *Chain Gang* (2006) to manipulate language and accepted meanings as a call to political action. Each of the five poems I presented, analyzed, and discussed in this chapter show a progression of Tracie Morris’s inclusion of sounds in her poems before and after *Project Princess*. These poems serve as markers of the ways in which Tracie Morris uses sound in her text. In chapter 5, I present the results of my analysis of *Project Princess*. 
CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS
EAR HUSTLIN’, YA FEEL ME, AND SHOUT-OUTS WITH TWEETS

“A poem will evolve through repetition and performance” (Rankine & Sewell, 2007, p. 212)

In this chapter, I describe how the intertextuality in spoken word poetry emerges using Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* (1998) as a case study. Currently, scholars in this understudied area have focused on the development of spoken word poetry using specific literary, cultural, and musical movements such as African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop. However, scholarship in this field has yet to research the development of the intertextuality in spoken word poetry. I hypothesize that the intertextuality in spoken word poetry is derived from its genealogical contributions. Using each of these identified movements, I consider the intertextuality in spoken word poetry specifically in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*. Each of this study’s four research questions has specific objectives which I address in this chapter.

Investigating Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*, I examine this text as data in the form of page poetry, spoken word poetry, and visual representation (video). I broke each of the guiding research questions down while exploring their overall objective, with regards to *Project Princess* in terms of its structure, themes, dialogic/performance, and visual attributes. In doing so, I endeavor to identify the ways in which her use of its genealogy crosses the intersections of race, gender, and class in terms of language use, word choices, accepted meanings, and reappropriated meanings in her written text, oral delivery, and visual representations (video) of this spoken word poem.

I discuss and address each of the research questions in the following order:

1- How does intertextuality function in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*? This question considers the ways in which intertextuality transpires in Tracie Morris’s
spoken word poem Project Princess by surveying what genealogical areas are present, to what extent, and what areas were omitted (if applicable) based on the genealogy of spoken word poetry.

2 - What role does the genealogy of spoken word poetry play in understanding the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem Project Princess? With this question I explore how the attributes of spoken word poetry materialize in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem Project Princess as part of her counter-narratives resituating her lived experiences and social realities in her present day context.

3 - In what ways does the intertextuality in spoken word poetry play at the intersections of race, gender, and class in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem Project Princess? I evaluate the language and accepted meanings that are used or reappropriated by Tracie Morris in her spoken word poem Project Princess to challenge dominant discourses across the intersections of race, gender, and class.

4 - What are the pedagogical implications for studying the intertextuality in spoken word poetry derived from its genealogical contributions in twenty-first century classrooms using Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem Project Princess as an example? I investigate this question in the context of formal and informal educational settings as discursive spaces of social interactions and communication in which listeners or audiences improve their abilities to think and articulate their thoughts and ideas critically.

Planting Seeds that Grow Wild

RQ1: How does the intertextuality function in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem Project Princess?

In this question, I scrutinize the ways in which the genealogy contributed to the intertextuality in Project Princess. I detected that the literary, cultural, and musical movements
appear cohesively in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem, with miniscule details which can be distinguished one from the other. Furthermore, I discerned that the intertextuality in this poem does not exist in isolation among its genealogical contributions, but is a hybrid transition between each of its identified literary, cultural, and musical movements. Due to spoken word poetry’s fluid movements across its “family tree,” Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem Project Princess integrates aspects of this lineage to varying degrees through her written words, oral deliveries, and public performances. To explore this question, I draw on the areas identified and discussed by scholars regarding the genealogy of spoken word poetry such as African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop. I analyze Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem Project Princess and identify the ways in which the intertextuality in spoken word poetry is represented in her page poetry, spoken word poetry, and visual text.

To explore the depth of the intertextuality which exists in Tracie Morris’s poem, I considered the following sub-questions: what does the intertextuality in Project Princess look like? and what does the intertextuality in Project Princess sound like? I reread my literature review chapter and the contributions that each identified area of spoken word poetry’s genealogy has made to the development of this genre. For that reason, I discuss and explain the larger question of the function of intertextuality in spoken word poetry through an exploration of each sub-question separately in this section, in the context of Tracie Morris’s Project Princess. First, I explain and discuss how the intertextuality in Morris’s poem is manifested in the page poetry version of the text. Next, I clarify how the intertextuality in Project Princess sounds as spoken word poetry. Finally, I examine and describe the ways in which the intertextuality emerges
through Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* from the page to the spoken word delivery.

**African Oral Tradition.** Beginning with an examination of Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess* as page poetry, I remembered a scene from the Haile Gerima’s film *Sankofa* (1993). This film provided a graphic depiction of slavery while illustrating the power deployed in the character of NuNu through her storytelling. Utilizing symbolic images of African religious deities and other visual texts, the narrative for the entire film was provided by Shola, a slave woman born and raised on the Lafayette Plantation. Employing the use of African oral tradition, *nommo*, and language games, NuNu retold the story of Afria, The Little Porcupine Girl. NuNu was born in Africa where she was kidnapped and sold into slavery at the age of thirteen. While traveling from Africa to the New World, she was raped and impregnated with her only child, a son named Joe. She used the story of Afria, The Little Porcupine Girl, in two different contexts in the film. The first time, the story is retold with NuNu sitting near a large tree at a campfire surrounded by children and adults who listen intently to her story. The second time she told the story of Afria, The Little Porcupine Girl, she included her lived experiences and social realities aboard the slave ship, along with details of her rape and impregnation. Through both retellings of Afria, The Little Porcupine Girl, NuNu was able to revisit her African homeland, lived experiences, and social realities, using narratives to create spaces for her memories of people and places as fictionalized accounts or counter-narratives of larger societal discourses. NuNu used animals (porcupines) as personas to retell stories of her lived experiences and social realities to her audiences, which conveyed hidden messages embedded in her narratives; thus enabling her listeners to interpret and derive meanings from the text.
The delivery style NuNu used in her tale of Afria, The Little Porcupine Girl, was non-chronological storytelling of her identified lived experiences and social realities derived from African oral tradition. Likewise, Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* (1998) presents narratives of her perceived lived experiences and social realities growing up in a public housing facility in Brooklyn, New York which is supported in the video with images of high-rise apartment buildings with Tracie Morris and two girls standing in a fenced area near one of these structures. The opening verse of Tracie Morris’s poem states:

- Teeny feet
  - rock layered double socks

The use of the word “teeny” is indicative of the age of the girl. From the use of the word “teeny” I deduced that the girl was young, a teen-ager, and the fact that the protagonist wore “layered double socks” led me to conclude that this character was female. Further indications that this poem is about a female protagonist moving from adolescence to womanhood is found in the lines:

- Color women variation reworks the French twist
  - with crinkle cut platinum frosted bangs
  - from a spray can’s mist

Borrowing from African oral tradition, Tracie Morris’s poem is a non-chronological delivery of her perceived lived experiences and social realities from early adolescence – as represented by “teeny” – to womanhood. She documents her social history by presenting narratives in this text from multiple points of view while drawing on *nommo* to redefine familiar words in her present day context. For that reason, Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess* serves as an intergenerational narrative of young girls and women of African descent residing in metropolitan areas.
Similar to Nunu’s (*Sankofa*) story of Afria, The Little Porcupine Girl, Tracie Morris’s poem incorporates elements of African oral tradition in the page poetry version of *Project Princess* as a way to preserve her identity and other cultural traits through the use of narrative. Whereas Nunu used Afria as a manifestation of her knowledge and understanding of African oral tradition by using animals as characters in her tale instead of people, Tracie Morris relied on the use of persona in the form of “project princess” to retell her story of lived experiences and social realities. Both Nunu and Tracie Morris relied on *nommo* to construct their narratives for retelling as intergenerational discourses detailing their lived experiences and social realities derived from African oral tradition.

However, when *Project Princess* moves out from the page during Tracie Morris’s oral delivery, the intertextuality in spoken word poetry occurs in didactic and transformative ways. Returning to the example of Nunu (*Sankofa*) story of Afria, The Little Porcupine Girl, I found that her narrative was accompanied by soft music played by a horn and a drum. Nunu used vocalized intonations mixed with song/talk set to the sounds of a crackling fire. In a like fashion, Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* includes African oral tradition through the use of echoing, repetition, chanting, and song/talk. Using non-musical accompaniment outside of her own voice, Tracie Morris integrates vocalized intonations into her spoken word poetry version of *Project Princess* in the prelude to the first line of the poem. The prelude includes the chant:

Tweedle-deeh-deeh-ha
Tweedle-deeh-deeh-ha

As the opening chant is echoing, images in the video emerge of high-rise apartment buildings with two young black girls standing near a fenced area with their backs touching. This image appears before Tracie Morris utters the words:
Teeny feet rock
layered double socks

Afterwards, the opening chant is repeated as it echoes in conjunction with the first verse of the poem as a form of call and response as the camera scans from the two girls to the apartment buildings to Tracie Morris, who stands near the fence with an apartment complex in the background. Tracie Morris merges both as follows:

Tweedle-deeh-deeh-ha
Tweedle-deeh-deeh-ha
Teeny feet rock layered double socks
(Echo: tweedle-deeh-deeh-ah/ tweedle-deeh-deeh-ha)
Teeny feet rock layered double socks/-ock, -ock, -ock
(Echo: tweedle-deeh-deeh-ah/ tweedle-deeh-deeh-ha)

Through the use of chanting, repetition, and sounds, Tracie Morris is showing the connections between her lived experiences and social realities of the 1990s with those of the girls currently residing in public housing similar to where she was raised. However, she takes these techniques a step further by including the use of song/talk, as evident in the lines:

Multidimensional shrimp earrings
frame her cinnamon face

The word “face” is sung, which separates and emphasizes its significance, because the other words of the verse are spoken and not sung. The word “face” is highlighted in the video with the camera zooming on the faces of Tracie Morris and of the two girls who are all wearing large, gold earrings. Unlike the page poetry version, the oral performance rendering of Project Princess moves the words from written text to verbalized artistic expressions of Tracie Morris’s lived experiences and social realities while maintaining the tenets of African oral tradition, as did the members of Harlem Renaissance.
**Harlem Renaissance.** The Harlem Renaissance provided black writers and poets with the opportunity to put many of the stories from their childhoods on paper. Many decided to retell stories of their lived experiences and social realities as counter-narratives challenging dominant discourses of black life, black “folk” traditions, and accepted discourses of blackness. Instead, in this literary movement, writers and poets opted to include autobiography mixed with fictionalized narratives to express their thoughts and ideas as discourses of empowerment, identity, and self-expression. Writers such as Arne Beutempts, Zora Neal Hurston, and Jean Toomer as well as poets like Gwendolyn Bennet, Lewis Grandison Alexander, and James Weldon Johnson chose to include their lived experiences and social realities in their narratives as a form of cultural expression. From this literary movement, I use Marita Bonner’s essay *On Being Young, a Woman, and Colored* (1925), the novel *Plum Bun, A Novel Without a Moral* (1928) by Jesse Redmond Fauset, and Clarissa Scott Delany’s poem *The Mask* (1925) as examples of the contributions of the Harlem Renaissance to the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*.

Arguably, the “project princess” in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem is a strong female protagonist based on the language and accepted meanings used to describe her. This narrative acts as a form of cultural expression in the tradition of the Harlem Renaissance in that street vernacular is used to articulate the poet’s retellings of her lived experiences and social realities. It is autobiographical in nature because Tracie Morris was raised in public housing in Brooklyn, New York, similar to the one featured in the video. I drew on the written version of *Project Princess* in order to connect the intertextuality in spoken word poetry to its genealogy in the Harlem Renaissance. The poem contains discourses of empowerment found in writings from the Harlem Renaissance such as:
Her hands mobile thrones of today’s urban goddess
Clinking rings link dragon fingers
no need to be modest

*Project Princess* uses counter-narratives to challenge dominant discourses of *blackness* and black life while rearticulating western beauty standards to include black females, as evidenced in the lines:

Multidimensional shrimp earrings
frame her cinnamon face
Crimson with a compliment if a comment hits the right place

In the page version of Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem, larger discourses of *blackness* and artistic expressions of black life serve as vehicles of empowerment for adolescent black girls that challenge stereotypical representations of black womanhood and sexuality in mainstream conversations emerging from rap and hip-hop music of the 1990s.

By opening sites of cultural and political resistance through the creation of texts of empowerment, members of the Harlem Renaissance contributed to the intertextuality in spoken word poetry which included elements of black life, black “folk” tradition, and black cultural expression in their written, visual, audio, and oral texts. This allowed for the development of areas for the construction of identity and other forms of self-representation that served to redefine dominant discourses of *blackness* in the larger society. In spoken word poetry, the intertextuality employs a form of storytelling adopted from African oral tradition which rearticulates past experiences as survival narratives of individuals or groups in the speakers’ present day context. In *Project Princess*, Tracie Morris’s narrative signifies the power of language and accepted meanings which are innate in spoken word poetry’s genealogy, while she
focuses her delivery on the art of naming; thus identifying its application as creative oratorical practice as reflected in the spoken word poetry version of the poem in the verse:

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multidimensional/multi-deeh-ceeh
multidimensional/multi-deeh-ceeh
Multidimensional shrimp earrings frame her cinnamon face
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In this verse, the word “face” is sung as the camera zooms in on the girls’ faces and ears to show their large, dangling earrings. With her right hand pointing and moving as if she were beckoning the girls to her, Tracie Morris raises her right hand, constantly moving while tilting her head to the left. Tracie Morris’s eyes are closed, and her left hand moves near the side of her face as she centers her head and recites:

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multidimensional/multi-deeh-ceeh
multi-dimensional/multi-deeh-ceeh
Multidimensional shrimp earrings frame her cinnamon face
crimson with a compliment if a comment hits the right place
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During her articulation of these lyrics, an image of the face of one of the girls emerges with her smiling as she looks at her long, red acrylic nails on her left hand. At that moment the audience or viewer is able to see that the girl is wearing gold jewelry (rings, bracelets, earrings, and a name-plate necklace) which all culminate with Tracie Morris’s standing near a fence with a high-rise apartment building immediately behind her as she throws her hands into the air. Conversely, in the next lines, the beginning consonant of the first word is sounded before she recites the following verse:

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hah-hah-ha-hands mobile thrones
hah-hah-ha-hands mobile thrones
of today’s urban goddess
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The phrase “of today’s urban goddess” is spoken in a slower and higher pitch than the rest of the lines. In a like fashion, both girls hold their hands in the air, mimicking Tracie Morris’s movements as both put their hands into the air, palms facing front, back, and front again to reveal
their palms. At this moment, one of the girls begins to admire her long red acrylic nails. As a result, I deduced that Tracie Morris recontextualized her lived experiences and social realities in her present day context by blurring the lines between the delivery of her verbal and non-verbal dialogues from the page to spoken word as the visuals show the girls imitating Tracie Morris’s gestures and body movements. This enables Tracie Morris’s voice, intonations, gestures, facial expressions, and body movements to become part of her narrative. Ultimately, the intertextuality in the spoken word poem generates knowledge by showing that commonalities exist across lived experiences and social realities, which renders Tracie Morris’s text just as significant to her performance as the words in her spoken word poem Project Princess.

As an autobiographical spoken word poem, Project Princess follows in the tradition of writers and poets of the Harlem Renaissance such as Marita Bonner, Jesse Redmond Fauset, and Clarissa Scott Delany. In this spoken word poem Tracie Morris uses a persona in the form of a strong female protagonist similar to those in Marita Bonner’s essay and the novel by Jesse Redmond Fauset. Using words such as “project” and “princess” to symbolize the reclamation of a positive identity and self-representation as counter-narratives, Tracie Morris introduces discourses of empowerment with the title “project princess” as well as the phrase “urban goddess” in much the same way as Clarissa Scott Delany employs the word “mask” in her poem The Mask (1925). However, Tracie Morris reappropriates language and accepted meanings in the spoken word poetry version of Project Princess through the use of voice and intonations in her public performance, which act as musical rhythms in her oral delivery of this poem – a tradition first popularized during the Jazz Poetry movement.
Jazz Poetry. Extracting from its roots in Jazz Poetry, the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess* employs symbolism, imagery, wordplay, street vernacular, and elongation of words. The page poetry version of *Project Princess* resituated Tracie Morris’s lived experiences and social realities with male/female relationships in the present day context. She stated:

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Don’t step to the plate  
with datelines from ‘88  
Spare your simple, fragile feeling  
with the same sense that you came
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Using free-verse, Tracie Morris showed emotion by articulating her disdain for males who do not know how to approach a female appropriately; instead she instructs them to “don’t step to the plate with datelines from ’88.” This stanza includes the use of street vernacular and wordplay, and equivalent of “don’t get in my face.” The word “plate” serves as a linguistic representation substituting for the physical presence of the “project princess” in which she expresses her displeasure with receiving unwanted attention from boys or men. Through this spoken word poem, Tracie Morris is revisiting her past experiences in the present day context, much like the narrator in Langston Hughes jazz poem *Weary Blues* (1923).

In her page poetry version of the poem *Project Princess*, Tracie Morris exhibits the distinct characteristics which separate her written text from her spoken word poetry version. For instance, in her page poetry version, Tracie Morris’s poem incorporates jazz influenced rhythms in the stanzas which also contain elements of orality, whereas her spoken word poetry version of *Project Princess* encompasses the use of syncopation, repetition, blues rhythms, word-sound relationships, and improv, similar to the jazz poem *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* (1970) by Gil Scott-Heron.
Using the Jazz Poetry technique of syncopation in the spoken word poetry version of *Project Princess* Tracie Morris incorporates vocalized intonation, repetition, word-sound relationships and fragmentation in the lines:

Don’t step to the plate with your datelines from ‘88
don’t step to the plate/don’t step/don’t step/don’t step/to the plate with datelines from ‘88
Spare your simple fragile feelings
with the good sense that you came

Tracie Morris uses syncopation as sound effects, specifically in the oral delivery of her poetic verses “don’t step to the plate/don’t step/don’t step/don’t step to the plate with your datelines from ’88,” moving her hands as if she were pushing something or someone away. The phonetically enhanced version of *Project Princess* mirrors the syncopation used in Jazz Poetry as demonstrated in Gil Scott-Heron’s *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* (1970). Unlike, Gil Scott-Heron who used music as the backdrop of his spoken word poem, Tracie Morris incorporates Jazz Poetry into her spoken word poem *Project Princess* by relying on her voice only, and intonations as syncopated rhythms marked by breaks in the sounds and silences contained in the lines “spare your simple fragile feelings with the same sense that you came.” In this line, she includes breath pauses between the words “your” and “simple” as well as between “feelings” and “with” before she completes her statement. This also illustrates the delicate use of improv in the oral performance of this part of the spoken word poem.

Tracie Morris uses her voice and intonation to reappropriate musical stylizations presented in Gil Scott-Heron’s *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* (1970) and referenced in Langston Hughes’s *Weary Blues* (1923). Reliving past experiences in the present day context, Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* uses intertextuality in her spoken word poetry as free-verse lyrics embedded with metaphors, imagery, and symbols as linguistic
representations. She uses breath pauses as a variation of the elongation of words in Project Princess as part of the jazz-influenced musicality embedded in the ways in which her words flow from the page during her oral delivery, much like singers in the Blues tradition.

Blues. On the page, Project Princess reads as a testimonial to young, adolescent black girls living in metropolitan areas. Unlike Abel Meeropol’s poem Bitter Fruit (1937) which was set in the Deep South, Project Princess is situated in a metropolitan low income housing facility. Although Project Princess does not directly address racism, it does address sexism in the unstructured body of its text through the use of language games, derived from the Blues tradition as stated in the lines:

Never dissed, she insists:
“No you can’t touch this.”
And, if pissed, bedecked fists
stop boys who must persist

These lines contain elements of testimony as black females try to guard their bodies against unwanted sexual advances. The words in this poem reflect the violence depicted in Abel Meeropol’s poem with the exception that the perpetrator of the act differs. In Bitter Fruit (1937), blacks were the victims of racism and lynching at the hands of whites, whereas in Project Princess adolescent black girls from the inner-city are the victims and committers of physical aggression as stated in the lyric “and, if pissed, bedecked fists stop boys who must persist.”

Borrowing from the Blues tradition, Tracie Morris uses intertextuality in her spoken word poem to articulate her narrative of lived experiences and social realities through an a cappella vocalization of the lyrics mixed with repetition, letter-sound fragmentation, and syllabication of words into sounds and chunks. Tracie Morris uses her voice as a musical instrument as she improvises the syncopation of sounds as a backdrop to her oral delivery of Project Princess. She does not use the theatrics of Billie Holliday in the spoken word poetry version of this poem, but
Tracie Morris does include the manipulation of language and accepted meanings through the use of sounds, elongations, shortened pronunciations of words, and breath pauses as presented in the lines:

Never dissed
never-nah-nah-never dissed/dissed/never dissed/dissed
No you can’t touch this
And if pissed, bedecked fists
stop boys who must persist

Morris extends the use of riffs and the breaking down of words and letters into phoneme sounds in the line “never-nah-nah/never dissed/dissed/never dissed/dissed” as images in the video move back and forth between Tracie Morris and the two girls. During the delivery of these lyrics, Tracie Morris expands the language games of the Blues through the use of non-sense words, fragmentation of syllables, and repetition of sounds, and her poem narrative contains the play of sounds mixed with words.

The verbal content of this spoken word poem embodies a form of storytelling that includes everyday language into the narrator’s text of lived experiences and social realities as part of the literary, cultural, and musical search for identity and self-representation in larger societal discourses. Using language games, such as repetition and wordplay derived from the Blues tradition, the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem Project Princess reflects the musical roots of this genre. The Blues contributed to the intertextuality in spoken word poetry by manipulating language and accepted meanings established by the African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, and later, the Black Arts Movement.

**Black Arts Movement.** Primarily, the Black Arts Movement expressed the desire of its members to create a “Black Aesthetic” through the use of fine arts blended with politics. Poets in this literary and cultural movement promoted the use of aesthetics that expressed the emotions
and frustrations of urban blacks with their oppression and marginalization in larger societal discourses. The poem *Black Arts* (1965), written and recorded by Amiri Baraka (born LeRoi Jones), as mentioned in Chapter Two (p. 56) has been identified as the foundational text of this 1960s and 1970s literary movement. The intertextuality in spoken word poetry derived from the Black Arts Movement with the use of multiple meaning words as new language, with new meanings to rearticulate lived experiences and social realities of individuals and groups in dominant discourses.

Embodying elements adopted from the Black Arts Movement, in the page poetry version of *Project Princess*, Tracie Morris uses the intertextuality as counter-narratives that challenge dominant discourses through language use, word choices, accepted meanings, and reappropriated meanings. In *Project Princess*, she states:

> Racing toe keeps up with fancy free gear  
> slick slide and just pressed weaved hair

> Jeans oversized belie her hips, back, thighs  
> that have made guys sigh  
> for milleni year

> Topped by an attractive jacket  
> her suit’s not for flacking, flunkies, junkies  
> or punk homies on the stroll

Presenting stories regarding the lived experiences and social realities of others as part of the speaker’s narratives, Tracie Morris uses multi-vocalizations in a single narrative in both versions of *Project Princess*. Like Gwendolyn Brooks who uses the word “Mecca” in the title of her poem as a physical dwelling place, Tracie Morris employs the word “project” as a representation of low cost housing as well as of a work in progress. Both Brooks (1969) and Cortez (1984) use commonly known words such as “Mecca” and “project” in their titles to articulate their vision of inner-city life.
The oral performance version of *Project Princess* incorporates the intertextuality adopted from the Black Arts Movement through the use of explicit language that includes multiple meaning words such as “flacking,” “flunkies,” “junkies,” “punk,” and “homies,” as well as through creating new meanings for other words like “belie” along with the line “racing toe keeps up with fancy free gear.” Tracie Morris blends syncopation derived from Jazz Poetry and the Blues into the oral delivery of *Project Princess* by varying the speed and pronunciation of words in the verses:

Racing toe keeps up with fancy free gear  
slick slide and just pressed recently weaved hair

Jeans oversized  
jeans oversized/jahh/jahh/jeans over/jeans oversized  
that have made guys  
sigh for milleni

Topped by an attractive jacket  
her suit’s not for flacking, flunkies, junkies  
or punk homies on the stroll

Chanting over the sounds of her own syncopated voice and intonations, in the oral delivery of *Project Princess*, Tracie Morris uses gestures, facial expressions, and body movements as she recites each word in the above lines. She elongates words through omissions of letters and phonemes, shortens the pronunciation of words, or includes sounds in much the same manner as Jayne Cortez in the poem *If the Drum is a Woman* (1982). In the line “racing toe keeps up with fancy free gear,” there is a breath pause between the words “free” and “gear” as well as between “weaved” and “hair.” In addition, in this poem, the words “gear” and “hair” are shortened as Tracie Morris uses her voice to rearticulate them through the stressing of phonemes as chunks, as opposed to blending the letter sounds in their pronunciation.
Combining fine arts with politics in the tradition of the Black Arts Movement, Tracie Morris uses her oral performance of *Project Princess* as a form of cultural expression; hence, enabling herself to vent the emotions and frustrations of females living in low cost public housing in metropolitan areas with their marginalization and oppression in dominant discourses. This is evidenced by images of the girls in the video standing with their backs to each other followed by another image of them, facing each other and smiling. Using these visuals, Tracie Morris interjects counter-narratives into her text, which expands the dialogues of empowerment, identity, and self-representation introduced during the Harlem Renaissance. Using her present day context, Tracie Morris employs the power of the word derived from African oral tradition by offering multiple narratives in a single text to introduce the lived experiences and social realities of adolescent black girls in the 1990s. Drawing on the Black Arts Movement’s notion of a “Black Aesthetic” to create new language and new meanings, the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* disrupts predetermined social expectations for poets and poetry in larger social conversations. Like for the members of the Black Arts Movement, it enables Morris to create a poem to reflect the issues of the black community in larger societal discourses through the introduction of new language and new meanings, similar to the works produced during the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz poetry, the Blues, and early hip-hop.

**Hip-hop.** Emerging as a grassroots, youth movement during the late 1970s, early hip-hop featured ritualized storytelling that included the use of braggadocio, language games, riffs, polyrhythmic syncopations, and inventive language. The intertextuality in spoken word poetry adopted from hip-hop includes the use of structural signification in the form of riffs, refrains, and ritualized storytelling through the use of sampling. Tracie Morris’s *Project Princess* applies hip-
hop’s use of riffs, sampling, and refrains in her oral delivery of this poem. It begins with Tracie Morris chanting the words:

Tweedle-deeh-deeh-ha
Tweedle-deeh-deeh-ha

thus verbally sampling words from the song *Rockin’ Robin* recorded first by Bobby Day (1958) and made famous by Michael Jackson (1972). I recall being a young girl during the late 1970s and early 1980s playing a variation of this song centered around the character of the Fonz from the ABC television show *Happy Days* (1974-1984). We added or omitted words and phrases from our rhyming games to reflect larger societal discourses, but the chant involving “tweedle-deeh-deeh” remained unchanged. Similarly, in *Project Princess*, Tracie Morris begins the oral delivery of this poem with the chant:

Tweedle-deeh-deeh-ha
Tweedle-deeh-deeh-ha

At the beginning of the poem, this chant and subsequent echoing during the articulation of the first line “teeny feet rock layered double socks” reflect the innocence of the girls whose voices are mixed with Tracie Morris’s as she sets the stage for the recitation of *Project Princess*.

Conversely, by the end of the poem, Tracie Morris has embedded hip-hop use of riffs, refrains, and ritualized storytelling into the spoken word poetry version of her spoken word poem in the lyrics:

She’s the one/she’s the one
sh-sheeh-she’s the one, right
sheeh-she’s the one
wind it/wind it
she’s the one, give her some
under fire/smoking gun/of whichsongs are sung/raps are spun
bells are rung/rocked/pistols cocked/unwanted
advances blocked
These words are recited by Tracie Morris at varying speeds with images of her hands moving in a circular motion, as if she were turntabling as her voice and intonation shift from fast to slow and vice versa as she reappropriates her use of sounds, such as stuttering and fragmentation of words that provide breaks in the flow of the poem during her oral delivery. For instance, Tracie Morris pronounces the words “she’s the one” at a slower pace than the phrase “sh-sheeh-she’s the one, right” with the inclusion of fragmentation. She reverses the polarity of the lines “sheeh-she’s the one/wind it/wind it/ she’s the one, give her some” as if she were stuttering when she repeats the words “wind it/wind it.” The spoken word poetry version of Project Princess reflects the intertextuality in spoken word poetry through the use of verbal sampling which includes the use of hip-hop language and idioms in the form of traditional verses and prose. For that reason, the intertextuality in spoken word poetry as shown in Project Princess derived from hip-hop is a marriage of the literary with the cultural and musical elements of its genealogy. As discussed in Chapter Four, in which Tracie Morris’s poem is considered an experiment with sounds and she acknowledges in I’ll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women (2012) (p. 389).

Tracie Morris’s use of verbal sampling, riffs, and refrains changes as she moves the words of the poem from written text to oral articulations on recordings and in her other public performances. Much like the griots of African oral tradition, her use of the intertextuality in spoken word poetry as part of her face-to-face verbal exchanges provides linguistic representations of her lived experiences and social realities in the same manner as poets of the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Arts Movement, and Jazz Poetry had done during the poetry readings, and blues singers during their recordings and public performances. Returning to the
excerpts from *Project Princess* used to explore and discuss the function of intertextuality, using Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem as a case study I examine the relationship between the genealogy of spoken word poetry and the ways in which Tracie Morris depicts these literary, cultural, and musical movements in *Project Princess* as part of her situated knowledge.

Tracie Morris’s use of hip-hop’s sampling and scratching in *Project Princess* changes as she moves the words of the poem from the page to her oral delivery on recordings and in other performance venues. Drawing from African oral tradition, Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* contains a non-chronological oral delivery system that reconstructs stories of lived experiences and social realities using multiple points of view. She incorporates the original language, meanings, and contexts by situationally retelling her narrative in the presence of an audience, who relies on their lived experiences and social realities to interpret Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem as storied text. In the next section, as I address Research Question 2, I expand the exploration of the ways in which the intertextuality in spoken word poetry functions by discussing and explaining how each of its genealogical attributes emerges in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*. Next, I evaluate the significance of the genealogy for understanding the intertextuality in spoken word poetry.

**Neo Translations…Familiarizing Ancestry**

**RQ2: What role does the genealogy of spoken word poetry play in understanding the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess***?

In this question, once again I focus my analysis on how the intertextuality in this spoken word poem appears in the text along with the ways in which Tracie Morris rearticulates this intertextuality during her oral delivery through the use of sounds. I reframe the question as an understanding of the intertextuality in spoken word poetry as a system of counter-narratives through an examination of the ways in which Tracie Morris uses her narratives of lived
experiences and social realities in her poem *Project Princess*. I address this question by considering the ways in which the attributes of spoken word poetry materialize in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*. Understanding how intertextuality is infused in this poem enabled me to trace the genealogical contributions of spoken word poetry, using Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* as a case study.

I uncovered an important aspect, essential to my understanding of the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*, and I included an examination of the ways in which the genealogy of spoken word poetry evolves in the text as part of her oral delivery. I began to perceive the intertextuality in this poem as an extension of Tracie Morris’s aesthetics (as defined by Eagleton, 1985, p. 327) anchored in her assessment of her lived experiences and social realities in the 1990s, in which language and accepted meanings are expanded into larger societal discourses through public performances of texts. Using knowledge as situated social interactions, as described in Chapter 4, Tracie Morris incorporates sounds in *Project Princess*, thus providing varied readings for the same text.

In addition, with the inclusion of sounds in her public performance of *Project Princess*, Tracie Morris opens sites of resistance as a form of social interactions by presenting narratives of her lived experiences and social realities from multiple points of view. This enabled me to view the intertextuality in *Project Princess* as counter-narratives in which relationships are renegotiated during each of Tracie Morris’s public performances as extensions of the intergenerational discourses derived from the intertextuality in spoken word poetry. In this section of the study, I explore, analyze, and explain the ways in which the intertextuality in spoken word poetry materializes in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*. First, I examine the ways in which the genealogy of spoken word poetry emerges in *Project Princess*. 

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Next, I evaluate how these characteristics are used by Tracie Morris in her oral deliveries. Finally, I explain and discuss how understanding the genealogy of spoken word poetry contributes to recognizing the ways in which the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess* materializes.

Returning to the excerpts from *Project Princess* used to explore and discuss the role that the genealogy of spoken word poetry plays in understanding the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess*, I examine the relationship between the genealogy of spoken word poetry and the ways in which Tracie Morris depicts these literary, cultural, and musical movements in her narrative of lived experiences and social realities. In Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*, I evaluate how she uses the intertextuality in spoken word poetry to transmit knowledge in her written text, but with my primary focus on her public performances.

Utilizing the intertextuality derived from the African oral tradition, Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* incorporates *nommo* as part of this text’s situated knowledge based on her narratives of lived experiences and social realities during the 1990s, in a Brooklyn low-income public housing facility. This is evident in Tracie Morris’s page poetry version of *Project Princess*, which aimed to empower adolescent girls, specifically black girls, who live in public housing facilities in metropolitan areas, as discussed in Chapter Four. For example, Morris states:

> Her hands mobile thrones of today’s urban goddess  
> Clinking rings link dragon fingers  
> no need to be modest

I drew on the written text of *Project Princess* in order to connect the intertextuality to its roots in the Harlem Renaissance. In this version of Tracie Morris’s poem, larger discourses of *blackness* and artistic expression of black life serve as vehicles of empowerment for adolescent black girls.
which challenge stereotypical representations of black womanhood and sexuality in mainstream conversations.

The intertextuality in the page poetry version employs a form of storytelling that rearticulates historical accounts or survival narratives of individuals or groups in the present day context. Tracie Morris’s use of nommo portrays her complex understandings of how multiple meaning words and phrases bring the intertextuality derived from African oral tradition, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop to her oral performance of *Project Princess*. This is evidenced in the following lines:

```
multidimensional/multi-deeh-ceeh
multidimensional/multi-deeh-ceeh/
Multidimensional shrimp earrings frame her cinnamon face
```

This part of the text borrows from the syncopation of Jazz Poetry in the elongation of the word “multi-deeh-ceeh,” scat singing and lyrical repetition of the Blues by singing the word “face,” and scratching from hip-hop in the verse:

```
multidimensional/multi-deeh-ceeh
multidimensional/multi-deeh-ceeh
```

Techniques (syncopation, imitation of musical instruments, refrain, repetition, improv) derived from Jazz Poetry, and the use of sounds in poetry previously explained appear in Tracie Morris’s phonetically enhanced version of these lines and are accentuated by her heavy emphasis on breaking down the word “multidimensional” through the use of sounds and fragmentation as the camera zooms in on the faces of Tracie Morris and the girls who are all wearing large, dangling, gold earrings.

Furthermore, Tracie Morris employs nommo in her spoken word poem *Project Princess* as evidenced by her choice of the words “project,” “princess,” “teeny,” and the phrases “mobile thrones” and “urban goddess.” Each of these words and expressions contains multiple meanings,
and her use of them implies alternative explanations of dominant discourses by resituating them in the narrative as statements of empowerment derived from the Harlem Renaissance. The word “project” suggests a work in progress; however, it also designates low income housing facilities. But, by adding the word “princess” into the text, the poet endeavors to reappropriate stereotypical images used in larger societal discourses to marginalize females who reside in affordable housing units. Indeed, the word “princess” conjures up images of regality, royalty, and wealth, and one would rarely consider the belief that a “princess” would reside in low income public housing. Yet, Tracie Morris’s use of the words “project” and “princess” as the title of her poem manipulates the accepted meanings that have been associated with those words in larger societal discourses.

Tracie Morris’s use of multiple meaning words like “teeny” illustrates an innate knowledge of nommo as derived from the African oral tradition and reinforced by the images of two adolescent, black females. “Teeny” is the informal use of the word “tiny,” but it may also serve as a shortened form of the word “teen-ager,” in the context of Project Princess indicating the age of the adolescent girls about whom this poem was written, and relates to the age of the “princess.” Inserting discourses of empowerment as a form of cultural expression with the phrases “mobile thrones” and “urban goddess,” the poet reappropriates the discourses surrounding adolescent girls in metropolitan areas in dialogues of self-representation and identity construction. These concepts were prevalent in the texts produced during the Harlem Renaissance, with writers and poets attempting to interject positive portrayals of black life, black “folk” tradition, and black cultural expression into dominant discourses. In her spoken word poem, Tracie Morris’s use of the words “thrones” and “goddess” echoes representations of beliefs depicted in African oral tradition, where storytelling was a way to connect with the divine
and to serve as a record of a tribe’s or civilization’s history. This contextualization of African oral tradition situates the spoken word poem *Project Princess* as a reminder to black girls in metropolitan areas that they are descended from royalty, and they are products of the divine, regardless of their geographical locations.

Conversely, members of the Harlem Renaissance used “the arts” to deliver black cultural expression such as poems, prose, novels, and plays, a tradition that would resurface during the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. By opening sites of cultural and political resistance through the creation of texts of empowerment, members of the Harlem Renaissance contributed to the intertextuality that included elements of black life, black “folk” tradition, and black cultural expression in written, visual, audio, and oral texts. This established spaces for the construction of self-defined black identities that redefined dominant discourses of blackness in larger societal conversations.

An additional example of the ways in which the genealogy of spoken word poetry emerges in Tracie Morris’s text appears in the following lines:

```
  hah-hah-hands mobile thrones
  hah-hah-hands mobile thrones
  of today’s urban goddess
```

Tracie Morris uses the intertextuality in many ways in her spoken word poem *Project Princess*. Her page poetry version of *Project Princess* contains distinct characteristics that separate her printed poem from her spoken word poetry version; for example, in her page poetry version, Tracie Morris includes jazz-influenced stanzas that contain elements of orality such as:

```
  Multidimensional shrimp earrings
  frame her cinnamon face
```
For these same lines, Tracie Morris’s spoken word poetry version of *Project Princess* includes
the use of sounds, call and response, repetition, and improv in her oral delivery supported by the
girls mirroring some of her facial expressions, gestures, and body movements.

multidimensional/multi-deeh-ceeh/multidimensional/multi-deeh-ceeh/
Multidimensional shrimp earrings/frames her cinnamon face

Tracie Morris incorporates the Jazz Poetry technique of syncopation in the above recitations of
*Project Princess*, and uses *a cappella* vocalized intonations of the word “face” in the oral
version, with each line indicating the fluidity of the intertextuality derived from her use of its
genealogical contributions from Harlem Renaissance, the Blues, and hip-hop. Using oratorical
practices, voice, and intonations during her public performances of the lines “hah-hah-hands
mobile thrones,” Tracie Morris refashions intertextuality to serve the needs of her listeners or
audiences by reappropriating her narratives of lived experiences and social realities through the
use of *nommo*, song/talk, verbal sampling, and scat singing derived from African oral tradition,
the Blues, and hip-hop.

Tracie Morris’s oral performance of *Project Princess* shows the significance of language
and accepted meanings in the literary, cultural, and musical movements that contribute to
intertextuality by providing counter-narratives of her lived experiences and social realities from
multiple points of view. In the video, they are represented by the panoramic view of Tracie
Morris, the high-rise apartment buildings, and the girls. This is also evidenced in the lines:

hah-hah-hands mobile thrones
hah-hah-hands mobile thrones

and

multidimensional/multi-deeh-ceeh/multidimensional/multi-deeh-ceeh/
Multidimensional shrimp earrings/frames her cinnamon face
The phonetically enhanced lyrics of *Project Princess* mirrors the syncopation used in Jazz Poetry, the scat singing of the Blues, and hip-hop’s scratching, each of which includes the use of riffs and fragmentation that reflect the musical influences of intertextuality. Tracie Morris’s use of syncopation extends elements of scat singing, wordless phrasing, call and response, and her vocalized intonations, specifically in the oral delivery of her poetic verses. Using language games such as lyrical repetition, wordplay, and call and response derived from the Blues tradition, the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem reflects the tensions often displayed as words are added to music and vice versa.

Her hands mobile thrones
of today’s urban goddess

hah-hah-hands mobile thrones/hah-hah-hands mobile thrones/
of today’s urban goddess

Through non-sense words and sounds, Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* illustrates her ability to integrate aspects of the genealogy of spoken word poetry by blending sounds mixed with words and images into her public performances. The verbal content of this poem embodies a form of storytelling that includes adopting everyday language in narratives of lived experiences and social realities as a literary, cultural, and musical search for identity and self-representation in larger societal discourses. Expressing internalized emotions such as anger, frustration, and humor, the Blues contributed to the intertextuality in spoken word poetry by manipulating language and accepted meanings established by African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, and later the Black Arts Movement.

Her suit’s not for flacking, flunkies, junkies
or punk homies on the stroll

These words “flacking,” “flunkies,” “junkies,” “punk,” and “homies” as well as their accepted meanings, serve as a form of cultural expression which began during the Harlem Renaissance.
and evolved during the Black Arts Movement. Like early Blues singers, members of the Black Arts Movement used explicit language, masculinized performance styles, and syncopations similar to Jazz Poetry to articulate their narratives of lived experiences and social realities. Drawing on the Black Arts Movement use of a “Black Aesthetic” to create new language and new meanings, the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* disrupts predetermined social expectations for poets and poetry in terms of language use, word choices, and pronunciations.

Blending multiple narratives into a single text, the intertextuality in spoken word poetry borrows from African oral tradition, Jazz Poetry, and the Blues to produce poems that emphasize the poet’s voice. Tracie Morris’s use of voice and intonation is part of her intertextual techniques as evident in the spoken word poetry version of *Project Princess*, which applies scratching and scat singing during the delivery of her social commentaries on black life in metropolitan areas during the 1990s.

She’s the one/she’s the one/sh-sheeh she’s the one, right/sheeh-she’s the one wind-it/wind-it She’s the one, give her some/under fire Smoking gun/of which songs are sung raps are spun/bells are rung rocked/pistol cocked unwanted advances blocked/well stacked/she’s jock it’s all about you/it’s all about you girl/ It’s all about you and livin’ in your word

She recites these verses while reappropriating sounds as fragmented words that provide breaks in the flow. With the words “and living in your world,” she improvised during her public performance in which she sings these words and raises her right hand in the air as an homage to the Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s.
Reflecting the hip-hop roots of spoken word poetry’s intertextuality, in her public performance of *Project Princess*, Tracie Morris uses verbal sampling, riffs, language, and idioms as part of its traditional verse and prose. For example, she verbally samples M. C. Hammer’s (1990) rap song *U Can’t Touch This*. She states:

No, you can’t touch this

You can’t touch this

Through this statement, Tracie Morris marks the reclamation of black females’ personal power by signifying their bodies as oppositional spaces that resist dominant discourses by asserting the black female’s voice into larger societal conversations. This enables the black female body to become personalized with its spaces to serve as a venue for sexual autonomy, which, in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poetry, becomes a site of resistance.

Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* borrows form the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop as indicated in the lines:

And if pissed bedecked fists
stops boys who must persist

and

You can’t touch this

These stanzas illustrate the attitude of the young adolescent black girls for whom this poem was written regarding their treatment in larger societal discourses. The phrase “bedecked fist” is a depiction of the protagonist’s empowerment which first appeared texts produced during the Harlem Renaissance, but it was reappropriated through the body language of the girls, as strong female protagonists, asserting their agency in dominant discourses of womanhood and sexuality.
The fact that their hands are fisted is an expression of the anger and frustration they are experiencing in the larger society as represented in early hip-hop.

In addition to “bedecked fists,” Tracie Morris verbally samples a line from M. C. Hammer’s (1990) *U Can’t Touch This*, and employs wordplay, a language game from the Blues tradition, in the lines “you can’t touch this.” She trades the letter “u” for the word “you” which rearticulates the language and accepted meanings associated with texts, a technique used during the Black Arts Movement as its members began to create new language and to repurpose the meanings of older words serving as contemporary raps stemming from Jazz Poetry. Evidence of these unstated discourses is confirmed in the verse:

```
And, if pissed, bedecked fists
stop boys who must persist
```

This use of intertextuality in *Project Princess* features couplets in which the poet’s voice is in its own phrasal sets as presented in her use of the ending sounds “iss” or “ist” in the following lines:

```
Never dissed, she insists
no you can’t touch this
And if pissed, bedecked fists
stop boys who must persist

never dissed/nee-h-never-nah-nah-never dissed, dissed/
never dissed/dissed/never dissed
```

Here, Tracie Morris infuses the tongues of hip-hop language and idioms, the scat singing of the Blues, and vocal intonations mimicking the syncopation used in Jazz Poetry.

```
Using language and accepted meanings to illustrate the importance of self-representation in her poem, Tracie Morris imitates the turntabling style of hip-hop with her fist moving in a circular motion as she states:
```
Never dissed
(never-nah-nah-never dissed/dissed/never dissed/dissed)
No you can’t touch this. And if pissed, bedecked fists
stop boys who must persist

Snapping her fingers in a crisscrossed fashion during her oral delivery of these lyrics, Tracie
Morris moves her right hand up and down before pointing with her thumb, index, and middle
finger as she extends each downward. She partially opens her eyes, tilts her head to the right, and
slightly raises her right shoulder as images of the girls are shown displaying their jewelry. These
visual representations non-verbally restate the premise that these girls are desirable, but they are
off-limits as the words “never dissed. No you can’t touch this” suggest.

It is Tracie Morris’s use of fragmented letters, words, and sounds borrowed from Jazz
Poetry, the Blues, and hip-hop that allow the intertextuality to emerge in Project Princess. Tracie
Morris’s blending of multiple narratives (written and oral) into a single text displays the
intertextuality borrowed from African oral tradition, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts
Movement, and hip-hop to produce a poem that emphasizes the use of voice and intonation in its
oral delivery. The intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s Project Princess, a case study of her spoken
word poetry manifests as hybrid dialogues retelling her narrative of lived experiences and social
realities as situated knowledge.

As a twentieth century extension of the African oral tradition, Tracie Morris’s spoken
word poem Project Princess reawakens the use of the poet’s voice as an instrument through the
inclusion of intonation, echoing, chanting, repetition, and song/talk. From the Black Arts
Movement, Tracie Morris incorporates the use of multiple meaning words as new language and
with new meanings to rearticulate stories of lived experiences and social realities. Her use of
intertextuality is evident in Project Princess as a blend of hip-hop’s sampling and scratching
techniques along with the Blues testimonial during the oral delivery of her social commentaries
on black life in her metropolitan areas during the 1990s, from African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, and the Black Arts Movement. By engaging each of the identified literary, cultural, and musical movements contributing to the intertextuality in her spoken word poetry, Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* negotiates dominant discourses at the intersections of race, gender, and class which contributed to the third research question in this study.

**Arbitrating the Anatomic Extensions of Verbalized Interchanges**

**RQ3:** In what ways does the intertextuality in spoken word poetry play at the intersections of race, gender, and class in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*?

Upon viewing *Project Princess* as a system of hybrid discourses disseminating knowledge through the deployment of power through narratives of lived experiences and social realities, I considered the ways in which these conversations address the intersections of race, gender, and class in larger societal conversations. This led me to my third research question which I explore using Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* as a case study. I addressed this question by concentrating on the language and word choices Tracie Morris uses to explore her lived experiences and social realities to challenge dominant discourses across the intersections of race, gender, and class.

Tracie Morris uses African oral tradition in the form of *nommo* to retell her memories of life in a metropolitan area. Her use of multiple meaning words such as “project” and “teeny” reflects one of the ways in which intertextuality plays at the intersections of race, gender, and class by reappropriating the perceptions of young black girls in low-income public housing through the spoken word poem *Project Princess* as counter-narratives challenging dominant discourses. Employing the original language and accepted meanings, situated in the present day context, Tracie Morris’s poem uses the words “teeny,” “urban,” “goddess,” “she,” “her,” “girl,”
“princess,” “project,” “cinnamon,” and “crimson” to portray the protagonists of the poem as adolescent, light complexioned black females living in a large city, as evidenced by the following excerpts:

Teeny feet rock
layered double socks

Her hands mobile thrones of
today’s urban goddess

Multidimensional shrimp earrings
frame her cinnamon face

Crimson with a compliment if a
comment hits the right place

She’s the one

It’s all about you girl

Combining the use of pronouns, nouns, and other descriptors, Tracie Morris utilizes words referring to, or commonly associated with, race, gender, or class in dominant discourses. Using words commonly associated with race, gender, and class, the video relies on images to assist the viewer or audience with understanding the narrative as it relates to public housing young girls’ sense of their personal worth in comparison to larger societal expectations. For instance, the allusion to race is made through words commonly associated with colors such as “cinnamon” which is a brown colored spice, and “crimson” which is a variation of the color red. This implies that the “princess” is a caramel complexion girl whose skin tone is accentuated by visible reddish hues when she blushes. The pronouns “she” and “her” are intermingled with the nouns “princess,” “girl,” “woman,” and “goddess” which indicate the gender of the protagonist. Although the protagonist in the poem was not given a name, attributes were assigned to her that provide the reader or audience with enough information to deduce that this character is female.
The discourse associated with class is evident in the words “project” and “urban,” with “project” conjuring images of larger societal notions of low income in metropolitan areas as supported by images of high-rise apartment buildings, and the word “urban” identifying the socioeconomic level of a particular population in large cities. Using language and accepted meanings as sites of resistance and social interaction in dominant discourses, Tracie Morris uses intertextuality at the intersections of race, gender, and class to reappropriate larger societal conversations of matriarchy, womanhood, and sexuality. The way in which intertextuality plays at the intersections of race, gender, and class in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem Project Princess is through the use of an encoded system of symbolic representations that offer the same narrative of lived experiences and social realities from multiple points of view derived from African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop. Adopting affirmations of empowerment and code switching borrowed from the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop, Tracie Morris uses the words “princess” and “goddess” as aesthetics of self-representation and identity construction as she addresses the intersection of gender and class in Project Princess. These words “princess” and “goddess” depict the relationship between written, oral, and visual texts as negotiations of stereotypical representations in dominant discourses as political aesthetics.

Using personas such as the “teeny” protagonist from Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem Project Princess, derived from Jazz Poetry, this text expands its narrative to incorporate black vernacular culture as a site of resistance through the use of language games derived from the Blues tradition. The multiple narratives embedded in Tracie Morris’s poem Project Princess signify the power of language and accepted meanings innate in spoken word poetry’s intertextuality, which enable her to focus her public performances on the collectivity and mastery
of the art of naming derived from African oral tradition. Ultimately, intertextuality generates knowledge by illustrating the commonalities among lived experiences and social realities, which renders Tracie Morris’s narratives in *Project Princess* just as significant to her public performances as the words in her page poem. Integrating encoded messages into her spoken word poem, Tracie Morris creates hybrid versions of her narratives of lived experiences and social realities, which mirror the here-and-now consciousness of the Black Arts Movement resituated in the present day context. This is accomplished through Tracie Morris’s inclusion of mediated narratives, braggadocio, verbal sampling, polyrhythmic syncopations, and the deconstruction of dominant discourses through the introduction of counter-narratives made popular in African oral tradition and continued during early hip-hop as evidenced in the lines:

Tweedle-deeh-deeh-ha
Tweedle-deeh-deeh-ha
Teeny feet rock layered
double socks
(Echo: Tweedle-deeh-deeh-ha)

Teeny feet rock layered
double socks

Her hands mobile thrones of
today’s urban goddess
Clinking rings link dragon fingers
no need to be modest

Never dissed, she insists:
“No you can’t touch this.”
And, if pissed, bedecked fists
stop boys who must persist

Through the reconstruction her narrative at the intersections of race, gender, and class, the intertextuality in spoken word poetry enables Tracie Morris to draw on its genealogical contributions in nuanced ways that breathe new life into each of her situated public performances of *Project Princess* as stories of her lived experiences and social realities.
Returning to excerpts from Tracie Morris’s *Project Princess* used to explore and discuss the function of intertextuality in spoken word poetry; I examine the relationship between the genealogy of spoken word poetry and the ways in which Tracie Morris blends these literary, cultural, and musical movements in the narrative of lived experiences and social realities. Using Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* as a case study, I investigate how Morris uses intertextuality to transmit her situated knowledge across the intersections of race, gender, and class as pedagogy and education.

**Breaking Boundaries, Freeing Minds: *Project Princess* as Pedagogy and Education**

**RQ 4: What are the pedagogical implications for studying the intertextuality in spoken word poetry derived from its genealogical contributions in twenty-first century classrooms using Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* as an example?**

I approached this question from the perspective of what can be learned from studying the intertextuality in spoken word poetry using Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* as a case study. After all twenty-first century classrooms are spaces, constructed by the demand of larger societal discourses regarding educational reform. Bearing these physical and imagined locations in mind, I considered Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* as a site of resistance which opens discursive spaces for dialogical exchanges and social interactions through the exploration and discussion of her narrative of lived experiences and social realities using the genealogy of spoken word poetry as a point of departure. I explore the pedagogical implications of studying the intertextuality in spoken word poetry as the reappropriation of physical and imagined spaces as locations of self-representation, self-expression, and empowerment. I now realize that the pedagogical implications of using spoken word poetry in twenty-first century classrooms emerge from the creation of counter-narratives that challenge dominant discourses and the use of discursive spaces as sites of resistance.
The significance of spoken word poetry to pedagogy and education stems from the texts produced and performed by its poets. In essence, spoken word poetry opens discursive spaces for creative expression which permits the development of counter-narratives that challenge dominant discourses. As a genre, spoken word poetry is shaped by the poets’ lived experiences and social realities constructed by their knowledge (internal and external) and are portrayed as part of their evolving aesthetics practices during their public performances. For those reasons, poetry used in spoken word utilizes counter-narratives and discursive spaces to build a sense of belonging among individuals anchored in the sharing of lived experiences and social realities across the intersections of race, gender, and class. In other words, spoken word poetry in pedagogy and education allows marginalized discourses to be heard using innovative language and accepted meanings to explain the poet’s interpretation of “reality” by presenting imagined possibilities as part of his or her narrative. This is accomplished by connecting pedagogy and education to the participants’ lived experiences and social realities in their present day context.

Realizing the pedagogical and educational possibilities that spoken word poetry provides, I considered the ways in which Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* may be used in classrooms as an approach for the creation of counter-narratives that challenge dominant discourses. I also pondered the ways in which this poem opens discursive spaces for dialogical exchanges and social interactions. Morris accomplishes this through the inclusion of scat singing, the elongation of words through a cappella singing, improvisation, riffs, refrain, and repetition as substantiated in the lines:

```
multidimensional/multi-deeh-ceeh
multidimensional/multi-deeh-ceeh
Multidimensional shrimp earrings
frame her cinnamon face
Crimson with a compliment if a
comment hits the right place
```
Through these lyrics, multiple narratives are retold using a single text. Morris uses language, accepted meanings, and sounds to resituate her narrative in her present day context. These hybrid dialogues are accentuated by Tracie Morris’s *a cappella* singing of the word “face” which elongates the text and generates oratorical practices that use scat singing and sounds such as “multidimensional/multi-deeh-ceeh/multidimensional/multi-deeh-ceeh” blended with repetition, riffs, and refrain in which her voice and intonation alter the flow of her words during her oral delivery. The aforementioned lyrics offer Morris’s audiences, listeners, or students opportunities to engage with her narrative based on their lived experiences and social realities; thus, opening transversal paths between historical accounts, fictionalized portrayals, lived experiences, and social realities as discursive spaces of dialogical exchanges and social interactions.

Spoken word poetry also provides educators opportunities to contextualize narratives of selected texts and use them as “springboards” into larger discussions. Innovative lessons may include the creation of thematic units across content area of English Language Arts which enables spoken word poems to be paired with other texts drawn from African oral tradition (e.g., *Sankofa*, 1993), the Harlem Renaissance (e.g., Clarissa Scott Delany’s *The Mask*, 1925; Jesse Redmon Fauset’s *Plum Bun*, 1928), Jazz Poetry (e.g., Langston Hughes’s *Weary Blues*, 1925; Gil Scott-Heron’s *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, 1970), the Blues (e.g., Abel Meeropol’s *Bitter Fruit*, 1937; Billie Holiday’s *Strange Fruit*, 1939), the Black Arts Movement (e.g., Gwendolyn Brooks’s *In the Mecca*, 1968; Jayne Cortez’s *If the Drum is a Woman*, 1984), and hip-hop (e.g., Public Enemy’s *Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos*, 1989; L. L. Cool J’s *Around the Way Girl*, 1990). It also helps situate them in larger societal discourses to create counter-narratives that challenge dominant discourses. This opens discursive spaces as sites of resistance and transformative locations where boundaries are transgressed, thus authorizing the
use of self-reflection, analysis, dialogical exchanges, and recursive thinking among students. As a result, these discursive spaces establish connections among students beyond an imagined past, shared history, or commonalities of lived experiences and social realities in larger societal discourses.

The pedagogical implications of using spoken word poetry, for example, Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess*, consists in providing a historical context for the narrative contained in this text. This enables students to use their prior knowledge to build communities based on the sharing of lived experiences and social realities to challenge dominant discourses and to establish discursive spaces as sites of resistance, dialogical exchanges, and social interactions. The use of spoken word poetry texts that “speak” to the lived experiences and social realities of students offers them validation in the context of larger societal discourses. Using *Project Princess* in twenty-first century classrooms may promote the development of self-expression as a source of agency and empowerment; hence, enabling students to use their prior knowledge to assist them in understanding, interpreting, and engaging with Tracie Morris’s narrative poem across the intersections of race, gender, and class. This leaves educators with several tasks: First, uncover the hidden transcripts contained in Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*. Second, identify themes that emerge across Morris’s narrative, and connect them to its genealogical contributors. Third, create safe-spaces for silences to be broken, through the presentation of spoken word poetry texts with works from key figures in each area of spoken word poetry’s genealogy. Finally, these discourses should be contextualized by the presentation of the students’ personal narratives, lived experiences, and social realities to facilitate meaningful discussion and interpretations of these texts. The intertextuality in spoken word poetry expands the poet’s marginalized discourses into larger societal conversations through use of discursive spaces as
sites of resistance which enables poets to use artistic expressions of their lived experiences and social realities as counter-narratives to challenge dominant discourses. By deconstructing socially sanctioned forms of representation, spoken word poetry use in pedagogy and education unlocks areas for the development of new relationships and new discourses which reappropriate language and accepted meanings while reinterpreting them in the poet’s present day context.

Twenty-first century classrooms are physical spaces of formal and informal teaching and learning in which spoken word poetry can be used to create counter-narratives that challenge dominant discourses and open discursive spaces through the manipulation of language and accepted meanings. For example, Tracie Morris’s narrative in *Project Princess* can also be used to establish sites of resistance by opening spaces for dialogical exchanges and social interactions. Situated in the poet’s present day context, the intertextuality in spoken word poetry derived from African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop opens spaces by creating sites of resistance. Using hybrid discourses, Tracie Morris incorporates the intertextuality in *Project Princess* as written, oral, and performative dialogues of her lived experiences and social realities.

**Summary**

This chapter examined the ways in which the genealogy of spoken word poetry manifests itself in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*. Using characteristics associated with the genealogy of spoken word poetry as identified by scholars, Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* relies on language and accepted meanings in the delivery of her narrative. She adapted the use of language games, symbolic representations, non-verbal cues, voice, intonation, and other literary devices to situationally construct her poem as a counter-narrative to dominant discourses as new knowledge. By studying Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project
*Princess* as a case study, I explored the ways in which the intertextuality in spoken word poetry functioned, created new understandings of past discourses, engaged as social interactions at the intersections of race, gender, and class. I examined its pedagogical implications in twenty-first century classrooms. Her narrative of her lived experiences and social realities manifested the genealogical contributions of spoken word poetry in complex and overlapping ways, which aids the audiences, listeners, or students in understanding the intertextuality in spoken word poetry in the present day context. In the next chapter, I discuss the findings of this study in relation to previous research.
CHAPTER SIX: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS
BEAST MODE: SHO’ YA RITE

Chapter Six presents a discussion of the findings of the study in relation to previous research. It begins with an overview of the study, a restatement of the purpose/significance of the study, and a summary of the significant findings. Next, findings related to the research questions posed are discussed in relation to the previous studies reviewed in Chapter Two. Implications for education in English Language Arts are discussed, followed by limitations of this study and recommendations for future study.

Overview of the Study

In this study, I explore intertextuality in spoken word poetry by outlining its development through the text of one of its poets, Tracie Morris’s Project Princess. When I began listening to spoken word poetry, my focus was on narratives in the lyrics that were in conversation with my lived experiences and the ways I had used these words to bridge the gaps in both my personal learning and that of my students. As I studied the intertextuality in spoken word poetry, my focus shifted towards the intertextuality embedded in the narratives of spoken word poets and their performances. My questions emerged from a space of curiosity and pragmatism after I had become a student learning about the intertextuality in spoken word poetry, while experiencing cathartic moments of clarity in lived experiences, through the internalization of the lyrics. My research questions emerged from my concerns as a woman, mother, educator, student, and researcher. I was interested in how I could use the intertextuality in spoken word poetry to introduce my students to the lived experiences and social realities of people beyond the school district’s English Language Arts curriculum and Reading First program.
Purpose/Significance of the Study

This study examined the intertextuality in spoken word poetry through its multiple roots in the African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop, using Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess* as a case study. With my study, I sought to add to the larger field of popular culture in education by exploring the intertextuality in spoken word poetry, based on Morris’s poem *Project Princess*. I used narrative inquiry as my qualitative research methodology to investigate, analyze, and articulate the nuances which exist as part of the intertextuality in spoken word poetry. I accomplished this through the use of four models of narrative analysis which enabled me to situate my data in larger societal conversations. I used intertextuality theory, public pedagogy, and performance studies to explore the ways in which the poet’s narrative served as a site of resistance and opened discursive spaces for dialectical exchanges and social interactions. My study was guided by the following research questions: How does intertextuality function in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*? What role does the genealogy of spoken word poetry play in understanding the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess*? In what ways does the intertextuality in spoken word poetry play at the intersections of race, gender, and class in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*? What are the pedagogical implications for studying the intertextuality in spoken word poetry derived from its genealogical contributions in twenty-first century classrooms using Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* as an example?

Significant Findings of the Study

Through the study of Morris’s *Project Princess*, I found that intertextuality in spoken word poetry emerged as hybrid discourses across its genealogical contributions as non-
chronological storytelling challenging dominant discourses through the use of counter-narratives and the opening of discursive spaces as sites of resistance. I recognized that Tracie Morris used her voice, intonations, sounds, facial expressions, gestures, and body movements as part of her text accentuating her narrative of lived experiences and social realities.

I realized that Morris used language and accepted meanings to manipulate, reappropriate, or contextualize her narrative during public performances. I learned that she includes the use of sounds to disrupt language and accepted meanings in her poem *Project Princess*. I ascertained that in her text, Morris relies on choices to signify larger societal discourses across the intersections of race, gender, and class. Using signifying words or signification, she implicitly identified the “project princess” in this poem as a black, adolescent girl who resided in low-income housing in a metropolitan area. I showed how Morris relied on physical and imagined places to create hybrid discourses of empowerment, social interactions, self-representation, and agency. She resituates her narrative of lived experiences and social realities in her present day context. I address these findings in the discussion of the results of this study, which I organized sequentially using the research questions as a guide.

**Discussion of Results in Relation to Previous Research**

**Tricks of the Tongue**

The first finding of this study uncovered the function of intertextuality in Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* as non-chronological storytelling in which she articulates the same narrative from multiple points of view, using themes, a technique acquired from African oral tradition, Jazz Poetry, and the Blues. Lord (1991) suggests that the use of themes occurs through the poets’ use of repetition during their oral deliveries. In *Project Princess*, I realized that Tracie Morris’s use of non-chronological storytelling is evidenced in the ways in which her words
appeared as written text as well as in her articulation of the poem’s lyrics during her public performances. As written text, *Project Princess* contains rhymes, alliterations, multiple meaning words, and figurative language, whereas, the spoken word poetry version incorporates the use of chanting, echoing, syncopation, and sounds. However, during her public performance Morris’s use of repetition in her oral delivery of *Project Princess*’s lyrics illustrates the themes surrounding the persona of “project princess” which is supported by Lord’s (1991) study of African oral poetry. Through the use of non-chronological storytelling, intertextuality emerges in *Project Princess* as a blend of poetry with musical rhythms provided by Morris’s voice and intonation, adopting aspects of the genealogy of spoken word poetry acquired from African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop. This enables Tracie Morris to make hybrid transitions across the “family tree” of spoken word poetry on the page and during her public performances of *Project Princess*.

Utilizing multiple versions of the same narrative (written and oral) contextualized in her present day context, Morris presents her autobiographical accounts of her lived experiences and social realities mixed with fictionalized accounts embedded with hidden messages that depict the race, gender, and class of the “project princess” in the tradition of texts from the Harlem Renaissance. Smitherman (1997) contends that black artists use ritualized storytelling connecting past and present discourses through linguistic representations of black life and black cultural expression. Correspondingly, Banks-Wallace (2002) maintains that storytellers are empowered through the retelling of narratives of their lived experiences and social realities using self-reflexive dialogues. The arguments by Banks-Wallace (2002) and Smitherman (1997) are supported by Morris’s rearticulation of her lived experiences and social realities in both versions of *Project Princess* used in my study. On the page, non-chronological storytelling in *Project
*Princess* functions as alternative portrayals of Morris’s lived experiences and social realities presented as aesthetics of self-representation emphasizing empowerment and political activism, through the deconstruction of stereotypical representations in dominant discourses adopted from the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement.

In her oral delivery of *Project Princess*, Morris’s non-chronological storytelling features the use of echoing, repetition, and chanting, ascertained from African oral tradition. Feinstein (1997) explains that poets include personal narratives in their texts as part of their poems rhythms and sounds. Likewise, Jones (2003) suggests that Tracie Morris uses word sound clusters to create her visual and aural experiences. My findings confirms Feinstein’s (1997) and Jones’s (2003) contention that Tracie Morris uses sounds in *Project Princess* to provide her audiences or listeners with multiple interpretations of her narrative of her lived experiences and social realities. Conversely, as performative text, *Project Princess* emphasizes Tracie Morris’s non-chronological storytelling through her use of rhythms, rhymes, and profane wordplay; hence, illustrating the flexibility of the human voice and intonation in which she articulates *Project Princess*’s lyrics using rhythmic syncopations and scat singing as a form of call and response adopted from Jazz Poetry, the Blues, and hip-hop.

The use of street vernacular and creative oratorical practices integrated with the sound of her voice echoing in *Project Princess*’s lyrics shows not only Morris’s grasp of non-chronological storytelling, but also establishes a connection between her past (“teeny feet rock layered double socks”) and present discourses (“color women variation reworks the French twist”) while offering a future of possibilities to her audiences and listeners (“It’s all about you, girl. And living in your world”). Rambsy (2008) maintains that poets draw on other genres and traditions to create their narratives. The ways in which Tracie Morris uses the intertextuality in
spoken word poetry verifies Rambsy’s (2008) finding that poets use other genres and traditions in the development and articulation of their narratives of lived experiences and social realities. Combining symbolism, imagery, wordplay, and elongation of words through repetition characteristics derived from Jazz Poetry, Tracie Morris incorporates non-chronological storytelling in her public performances as evidenced in the opening chant of *Project Princess* in which her vocalized intonations provide breaks in flow through the inclusion of sounds (echoing) and the use of silences (breath pauses).

Stephens and Wright (2000) contend that artists use their works to introduce marginalized discourses using a single text to invite others into their narratives across the intersections of race, gender, and class. In *Project Princess*, Morris uses her narrative to articulate her lived experiences and social realities through the persona of “project princess” which expands her text into larger societal discourses of blackness, womanhood, and life in low-income public housing. The findings of Stephens and Wright (2000) are reinforced by my results which show that Tracie Morris’s use of language and words to present her narrative of lived experiences and social realities in *Project Princess* from multiple points of views is part of her use of non-chronological storytelling. Using multiple meaning words, Morris resituates her narrative through the inclusion of explicit language on the page and in her oral performance through sampling. Jones (2003) found that spoken word poetry’s relationship with hip-hop is the use of sampling by poets in this genre. This is substantiated by Morris’s verbally sampling of *Rockin’ Robin* by Bobby Day (1958) and Michael Jackson (1972) in which she includes riffs and refrains (echoing and repetition) to reposition her oral delivery of *Project Princess* during her public performances.

In addition, she modulates the tempo and pronunciation of the words and verses, thus, expanding her use of non-chronological storytelling as an extension of the intertextuality in
spoken word poetry obtained from its genealogy. Morris’s multi-vocalizations of specific words, sounds, and (verbal) sampling in *Project Princess* are transformed into non-chronological storytelling in which braggadocio, riffs, and inventive language are used to reverse the polarity of her lyrics which redirects her narrative of lived experiences and social realities from the page to her oral delivery. This is consistent with those in research conducted by Feinstein (1997), Jones (2003), and Rambsy (2008). Through repetition of themes during her public performance, Morris uses her lyrics to deconstruct language and accepted meanings as part of her non-chronological storytelling in *Project Princess*. These results are supported by Lorde’s (1991) study on African oral poetry.

**Are Ya’ Feelin’ Meh Yo’?**

The second finding reveals that the genealogy of spoken word poetry aids in comprehending its intertextuality through the poet’s use of *nommo* to situate language and accepted meanings in their narratives. Cummings and Roy (2002) stated that *nommo* is an orally communicated component of black creative expression which includes “rhythm, soundin’ out, repetition, stylin’, lyrical quality, historical perspective, indirection, call and response, protest against white establishment and mythication” (p. 63). Walker and Kuykendall (2005) maintained that *nommo* varied based on the delivery style of the poet. However, Brown (1999) asserts that black poets use linguistic transformation in oral deliveries of their narratives. My findings substantiate those by Walker and Kuykendall (2005) and by Brown (1999) regarding the poets’ oral delivery of their texts during their public performances. In addition, my results uncovered the ways in which poets use their voices and intonations during their oral deliveries as linguistic representations of *nommo* anchored in language and accepted meanings. Relying on the rhythmic power of words, Morris uses language and accepted meanings in *Project Princess* to preserve the
history of individuals or groups through the use of metaphors, imagery, and other literary devices as part of her generational text to create new cultural identities.

Drawing on nommo, multiple meaning words, and idioms acquired from African oral tradition, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop, my findings regarding language and accepted meanings as components of understanding intertextuality in Tracie Morris poem *Project Princess* are confirmed by Cummings and Roy’s (2002), Walker and Kuykendall’s (2005), and Brown’s (1999) research. Morris uses nommo to resituate her narrative of lived experiences and social realities in her present day context. I learned that Morris’s use of black vernacular speech and practices in *Project Princess* combined with unstructured verses or free-verse, song/talk patterns, lyrical repetition, sounds, and riffs to position language and accepted meanings. In her text, Morris’s lived experiences and social realities serve as mediated narratives acquired from African oral tradition, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, and hip-hop. Demers (2003) suggests that artists used their narratives to pay homage to their communities. This is verified by my findings which show that Tracie Morris blends her narratives of lived experiences and social realities through the use of autobiography and fictionalized narratives that pay homage to “project princesses” across geographical boundaries. By incorporating multiple narratives in a single text, Morris uses intertextuality in *Project Princess* to negotiate social boundaries, deconstruct stereotypical representations, and gain social positioning in larger societal discourses. Verbally constructing discursive spaces, Morris resituates her lived experiences and social realities of living in a Brooklyn low-income public housing facility, to pay homage to the young ladies with whom she was raised as well as to those who reside there now, which is validated by Demer’s (2003) findings.
Evolving across time and space, *Project Princess* contains encoded messages in which Morris uses her narrative as political aesthetics in which language games are blended with humor, emotions, and sounds to manipulate language and accepted meanings in her written text and during her public performances. Wallenstein (1991) contends that poets create unstructured narratives which blend humor and improvisation during their oral delivery of their texts. But, Rose (1991) asserts that language acts as a point of contention used by artists to create spaces in larger societal discourses. In contrast, Brown (1999) states that black poets focus on the sounds in language during their oral deliveries to communicate meanings. Each of these studies validates the findings of my research regarding Tracie Morris’s use of language and accepted meanings in *Project Princess*, derived from the intertextuality in spoken word poetry. This emerges as social narratives featuring Tracie Morris’s voice, intonation, echoing, chanting, repetition of words or phrases, and song/talk borrowed from African oral tradition, Jazz Poetry, and the Blues infused with sounds during her public performances. Breaking-down words using sounds, fragmentation, intentional stuttering, song/talk, elongation of words, and refrain, Morris borrows from Jazz Poetry and the Blues, to transmit knowledge while reintroducing marginalized discourses of empowerment, self-representation, self-definition, and identity through the inclusion of counter-narratives in her text rooted in language and accepted meanings.

In *Project Princess*, Tracie Morris uses language and accepted meanings as culturally collaborative discourses anchored in a here-and-now consciousness adopted from the Black Arts Movement and hip-hop in which she situates the “project princess’s” status in larger societal discourses. Sparks and Grochowski (2002) found that spoken word poets use their narratives to generate knowledge by negotiating dominant discourses and establishing new social identities. My research supports Sparks and Grochowski’s (2002) assertion by exploring the ways in which
Tracie Morris incorporates the genealogy of spoken word in *Project Princess* through breaks in rhythm in which her voice, intonation, informal pronunciation of words, use of idioms, improvisation, and sounds contextualize language and accepted meanings. In her poem *Project Princess*, Morris uses language and accepted meanings to create cultural spaces as sites of resistances for artistic expression through the use of signification as stylistic and structural aesthetics across the intersections of race, gender, and class.

**Cliques, Clicks, and Flashes**

A third finding places the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess* at the intersections of race, gender, and class through her use of signification (signifying) to articulate her narrative of lived experiences and social realities. Using *nommo* acquired from African oral tradition, Morris uses signification as symbolic representations of her lived experiences and social realities in which she uses the original language, original meanings, and original situation to describe and explain events, experiences, or phenomena through the “project princess” persona. Brown (1999) suggests that black poets use their words to politicize their narratives. Similarly, Sparks and Grochowski (2002) assert that poets manipulate language in order to address dominant discourses. The results of my research show that Tracie Morris’s word choices politicizes her text by manipulating language and accepted meanings to address dominant discourses across the intersections of race, gender, and class which supports by Brown (1999) and Sparks and Grochowski (2002) research. In *Project Princess*, I determined that Tracie Morris’s language use and word choices create an encoded system of communication in which signification (signifying) is used to play across the intersections of race, gender, and class. She reappropriates language and accepted meanings by reassociating commonly used, nouns, pronouns, and other descriptive words to represent race, gender, and class in her narrative of
lived experiences and social realities. On the other hand, Gates (1988) states that black oral poetry uses signification to communicate meaning by illustrating the relationship between black literary traditions and African American interpretations of these practices. My study confirms Gate’s (1988) research regarding the use of signification to convey meaning, but my findings contradict his assertion regarding its connection to African American literary practices.

Relying on customary practices, Morris uses intertextuality to reappropriate language and accepted meanings through the use of signification (signifying) to open sites of resistance, empowerment, and social interactions. Decker (1993) explained that black artists incorporate ancestral discourses into their narratives to situate their lived experiences and social realities in their present day context. My findings are substantiated by Decker’s (1993) research which reinforces Tracie Morris’s use of signification in *Project Princess*. Drawing on the influences of the Harlem Renaissance on spoken word poetry, Morris’s use of intertextuality emerges in her choice of language and words to contextualize her narrative of lived experiences and social realities in her present day context. Morris uses signification (signifying) in her public performances; she replaces banal discourses with new language and new meanings explicitly to create intersubjective transformations as generational wisdom, identifying markers of difference in which she redefines or addresses issues important to her and her community, a characteristic borrowed from the African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, and Black Arts Movement.

In *Project Princess*, Morris incorporates color words to describe the race and skin tone of the “project princess” and uses socially accepted pronouns, nouns, as well as other descriptors to establish the gender and class of the poem’s protagonist. These words serve as part of Morris’s hidden transcripts providing social critique through her lyrical skills as new dialogues paying homage through multi-vocalizations in a single text, a technique acquired from the Black Arts
Movement and hip-hop and are substantiated by Demer’s (2003), Rose’s (1991), and Decker’s (1993) research findings. Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess* contains themes of empowerment and self-representation as used in texts by writers and poets of the Harlem Renaissance which verbally reconstruct social spaces while metaphorically articulating her lived experiences and the social realities of girls residing in low-income housing in large metropolitan areas as articulated in Brown’s (1999) research. Tracie Morris uses signification (signifying) to create new dialogues in her poem *Project Princess* by integrating multiple meaning words in her narrative, to open discursive spaces in larger societal conversations in which her use of intertextuality delivers counter-narratives of her lived experiences and social realities in the context of pedagogy and education.

**Flip it Around and Open it Up**

The fourth finding situates the pedagogical implications for studying the intertextuality in spoken word poetry using Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess* as a case study, in twenty-first century classrooms, to explore counter-narratives that challenge dominant discourses as well open discursive spaces for dialogical exchanges and social interactions. Stapleton (1998) argues that artists use their narratives to transgress geographical boundaries. Stapleton’s (1998) research results are supported by mine, in which I extend the concept of pedagogy and education into larger societal discourses across physical borders. Using lyrics (written and oral) contained in *Project Princess* as cultural aesthetics to create an oppositional consciousness, Tracie Morris blends African oral tradition with Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop to construct new knowledge during her public performances. Dyson (2005) suggests that poets use their narratives to open spaces between oral and written forms of expression as situated knowledge. Comparably, Kinloch (2005) describes the ways in which poets used their works as
oral and written exchanges to politicize the ideas, thoughts, and experiences of their readers, audiences, or listeners. The results of Dyson (2005) and Kinloch (2005) are confirmed by my findings which enabled me to explore Project Princess as situated knowledge and political aesthetics in which physical and imaginative spaces are manipulated during Tracie Morris’s public performances. Morris’s poem Project Princess opens locations between oral and written texts by reappropriating physical and imagined spaces as sites of resistance, self-representation, self-expression, and empowerment.

Relying on physical and imagined spaces, Morris uses the Harlem Renaissances concepts of self-representation, empowerment, and self-expression to create her counter-narratives and negotiate dominant discourses by situating Project Princess in her present day context. Brown (1999) found that black poets use their oral deliveries to open sites of resistance and to create spaces for self-definition, self-representation, and interpreting the world. Likewise, Dowdy (2007) found that artists use physical space to create bonds between themselves and their audiences or listeners. My study reinforces Brown’s (1999) contention that oral deliveries are used by black poets to create space and Dowdy’s (2007) assertion that physical space creates bonds between poets and their audiences or listeners. However, my research contradicts Dowdy’s (2007) limitation of these bonds to physical spaces as the primary source of the relationships between poets and their listeners or audiences.

Using informal representations of her lived experiences and social realities, autobiographical and fictionalized accounts emerge as pedagogy and education from Morris’s poem Project Princess through counter-narratives that challenge dominant discourses while opening discursive spaces for dialogical exchanges and social interactions. Brown (1999) found that black poets used their narratives to provide social commentaries that were personal and
communal in nature. My findings regarding Tracie Morris’s use of signification in her narrative of lived experiences and social realities to engage her audiences or listeners in larger societal discourse coincide with Brown’s (1999) results. Opening discursive spaces for dialogical exchanges and social interactions, the pedagogical implications for studying the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess* rest in the breaking of silences, unveiling of hidden truths, the introduction of marginalized discourses, and the evocation of new thoughts, ideas, and political activism among her audiences or listeners.

Creating counter-narratives that challenge dominant discourses and opens discursive spaces for dialogical exchanges and social interactions, Morris uses her text to establish relationships between herself, her narrative, and her audiences or listeners. She uses the genealogical contributors of spoken word poetry in *Project Princess* to open transverse paths between her verbal and non-verbal dialogues by reinventing and resituating language and accepted meanings in her narrative of lived experiences and social realities through non-chronological storytelling across the intersections of race, gender, and class. These findings are supported by research conducted by Dyson (2005), Kinloch (2005), Dowdy (2007), and Stapleton (1997). The next section explores the implications for education using Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess* as a case study exploring the intertextuality in spoken word poetry. This discussion is based on *Project Princess*, but can be extended to any other spoken word poem.

**Implications for Education**

In my past teaching experiences, I used spoken word poetry texts to build the literacy skills of my students in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, and vocabulary. However, after researching the intertextuality in spoken word poetry using Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess*, as a case study, I have developed an understanding of the role that lived experiences
and social realities play in the construction of knowledge. Reflecting on my new understandings of spoken word poetry as a genre and the ways in which Morris integrates characteristics of its genealogy in her written and performed versions of *Project Princess*, I considered the following question as I contemplated the implications of my study for education: What can be learned or taught using this poem or any other spoken word poem in a twenty-first century classroom based on the findings of my study? I realize that the use of Morris’s poem *Project Princess* in the current atmosphere of educational reform, namely Common Core Curriculum Standards and high-stakes testing, exceeds conventional uses of spoken word poetry, discussed in Chapter Two.

As discussed in Chapter Two (p.32) when spoken word poetry is brought into traditional classrooms, generally instruction is limited to connecting spoken word poetry to canonized poetry, instruction on literary terms, or the development of critical thinking skills. However, I perceive the potential of using *Project Princess* or any other spoken word poem in twenty-first century classrooms as extending the conventional expectations of teaching and learning by offering opportunities for teachers and students to engage in meaningful dialogues based on their lived experiences and social realities.

To solidify my new understanding of the implications of my study for the field of education, I returned to Porter’s (1986) definition of intertextuality as “the bits and pieces of text which writers or speakers borrow and sew together to create new discourses” (p. 34), Wright’s (1993) explanation of pedagogy as “empowerment [that] comes from acting on one’s behalf” (p. 26), and Mitchell’s (2010) description of cultural aesthetics as “the dialogic relationship between people and their environment [which leads] to a way of experiencing the world that is reflected in the art that they produce” (p. 608). I used these concepts as I commenced exploring the findings of this study in the context of their implications for the field of education as public
pedagogy. As I contemplated my findings using the notions of intertextuality, pedagogy, and cultural aesthetics, I reexamined Morris’s use of intertextuality and sound in her written and oral versions of *Project Princess*.

My analysis of the data derived from the page poetry and spoken word poetry versions of Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess* speaks to their use in pedagogy and education. The data indicates that the use of *Project Princess* exceeds conventional uses of poetry in traditional learning environment (i.e., classrooms) which had been the case with many of the studies reviewed in Chapter Two, such as those conducted by Camangian (2008), Dyson (2005), Fisher (2005), Jocson (2005), and Kinloch (2005). Instead, I found that *Project Princess* lends itself to the exploration of larger societal discourses through the creation of sites of resistance and the opening of discursive spaces through dialogical exchanges and social interactions. I chose to revisit these ideas because their implementation may serve to inspire and influence pedagogy and education towards the creation of counter-narratives and discursive spaces anchored in Tracie Morris’s use of intertextuality in *Project Princess* or other spoken word poems to transform larger societal conversations into new discourses through non-chronological storytelling, language and accepted meanings, and signification (signifying). At the end of Chapter Five, I outlined steps that educators may take to reappropriate physical or imagined spaces as locations of pedagogy and education. First, I suggested the uncovering of hidden transcripts contained in *Project Princess*. Next, I proposed the identification of themes across Morris’s narrative and their connection (if applicable) to the genealogy of spoken word poetry. Then, I recommended the creation of safe-spaces for dialogical exchanges and social interactions. Finally, I encouraged the facilitation of meaningful dialogues and social interactions among students.
The first implication for exploring the intertextuality in spoken word poetry using Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess* or other spoken word poems is the unveiling of hidden transcripts embedded in the lyrics. Using the genealogical contributions of spoken word poetry integrated in the lyrics of *Project Princess* enables Morris’s narratives of lived experiences and social realities to emerge as hybrid transitions across spoken word poetry’s “family tree,” during her public performances. Attention should be focused on Morris’s use of repetition, refrain, echoing, sounds, and *a cappella* singing as indicators of hidden messages (e.g., female empowerment; development of black beauty standards) contained in the lyric immediately following her intentional breaks in rhythms. In *Project Princess*, sounds are used to enable Morris’s audiences or listeners to explore *Project Princess* as multigenerational discourse in which she uses non-chronological storytelling to document her narrative of lived experiences and social realities by situating them in her present day context. This leaves the central task of analyzing, interpreting, and articulating the meanings of Morris’s narrative to her audiences or listeners, and to the students.

Another implication for education is for students to use the themes in the page poetry and oral performance versions of *Project Princess* or other spoken word poems, to explore the ways in which Morris’s lyrics use language and accepted meanings to renegotiate social boundaries in larger societal discourses. This is done through an examination of Morris’s reappropriation of language and accepted meanings in *Project Princess* as she moves her words from the page during her oral delivery. Drawing on African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop, Morris’s voice and intonation serve as important components in her oral delivery of *Project Princess*, thus, offering varied readings of the same narrative from multiple points of view through the reappropriation and manipulation of
language and accepted meanings. From this perspective, intertextuality is used to transmit knowledge and establish bonds among Morris, her narrative, and her audiences or listeners, in this case the students, through dialogical exchanges and social interactions.

A third implication for the field of education is the facilitation of meaningful dialogical exchanges and social interactions incorporating the discourses contained in Morris’s poem *Project Princess* or other spoken word poems. This may be done through an exploration of the ways in which Morris recontextualizes many of her older narratives of lived experiences and social realities in *Project Princess* by resituating them in her present day context. An investigation into the ways in which Morris uses her lyrics, to deploy power across the intersections of race, gender, and class, is useful in the facilitation of meaningful dialogues and social interactions among students in physical and imagined spaces. With language and accepted meanings serving as essential components of her narrative, Morris encourages an examination of *Project Princess* which includes an analysis of her use of vernacular language and symbolic linguistic representations; hence, inviting students to share narratives of their lived experiences and social realities. This enables the development and implementation of mediated narratives in which Morris’s language use and word choices are analyzed and discussed as essential components of *Project Princess* and its hidden messages.

The final implication for education is the creation of safe-spaces as sites of resistance, dialogical exchanges, and social interactions. Using physical and imagined spaces as locations of aesthetics practices enables a reading of *Project Princess* in which Morris’s video and spoken word poetry are paired, showing the relationship between language and visual representations. This concept is applicable to the reappropriation of space as a discursive place for the exploration, interpretation, and discussion of the marginalized discourses introduced by Tracie
Morris in her narrative of lived experiences and social realities. For instance, in the video, she uses high-rise apartments surrounded by a fence to illustrate that although “project princess” resides in what many may consider a high-crime area, “she” is still safe. The notion of safety or safe-space encourages the sharing of lived experiences and social realities among students across the intersections of race, gender, and class.

Reconceptualizing my thoughts regarding my previous use of spoken word poetry, I examined the ways in which Tracie Morris’s use of intertextuality in Project Princess may be incorporated in twenty-first century learning environments. I connected the implications of my study to pedagogy and education by anchoring my understandings in ideologies expounded and explained by Porter (1986), Wright (1993), and Mitchell (2010) in which intertextuality, pedagogy, and cultural aesthetics emerged as key components of the use of Tracie Morris’s poem Project Princess as an instructional tool. In the next section, I discuss the limitations of this study.

Limitations of the Study

The current research is a case study (as defined by Stake, 1995, p. xi) in which I use one poet and one poem to explore the intertextuality in spoken word poetry. The primary methodology of my research is narrative inquiry with narrative analysis used to interpret and rearticulate the data. Using case study in this research enabled me to explore Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem Project Princess as a single case from multiple points of view (written, audio, and visual).

Project Princess is a unique text in which Morris uses her voice and intonation to articulate her narrative of lived experiences and social realities in her present day context. Narrative inquiry and narrative analysis, enabled me to explore the events, experiences, and
phenomena Tracie Morris described in *Project Princess*. The knowledge obtained through this study can be brought into larger discourses associated with pedagogy and education.

The results of this study are based on *Project Princess*, in which Tracie Morris uses intertextuality (as described by Porter, 1986, p. 34), cultural aesthetics (as defined by Mitchell, 2010, p. 608), and sound to create new discourses for her audiences or listeners to interpret and derive meaning. This study generates possibilities for the field of education to include students’ narratives of their lived experiences and social realities in twenty-first century classroom curricula as pedagogy (as defined by Eagleton, 1988, p. 26). So although the results of this study cannot be generalized to all spoken word poems, Morris’s *Project Princess* can provide an example, or allow a better understanding of similar events, experiences, or phenomena, i.e., they produce knowledge which can inform similar situations.

Moreover, understanding the components of this particular case can set a foundation for future research using other spoken word poems. Such a study can be used as a springboard into larger societal conversations, in which educators and students can create counter-narratives that challenge dominant discourses by developing sites of resistance and opening discursive spaces for meaningful dialogues across the intersections of race, gender, and class.

**Further Research Suggestions**

Further research in the area of intertextuality in spoken word poetry should explore the development of this genre by tracing the role of women in each of the identified genealogical contributors. Scholars wishing to advance research in this area may consider increasing the number of poems, poets, and studies. A final suggestion, for future research into the intertextuality in spoken word poetry is for researchers to look across Tracie Morris’s written and
performed versions of *Project Princess* analyzing each separately as page, oral, audio, and visual texts.

**Conclusions**

The purpose of my qualitative research study using narrative inquiry and narrative analysis was to explore the intertextuality in spoken word poetry using Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess* as a case study. With this study, I traced the intertextuality in spoken word poetry through its multiple roots in African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop. I was guided by the following questions: How does intertextuality function in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*? What role does the genealogy of spoken word poetry play in understanding the intertextuality in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*? In what ways does the intertextuality in spoken word poetry play at the intersections of race, gender, and class in Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*? What are the pedagogical implications for studying the intertextuality in spoken word poetry from its genealogical contributions in twenty-first century classrooms using Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* as an example?

While analyzing, interpreting, and rearticulating the data collected for this study I found that intertextuality in spoken word poetry emerged in Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* as non-chronological storytelling, language and accepted meanings, signification, and counter-narratives that challenged dominant discourses by creating discursive spaces as sites of resistance. The initial findings showed that Tracie Morris used non-chronological storytelling to articulate her narrative of lived experiences and social realities in her present day context through the use of repetition, sounds, and elongation of words during her oral delivery. As written text, Morris used non-chronological storytelling by integrating her narrative with autobiographical
and fictionalized accounts of her lived experiences and social realities using the persona of “project princess.” The next finding indicated that language and accepted meanings are essential component of Morris’s poem *Project Princess* as written, oral, and visual texts. On the page, *Project Princess* is a poem that describes the life of an adolescent black girl who resides in low-income public housing in a larger metropolitan area. However, in the oral version of *Project Princess*, Morris’s voice and intonation are vital elements for the interpretation of her narrative. During her oral delivery, the primary focus is on her articulation of the lyrics and the context in which her word choices are situated. When paired with the visual images in the video, the lyrics of *Project Princess* are reappropriated to include alternative analysis and interpretation of the language and accepted meanings she has embedded in her text.

The third finding showed that the use of signification (signifying) by Morris to play at the intersections of race, gender, and class. This showed Morris’s ability to manipulate language and accepted meanings in her text in which she used socially accepted words to depict the race, gender, and class of her poem’s protagonist. The final finding of my study, explored the use of counter-narratives challenging dominant discourses by creating discursive spaces as sites of resistance. This enables Tracie Morris’s audiences or listeners to use their lived experiences and social realities to provide alternative explanations for the events, experiences, or phenomena described in her narrative. My findings suggest that the intertextuality in spoken word poetry emerges in Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess* more during her public performances than in her written text. Each of my findings based on the analysis of the data in Chapter Five, showed that Morris’s poem draws on, and integrates, the genealogy of spoken word poetry to varying degrees simultaneously in her written and oral texts.
My findings also imply that her voice and intonation are important aspects in understanding her narrative from multiple points of view and acquiring meanings based on the lived experiences and social realities of her audiences or listeners. Throughout my exploration of the intertextuality in spoken word poetry using Tracie Morris’s poem *Project Princess* as a case study, I learned how the genealogical contributions have been blended by her into her narrative of lived experiences and social realities in her text. I acquired an understanding of the ways in which intertextuality functioned in *Project Princess* by investigating Morris’s narrative as page poetry and spoken word poetry texts. During my examination of *Project Princess*’s lyrics I realized that language and accepted meanings are important considerations when analyzing Morris’s word choices and her reappropriated meanings of commonly recognized words to describe race, gender, and class. By the end of my study I ascertained that Morris uses non-chronological storytelling, language and accepted meanings, and signification (signifying) to create counter-narratives as discourses of empowerment in which her audiences or listeners are encouraged to take action by using her text as discursive spaces of resistances challenging larger societal conversations. The findings, implications for education, and conclusions drawn from this study are readily applicable to the field of popular culture in education. This is an area in which my research may contribute to larger discourses surrounding the origins and development of spoken word poetry. Instead, of exploring this topic through specific literary, cultural, and musical movements, I opted to examine the ways in which these movements work together in the creation of intertextuality in this genre using Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* as a case study.
Epilogue: Settling Scores, Uncovering Reasons

With lyrics from Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem Project Princess still echoing in my brain, I began to reflect on my journey from novice to acquiring familiarity of spoken word poetry. Admittedly, my understanding of spoken word poetry as a literary, cultural, and musical movement was limited by my inability to distinguish it from similar poetries such as page poetry, performance poetry, and slam poetry. I was further hindered by my initial interest in using only the poets’ words, voice, and intonation to provide me with some insight into their lived experiences and social realities articulated in their narratives. I had been influenced by early rap of the late 1970s and early to mid1980s, so for that reason initially I viewed spoken word poetry as an extension of the hip-hop music genre and used it to situate my narratives of lived experiences and social realities in the artists’ lyrical discourses. It was during my disillusionment with rap music as it began to idealize violence and to objectify women that I discovered spoken word poetry as an independent genre through the work of Meshell Ndegeocello in 1993. I became an avid fan and I have continued to follow Meshell Ndegeocello’s career from spoken word poet into other musical forms of expression such as jazz, blues, and techno.

When I began considering topics for my dissertation, spoken word poetry emerged as the fore-runner as I started expanding my horizons by listening to works by Taylor Mali, Big Poppa, Ursula Rucker, Sarah Jones, and Saul Williams. It was my exploration into Saul Williams’s intertextual use of spoken word poetry that led to my discovery of Tracie Morris’s poem Project Princess. I located the video of Project Princess on You Tube and as I listened and watched I became entranced by the intricate nature of Tracie Morris’s oral delivery that was a mixture of a cappella singing, sounds, echoes, and verbalized narratives. I realized that this poem was the work that I had been searching for as I began to delve into the genealogy of spoken word poetry
and explore the intertextuality in this genre. I unearthed research which placed spoken word poetry in African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop; however, I had not found a study that situated the intertextuality in spoken word poetry as a hybrid genre that drew inspiration from each of the literary, cultural, and musical movements scholars identified as sole contributors to the development of spoken word poetry.

As each day of my research passed, I listened to Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*, seeking to locate remnants of each of its six genealogical contributors in its lyrics. To my surprise I found that each of the identified areas of spoken word poetry’s genealogy was present in the text and often emerged simultaneously with minute nuances that enabled me to distinguish where one began and the other ended. Overtime, I learned the characteristics associated with African oral tradition, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Poetry, the Blues, the Black Arts Movement, and hip-hop, and I was able to connect these traits to the development of spoken word poetry. Once I began to link the intertextuality in spoken word poetry to its genealogical contributors, I used conceptual frameworks (intertextuality theory, public pedagogy, and performance studies) that reflected the complexity and richness of spoken word poetry and Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess*. After choosing the appropriate conceptual framework for this study, I selected narrative inquiry as my qualitative research methodology for the collection, analysis, and interpretation of my data to enable me to integrate my narratives of lived experiences, social realities, and personal knowledge as a means of broadening my understanding of the intertextuality in spoken word poetry and that of my readers or listeners.
In order to show the range of Tracie Morris as a poet, performance artist, sound artist, and academic, I examined the ways in which she used the intertextuality in spoken word poetry to create new understandings of her narratives of lived experiences and social realities through the use of sounds. I researched the genre of sound poetry as an extension of spoken word poetry to provide me with an in-depth understanding of Tracie Morris’s works before and after *Project Princess*. I found that like spoken word poetry, sound poetry had a varied history rooted in the Symbolist Movement of France circa 1875 and evolved in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the inclusion of works by Russian Futurists, Italian Futurists, and Dadaists. I used this information to explore the progression of Tracie Morris’s artistry from spoken word poet to sound artist. As a result, I selected some of Morris’s other works to examine her integration of the intertextuality in spoken word poetry through the inclusion of sounds during her public performances.

Using other works by Tracie Morris, I developed an understanding of her use of sounds to expand the intertextuality in spoken word poetry in *Project Princess* beyond its genealogical contributors. This was an essential step in my analysis of the lyrics of *Project Princess* based on the four research questions constructed for this study, and it enabled me to select and utilize four models of narrative analysis (structural analysis, thematic analysis, dialogic/performance analysis, and visual analysis) to interpret my data from multiple points of view and articulate my findings from a multitude of perspectives. The use of narrative analysis allowed me to use the video of *Project Princess* as text, and to compare and contrast its images with the written and audio versions of the poem. I experienced some difficulties in articulating my findings and drawing conclusions from this data that would enable me to identify implications for the field of education and offer suggestions for further research into this area. After all, there was a lack of
scholarship on the intertextuality in spoken word poetry with much of the research centered on a specific literary, cultural, or musical movement.

My findings contributed to an understanding of what could be learned in the English Language Arts and Social Studies classrooms through the study of the intertextuality in spoken word poetry using Tracie Morris’s spoken word poem *Project Princess* case study. I realize in hindsight that spoken word poetry can be used in more creative ways by drawing on its genealogy to contextualize the poets’ narratives in their present day context and historicize the same narratives by situating them in larger societal discourses. After completing this study, I now realize the power and potential of exploring and using the intertextuality in spoken word poetry in twenty-first century classrooms as well as scholarship in the field of popular culture in education.
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APPENDIX A: PAGE POETRY

Project Princess

Teeny feet rock
layered double socks
Popping side piping of
many colored loose lace ups

It's all about you girl.
Racing toe keeps up with fancy free gear
slick slide and just pressed recently weaved hair

Jeans oversized belie her hips, back, thighs
that have made guys sigh
for milleni year

You go on.
Topped by an attractive jacket
her suit’s not for flacking, flunkies, junkies
or punk homies on the stroll.

Her hands mobile thrones of today's urban goddess
Clinking rings link dragon fingers
no need to be modest.

Don't you dare stop.
One or two gap teeth coolin'
sport gold initials
Doubt you get to her name
just check from the side
please chill.

Multidimensional shrimp earrings
frame her cinnamon face
Crimson with a compliment if a
comment hits the right place

It's all about you girl.
Don't step to the plate
with datelines from '88
Spare your simple, fragile feelings
with the same sense that you came

You go on.
Color woman variation reworks the french twist
with crinkle cut platinum frosted bangs
from a spray can's mist

Never dissed, she insists:
"No you can't touch this."
And, if pissed, bedecked fists
stop boys who must persist.

She's the one. Give her some. Under fire. Smoking
gun. Of which songs
are sung, raps are spun, bells are rung, rocked, pistols
cocked, unwanted
advances blocked, well stacked she's jock. It's all about
you girl. You go
on. Don't you dare stop.
APPENDIX B: VIDEO AND ITS TRANSCRIPTION

Project Princess

[Opens with a chant]: Tweedle-deeh-deeh-ah-tweedle-deeh-deeh [echoing] [Sampling]

Teeny feet rock layered double layered socks -- (repeated 2x)—with the last 3 letters of the word sock 1x and then broken down into and repeated as -ock;-ock;-ock;-ock in conjunction with tweedle-deeh-deeh-ah-tweedle-deeh-deeh [echoing]
Teeny feet rock layered double socks
Popping sides piping of many colored lace ups [alliteration]

Racing to keeps up with fancy free [breath pause/break] gear [shortened sound/internal rhyme]
Slick slide and just pressed recently weaved [breath pause/break] hair [shortened sound/internal rhyme]

Jeans oversized jeans oversized; jeans oversized; jah-ha, jah-ha; jeans over; jeans oversized belie her hips, back, thighs
That have made guys sigh [slower speak on “guys sigh”] for milleni

Topped by an attractive [breath pause] jacket
Her suit’s (breath pause) not for flacking, flunkies, junkies
Or punk homies on the stroll

Her hands mobile thrones hah-hah-ha hands mobile thrones; hah-hah-ha hands mobile thrones of today’s urban goddess
Clinking rings link dragon fingers
No need to be modest

One or two gap teeth coolin’
Sport gold initials
Doubt you get to her name
Just check from the side
Please chill

multidimensional; multi-deeh-ceeh; multi-dimensional; multi-deeh-ceeh
Multidimensional shrimp earrings frame her cinnamon face [the word “face” is song] [rhyme]
Crimson with a compliment if a comment hits the right place [rhyme]

Don’t step to the plate with your date lines from ’88 [rhyme]
[repeats] Don’t step to the plate; don’t step, don’t step; don’t step [breath pause] to the plate with your datelines from ’88 — song/talk [Blues]; scratching [hip-hop]
Spare your simple, fragile feelings
With the same sense that you came [rhyme]
Color women variations reworks the [breath pause/break] French [breath pause/break] twist [silence]
With crinkle cut platinum frosted bangs
From a spray can's mist from a spray can's mist; from a spray can's—mist omitted [repeated]

Never dissed never-nah-nah-never dissed, dissed; never dissed, dissed [repeated]
No you can't touch this. And, if pissed [emphasized the words "if pissed"], bedecked fists
Stop boys who must persist [assonance and half-rhymes]

She's the one. Give her some. Under fire. Smoking gun. Of which songs
Are song, raps are spun, bells are rung, rocked, pistols cocked, unwanted [rhyme] [assonance]
Advances blocked, well stacked she's jocked. [rhyme] [riffs]

It's all about you girl. It's all about your, girl [repeated]
It's all about you girl.
It's all about you girl and livin' in your world [this line is sung] [repetition]

Legend
*Regular Font: Tracie Morris's Page Poetry Text
*Italics: Added Text by Tracie Morris in Her Oral Delivery of Project Princess
*In Open Brackets: Added Comments by Tammie Jenkins
*Colored Font: Identify Text Characteristics For Analysis
  -Red: rhymes/rhyming words
  -Blue: assonance
  -Green: alliteration
APPENDIX C: AUDIO INTERVIEW AND ITS TRANSCRIPTION

Close Listening Charles Bernstein’s Podcast Interview with Tracie Morris

1. Introduction (1:06 Runtime)

Charles Bernstein: Welcome to close listening WPS1’s program of poetry readings and conversations brought to you by Penn Sound, the poetry sound archive, at writing.upenn.edu/pennsound. On today’s show today our guest is Tracie Morris. Tracie Morris, one of the preeminent performance poets in the U. S., is the author of a couple of collections of poetry Intermission and Chapter 1 and has given performances throughout the world, but especially here in the United States of America. Morris, who lives in Brooklyn, is completing a doctorate in the Performance Studies program at NYU. Over the past several years, she has taught at SUNY Purchase, Sarah Lawrence, Europa, Queens College, and the Center for Worker Education. And she is a fellow at Cave Canem the National Organization supporting African American poetry. This fall, Morris will be teaching at East Michigan University. My name is Charles Bernstein.
2. On Where Poetry Exists (1:58 Runtime)

Charles Bernstein: welcome to the show Tracie.

Tracie Morris: Hi Charles.

CB: Nice to have you back.

TM: Thank you happy to be back. What’s going on? [laughter]

CB: Is a poem for you something that exists primarily in performance or something that exists primarily on the page, or somewhere in between?

TM: Umh, that’s an interesting way to frame it. Where does it exist? I think that a poem exists beyond the media in which it’s presented. If I want to get totally esoteric, [CB interjects] but I really believe that.

CB: Esoteric is good for me. I like the esoteric.

[both chuckle]

TM: I think you know it’s weird. It’s like, poems they exist and then it’s a matter of manifesting them in different media that will present them in a way that, [stuttering] that presents in way that presents them with as much integrity to them as possible. So, sometimes that is strictly on the page. I need to present a poem in a way that has spacing, line breaks, and all of that stuff and punctuations and stuff at the fore. Then other times it needs to be in the atmosphere it needs to be primarily through or exclusively through sound waves, invisible sound waves impacting the body. And then a lot of the poems are in between, they have different kinds of lives depending on the medium in which they are set. So, I feel like the poem itself, is of itself and then when it is in a different medium it presents a particular side. And as you know, sometimes I have poems, I have poems that are only meant to be heard or experienced as live performance. And then I’ll have poems that are only meant to be read. And of course, there are poems that are between those two that are recorded, that are in between all of those things. It’s just what I feel is more effective in getting that out.
3. On Composing Sound Poems (5:17 run-time)

CB: Let’s talk for a second about the poems that are only or primarily meant to be heard.

TM: Umh, umh.

CB: Sound poems or performance poems and you read a couple in the other program that we did here. Umh, can you talk about the genesis of those poems? How you compose them? How they come into being? And also, are there scores for those poems? Are there written traces?

TM: Yeah, I’ll answer your last question first. It’s, it’s kind of a political decision that I made [giggle] you know. Aesthetics politics I guess do not have any visual representation for the sound poems for the most part. There are a couple of soliloquies I wrote for the Joe Geography Project that were read by someone else so they had to have a visual representation, but they are different types of poems than the sound poems I use in a like, in a live setting. So, I wanted to see how far I could go with not have physical, visual text to have it just experienced as sound so there are no representations of that, having those kinds of poems outside of being heard.

CB: And of course recorded, as we have now in this project that we are doing today where the sound file itself becomes something like the equivalent of a printed version of a poem. Although will exist in a number of different versions as you perform at different times.

TM: Yeah, it’s funny. Because…

CB: What do you think about recordings?

TM: Yeah, it’s weird. I think my resolution of dealing with the notion of how poems represent in recorded media, in sound recorded media really kind of came to a head when I did an installation piece for the biennial, for the Whitney Biennial a few years ago, in 2002.

CB: And that piece is available on Penn Sound.

TM: Yeah, I think one of them is. One of them is. Yeah one of them is. I had to really figure out that how I was going to deal with the fact that these poems were going exclusively presented in a non-live format. And what that meant for the issues that I was talking about because one the things that make them compelling is the fact that you can’t escape from them. But, they are dealing with issues like sexual abuse of children, spousal abuse, slavery, stuff that...

CB: [interrupts TM] Enormously different experience to see you up before an audience, as I have many times, performing one of those poems.

TM: Oh, yeah.
CB: The way that you. Just your body being present and performing it creates a different feeling than when I went into the Whitney. There were a lot of people doing many different things looking at things. Then one put the headphones on in a low vision room and listened. It's a very different kind of experience.

TM: You know I don't know how I look. I try not to think about it. Otherwise, it would become disruptive for me [giggles]. But, I can believe that, that was the thing. Once in that box what happens? And I think for those particular poems that are different than say doing Project Princess or those things that have another kind of life as text. Doing it I really had to work closely with my engineer Val Shante to make sure that it felt alive. And the headphones were important too, I wanted the person not to be able to leave because it was in their head. You know what I mean. So, the sound quality I had to do two things to attend to it. One make sure it had a very almost viscous very live feel to it that was like really working very closely with her to make sure the sound was right. But, the other thing was to make sure that no matter what the person, no matter where they were at... that wait let me sure I'm saying this clearly. That number one the sound tracks were separate which was a bit of controversy with myself and the Whitney because they sort of envisioned it as a loop. But, for those people who were dealing with those experiences aesthetically or personally I just wanted them to live with that fact.

CB: Separate poems as separate works.

TM: But the other thing is I don't know if I mentioned this to you before Charles. But, I actually, when we edited it because sound poems are meant to be improvised, but that setting doesn't allow for just extemporaneous improvisation you have to be kinda mindful of the attention span and expectations of someone sitting down to listen because they bring the expectation of listening with headphones in other context. So that it had to be edited to feel as if it made sense as a, you know in a particular time frame. And so when we edited I would see if I could naturally or if it felt natural for me to duplicate it after we edited it. If it felt natural for me to duplicate that live and if it did if it didn't we would keep that edit and if it did I would keep that edit. So it could sound really, really great and work well in the poem, but if it didn't authentic or organic or both then I would take it out.
4. **On Living Performatively** (4:30 run-time)

**CB:** What does it mean to live performatively?

**TM:** Wow, have I said that I live performatively?

**CB:** You said earlier today that you were writing and thinking about living performatively.

**TM:** Uhm, probably I meant that as a poet you know our subconscious says things that our consciousness sometimes has to catch up with. But, uh the interesting thing about being in a program in performance studies and I’ve had different perspectives on performance studies than other people have had and hopefully have made my own way in that interpretation. But, to think of things as being, to think of performance as being a context in which one does things, in which one exists. To think of it as a medium is really interesting. So the poems themselves have a life in which they live as a form of performance even if they are text. I think everything the way that I talk everything I begin to reconfigure the way that I exist as forms of performance, and that doesn’t mean false. It just means that something is being done there is an activity at all times and it is interesting to reconceive of things in that way. The other thing that living performatively has led me to consider is the notion of performance in ways I had never been comfortable thinking about it before like as an actor. And I had sort of a meditative epiphany last year it was and I was thinking about where I wanted to go with my life blah, blah, blah. You know I always meditate on this stuff and a bunch of other stuff like being free and not living in an oppressive government where my vote doesn’t count. Anyway I decided [interrupted].

**CB:** Your vote counts it just counts for a little bit.

**TM:** Or it’s not counted at all depending on where you live in this country.

[both talking at the same time]

**TM:** But, and actually it sounds like an aside. But, the politics of now feels very concrete to me, feels very tangible and it does affect my work, and the way that I feel I exist in the world, my sense of safety. I mean, I have always been politically active and have disagreed with the government and the establishment in a lot of ways for my whole life. But, this confrontation as to whether or not we are going to be a constitutional democracy has really affected how I walk around and how I live performatively because I feel at my core less safe even than I did before. You know, I feel that everybody is less safe [chuckles] than they have been before. And to refer to living performatively and thinking about acting, I think the notion of action on all these levels conceptually has been in effect, but also the idea of not just living internally. And my sound poems to a large extent has, have always been about the visceral, you know, it has been about the internal organs, getting everything out, and impacting the body’s insides. When I did the Afrofuturistic Project, uh, for the Kitchen Performance base a couple of years ago, one of the things I wanted to deal with was limbs, you know what I mean, and bone, and the actual external,
my external performative life. And I think eventually that led me to begin to consider acting because you can’t avoid the fact that you are existing in a space that you are performing in a space. But, I consider the work I do as an actor completely different than my work as a performing poet even though one is kinda related to the other in a weird way because I’m on a stage. Uh, when I think about performing poetry I don’t think of it as acting and I have always been very clear about that decision you know when I wasn’t acting, and now that I am it feels really different too.

**CB:** You know poetry as in the Dewey Decimal System in libraries is a form of non-fiction, not fiction.

**TM:** Isn’t that interesting. You know you are the only person I know that has brought that up. [inaudible sounds] I have always thought that was really cool and weird.
5. On the connection Between Artistic and Political Acting (2:05 run-time)

TM: Yeah, yeah that’s that’s a good point. [inaudible speaking of both]

CB: You talk about performing as an actor in a fictional role, performance as a poet, and you've also been talking about performance as a person, the performance of everyday life. I guess all of us every day we are involve with art and also with political realities, think about this question of what are the connections between what we do as artist and our political acting as individuals as citizens either as a conflict, as being connected, or as just being disconnected all around us what is your sense of that just as of this morning not overall, what are you feeling about that today.

TM: Well, it’s completely political. You know what I mean, because what we are basically talking about is permission to make something out of nothing. You know, I think that is politically confrontational just by the very nature of it being true. You know no matter what the medium. There is a reason why art is so often attacked and constricted to really small roles particularly in this society. In other societies South America, Africa, Asia, that not true, but here it’s very much, even in Europe it’s not true. But, here it’s very much confined to entertainment value I think because of the political power that we as artists could have just by existing. Just by having permission to create and considering that valuable in society. So, I think that is the way that they kind of interface. And that could mean that you could write something or perform something that is overtly political, geopolitical, or the body politic, but you can do something that is completely experimental and think that that’s okay and feel that you have to be Brittany Spears and that’s political. I mean we are at such a crisis, I think that almost everything is highly political if it involves any measure of freedom. [she chuckles]. You know so.

CB: You are listening to Tracie Morris, on Close Listening here at WPS1, in New York.
6. On the effectiveness of art in transforming society (3:01 run-time)

CB: But, of course one of the things that people most concerned about is the effectiveness of anything that we do and if we are choosing our energy and time into that which will create the kind of society that we would like to see, or prevent the erosion of the society that we have taken for granted, which is another thing that you have been saying this morning.

TM: Well, it’s complicated Charles because on the one hand you have the “overt” say this thing that is political and make us feel better or make us feel mad or make us … and that is important. And I’d like to do I think that I am committed to doing that and like to think that’s helpful, but I think there is almost a metaphysical import and impact to making art too. And Darryl McNeil doesn’t want us to say that he is an engineer, but he is here and I have known Darryl for a longtime. And I was thinking one of the reasons I mentioned him was because..[she is interrupted by CB].

CB: Because he is sitting right here is one reason to mention him. Take away some of the invisibility behind what we do when we are producing these things.

TM: yeah, people who need people. Yeah, part of the reason I mentioned is because we know each other from years ago in the Black Rock Coalition and I refer to people like you know Jimmy Hendrix, Miles Davis, and many others who might sometimes say something overtly political, but just the fact that they are continuing to experiment and push the envelope to take things to another place reconfigures peoples’ concepts of what kind of world they can exist in. And to me that is really political and you know one could say that some of Jimmy Hendrix’s some music like the Star Spangled Banner, his interpretation of that, might have an overt political element. But, I think him just reconfiguring the Blues and electrifying it takes it out of the dusty south of Mississippi Delta and says I have the right to be in a big city all over the world. For an African American, Native American person to do that is just placing themselves in a non-folkloric, non-Bantu stand position [CB chuckles] that’s political. So, sometimes we don’t always say those kinds of things and do it in an overt political way, but that doesn’t mean that it don’t have political impact being experimental because it’s being conventional in a situation where convention is being transgressive like believing in the Constitution [she laughs]. Like, you know that’s very traditional, but that could be transgressive in a place where people don’t. So, even in that instance just the existence of that kind of being is political. It doesn’t mean that that’s all that has to be done I’m just going to make some really strange stuff and I’ll be fine. There might need to be other compliments to that in the world, too, but I have to say the intangibility of that kind of power can’t be dismissed because it’s not saying this is wrong, this is right, etcetera.
7. On being from Brooklyn (2:28 run-time)

CB: One of the ways in which people imagine poetry to be political is through identity and identification, the way people are imagined as have social roles, social identities. Now you’re from Brooklyn and from New York.

TM: I am.

CB: So, to what degree is being from Brooklyn or New York an important part of your identity as a poet?

TM: Oh, what? Now you know [giggling] Charles that is such a leading question. You know I’m like a Brooklyn-a-holic. I am a Brooklyn beyond fan, beyond enthusiast, people would say it’s a little pathological my love for my borough.

[both laugh]

CB: My borough and me.

TM: My borough and me. Me and Brooklyn. I remember Maurice Kenney, a poet, who had sent me his uh lovely poetry book on Brooklyn. I was just like Brooklyn it really is the bomb. It really is.

CB: [laughs]

TM: Uhm, so I really closely identify with the borough. I’m second generation Brooklyn-nite, but my family is from the south. And my mom used to tell stories about when she would try to hang-out in Harlem and everybody would say you from the country cuz you’re from Brooklyn. And I think you know as always the second generation is always the ones that always says embraces their tradition in an unusual way. I think there is ah, that it is so genetically ingrained in me being a person from Brooklyn because it’s such a mix of different forces. That proximity to Manhattan in some parts of the borough not where I grew up in east New York which is far away from Manhattan. But, the prox, visual reference of Manhattan and its potential proximity makes it seem either farther away or closer depending on you know, your life circumstances. I’ve performed a lot in Manhattan and in a lot of different countries and stuff, but I always feel like that’s home. Like I’m relieved to go back to a place that’s home, with its good, its bad, its mixed, and you know, overcrowded streets, and it’s bodegas of various ethnicities, you know, who actually run, learning to speak Spanish. It’s, it’s definitely home and it will always be you know home to me. So it makes me. I think I’ always going to be a Brooklyn girl. No matter where I live and no matter what I do.
8. On performing in slam (3:04 run-time)

CB: You started out as far as I know as a performer doing slams in the poetry performance context. Could you talk about that experience a little bit about that experience for you?

TM: Wow.

CB: What it was like? What you think about it now?

TM: It feels like

CB: What you think about the way it is now?

TM: Oh, now see that’s a whole bunch of other questions in there now Charles.

[both laugh]

TM: Well, I can’t say what it’s like now cuz I’m not a part of that at all now. But, it was...

CB: I added those in there. I was sort of interested in you going back to [inaudible].

TM: Trying to mess with me.

[Morris laughs]

CB: How was it for you at the time that you got involved?

TM: It was very helpful at the time because it taught me two things. One, it got me used to performing even though until the last until I decided I wanted to be an actor probably just before that I really didn’t like performing quite frankly. I felt it was necessary to get the poetry out. It wasn’t something that I loved to do. And then I stopped doing it and missed and realized oh that’s something I like, now. But, the slam made me do it anyway and it was helpful. It, I think one of the most helpful aspects of the slam for me was losing the Grand Slam in 1992 because after that I was so invested in winning that I created this new work which actually began to lead me towards my experimental texts, but when I lost dismally in that Grand Slam and I was so upset about it and I was wondering what I was going to do and I realized I was going to write poems anyway something changed, something fundamentally changed with that loss. I was completely free to write whatever I wanted and I would say that if I had won that slam in ’92 none of the things I’m doing now I would be able to do.

CB: Can you talk about what the aesthetic choice that you made there not necessarily that one is better than the other? But, what was at stake in terms of what kinds of values would have been oriented more towards the slam context verses the more sound performance work that you later took up?
TM: Yep, but not just sound performance, but teaching, working with a band in the way that I work with whom I work with. I work with electronic musicians. Because I really wasn’t looking for acceptance, once I could release the idea of acceptance through losing really badly and I mean really, I had a new dress and had got my hair done. I was really ready to win, okay.

CB: (chuckling)

TM: But, I was happy that I lost because that when I was free to make any kind of work that I wanted to based on the word it just released all of that other stuff. Now the following year I did win the Grand Slam, but I won it with new work. And I really, truly didn’t care (laughs) and so I started to get led towards sound poetry with Project Princess when I started to hear it differently and when I started to really work with exclusively with sound based work with no textual reference. I didn’t feel any reservations about going on whereever the poetry was taking me. So that was probably the most valuable aspect of the poetry slam it was losing and being free to make whatever work I needed to make.
9. **On influences, immediate company, and historical materials (4:38 run-time)**

CB: What do you see now as the most immediate company for your work?

TM: I can’t say.

CB: I mean people always ask about influences or scenes or contemplers. I want to leave it at a more open way for you.

TM: That’s a very provocative question. (laughs). And I can’t say just because. The reason why I can’t say is just because there are so many different ways in which people are influencing me now that it’s kind of hard to narrow it down to a company. Like I’m really influenced by Jeffery Wright right now just because I just, I just that disappearing act that he does in every, and it’s not just to say that he is a good actor. Its some other thing that he just absorbs and it’s interesting because he’s not. American actors are not as known for that. But, to get back being another kind of inspiration to see someone go into the character and that someone prioritizes the work over their personal presence. But, that has nothing to do with poetry per se. But, he’s, he’s cool. Of course music there is always music and I’m really happy about some of the r & b artists that are out now like Johnny Legend who don’t sound like really bad versions of one riff in a Stevie Wonder CD, in 1976. There’s a few of these guys that really seem to be going back to something primordial in their voices and that doesn’t inspire me as a sonic person. I don’t want to sound like anything like them but it does make me feel good that that energy is out there because I think that it’s a more welcoming context for me. I love, love electronic music, experimental electronically produced beats and how it manipulates stuff that is orally based or acoustically based and begins to transform that into the twentieth century. So, it’s a lot of stuff and like I said the politics of the day. I know that’s not really answering your question in terms of a company, but that’s what keeps me company. [giggles]. I guess.

CB: How about in your research and the work that you’re doing at NYU and your teaching? What sort of historical materials do you find most compelling right now?

TM: Oh.

CB: I just thought I’d give a different question a context for the way that you are talking about your art and your politics too.

TM: Well, that’s a great way to tie these things up Charles. But, uhmm. The person that I’m doing most of my research on is a cat named J. L. Austin who is kind of definitely a part of a group that people wouldn’t see me as being a part of (giggles) definitely probably adversarial to which is the dead European male from England (giggles). You know who talks about philosophy and doesn’t really talk about black people at all or people of color or even though he was writing stuff in the ‘40s and ‘50s. He didn’t as far as I can tell write anything on Civil Rights or the upheaval that was going on in England. But, he came up with this interesting idea about
performance in everyday life. And how people use text that way, I don’t agree with everything that he said, but his theories are really compelling. So, I’ve been looking at trying to broaden the niche that he’s in out to apply to things like hip-hop lyrics and you know that the African Americans have transformed American English and texts and stuff. And so he’s been and that’s political the performativity of language in everyday life is why they are trying to prescribe our speech so much so he is becoming a linchpin for the way that I’m thinking about things right now.

CB: I share that interest in Austin myself. I think he is very influential to me as a poet to thinking about ordinary language and thinking about speech acts as we have been talking about today. How speech an actually act.

CB: You have been listening to Tracie Morris on “Close Listening” in association with Penn Sound. We recorded the show on May 23rd, 2005 at WPS1 Clock Tower Studios. This is Charles Bernstein asking, “You to listen twice and don’t take accessibility as an answer.”
21. Discussion of *Project Princess* (0:38 run-time)

TM: You know animals will hopefully be alright in spite of us messing up everything. Let’s see, I think I have time for one more poem. I’m going to make this last poem I guess a sound poem. And I have actually had three reiterations of this poem on tape or recorded. And I always like to return to it just to see what happens. [giggles]. This is the first poem that I had begun to experiment with sounds and it’s called *Project Princess*. And I’m going to close with it.

[She performs a version of *Project Princess* that is one minute and twenty-five seconds long.]
APPENDIX D: ESSAYS

WORD WARRIORS

35 Women Leaders in the Spoken Word Revolution

Including
Michelle Tea
Eileen Myles
Sarah Jones
Staceyann Chin
Patricia Smith
and others

EDITED BY Alix Olson
FOREWORD BY Eve Ensler
IF YOU HAD TOLD ME, WHEN I STARTED writing in my first little journal, that I'd be documenting the journey of how my poetry led me to a tenure-track college professorship, I'd have accused you of writing really bad fiction. And to tell the truth, if I had known, when I first started writing, what an intense and downright weird life path poetry would send me on I probably wouldn't have started writing and certainly wouldn't have started performing.

At the beginning of my career, however, I got so caught up in the exciting poetry slam scene in New York that I wasn't thinking about the deep waters in which I was starting to tread.

Until 1991, I had pretty much kept my poems to myself, with the exception of publishing a couple of them in Hunter College's Black student newspaper, The Shield. The first time I read poetry in front of other people was at the dusky, funky club CBGB's, during an acoustic-musical evening that happened to include poetry. I was mind-numbingly nervous; however, because it was a political event, challenging the first Gulf War, I felt morally obligated to do it—moral outrage can be a great motivator. From that night on, I dove into the "perform
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mance poetry scene,” primarily through the multimedia performance venue, the Nuyorican Poets Café.

The big advantage that I had over other writer-performers in the national scene, was that I was acutely aware that I had to understand poetry more, and work harder at developing my art form. I just knew there was more to it than writing down “thoughts.” I recalled lots of the poets I’d enjoyed, from Dr. Seuss to Edgar Allen Poe, Langston Hughes to Maya Angelou and obviously Shakespeare. Even recorded poets and orators such as Oscar Brown Jr., Nikki Giovanni, Kahlil Gibran, and the original Last Poets conveyed that some “technique” was involved. At some level, I figured out that to be really good at anything, you had to study it. I may have liked my poems to a certain extent, but I knew I wasn’t, pardon the pun, “well-versed” in poetry. While I confess that I did get some mileage out of my “charm,” as well as from the novelty of doing hip-hop poetry as a woman—which was fairly new in poetry circles at the time—I really wanted to shine as a writer. After all, there were too many great writers in New York City for us to succeed based solely upon our personalities or presentations. One way I figured I’d learn more about writing was to go where writers went.

I eventually ended up at the Nuyorican to read at the open mic. What I didn’t know at the time was that the open mic took place after something called a “slam,” and the week after my first open mic, I found myself winning a slam competition. I had inadvertently become involved in a new “scene” and opened up a new path in my life.

A few of us “new” Nuyoricans began to gather and socialize with each other. There was a sense of this new energy, this new “vibe.” We saw each other read and also met some of the more established poets in print and in person. (I even had the good fortune of reading before the great Gwendolyn Brooks at the Nuyorican.) The unevenness of some of our, and certainly my, efforts reached enough of a critical mass that we decided to work on our poems together.
I took a Nuyorican Poets Café workshop run by Steve Cannon, Miguel Algarin, and several other seasoned Nuyorican regulars. These were strong writers who had an extensive artistic range and were very good poetry critics. It was a dynamic scene: We critiqued each other’s poems, incorporated multilingual phrases, and copied and stapled our work into a modest, short-lived underground poetry compilation called The Fuse. Through the Nuyorican scene, I also came across the chapbooks of other poets, like the great Bob Kaufman (the first experimental Black poet, and the first Black beat poet I read). Because the Café had a range of programming, I became acquainted with the natural interdisciplinary nature of poetry: work that incorporated not only hip-hop, but also theater, music, and a wide variety of other cultural and artistic forms. Although I was grounded in my nascent idea of poetry, the range of arts I was exposed to helped me to see poetry as infinitely fluid, applicable to everything. This understanding, as well as the range of popular poetic styles at the Café, encouraged me to experiment with my voice and follow the poem’s lead, rather than what I thought I, as a poet, should be saying. As a “student” of the Café experience, I began to get increasingly clear about just how much more I needed to know in order to start making baby steps as a writer. I began to study poetry books, and thought more about poems that I’d read and heard and why I liked them. As a result, I was constantly reevaluating my own work. The intensity of live performance helped me to not only crystallize my rapport with an audience but also learn to pay attention to the on-the-spot editing I was doing when words were awkward as I read them aloud.

In 1993, I won the Nuyorican Grand Slam and decided to go on the road and compete in various national slams. I won the 1993 National Haiku Slam Championship on pure luck—I had no real haiku-writing knowledge at the time, but was a decent performer. My national exposure led to more gigs out of town and around the world, as a solo artist, with groups of Nuyorican poets, and later, with my own band.
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As a touring performer, I was often asked to conduct workshops. I had no experience leading workshops and hadn’t been exposed to any formal, academic workshops. I didn’t have the luxury to go and study poetry in school; performing live was my job. So I basically had to wing it. I started to work on exercises, inspired by my simple research, that might be useful for the participants’ future art practice. As I learned more about poetic form and technique through this “on the job” training, I began to feel more free to experiment with my page poems and my performance-based poetry, particularly my sound poems (sound-based experimental poetry) that are improvised.

My informal study began to clarify my relationship with the idea of “spoken word,” and I began wondering about my own designation as a “spoken word” artist. I had to make a decision about the type of artist I would be, and my choice was eventually articulated at the 1993 national slam forum. I advocated that the scoring be skewed toward writing and away from performance. I was told that I was “imposing my aesthetics” on other people—which I suppose I was, because I’ve always seen myself as a writer first and a performer second. Ironically, it seemed as if the environment that had helped me blossom as a poet was beginning to impede my continuing growth. One of the “problems” that crystallized this quandary for me was the decreasing use of the term “poetry” and the increasing use of the term “spoken word.”

“Spoken word,” as a demarcation, sustains an ambiguity about poetry, at least in contemporary American society, especially for younger people. Poetry, no matter how “orally based” or experimental—and from any tradition(s)—is dependent upon certain historical and cultural references. The writer is then able to decide whether to reinforce the “craft” of these traditions or reject them. The generality of the phrase “spoken word” (a.k.a. “talking in public”) includes poetry, stand-up comedy, preaching,
dramatic monologues, storytelling, forensics, and even hawking jewelry on the streets of Greenwich Village. It really doesn't mean anything specific. "Poetry" gets lost in the breadth of the definition of "spoken word."

I'm not suggesting that there aren't real, and legitimate, reformations of uttered poetry that take performance into consideration. Women poets, poets of color, queer poets, and other marginalized people have often found the slam scene and other venues that focus on performance friendlier than mainstream poetry circles. In general, these forums are more democratic and less elitist. After all, anybody can get onstage and take a shot at an open mic, and often there are on-the-spot sign-up sheets at slams; there is no institutionally sanctioned programming or academic structure to exclude different voices and their messages. In fact, many women on the slam scene in New York have been actors, musicians, and other types of performers who write poetry to present material on their own terms, rather than accept the limited roles for women.

There is, though, a tangible, generation-specific tone and attitude in performance poetry that's influenced by urban culture, particularly hip-hop culture, as the predominant new wave of today's creative orality. There's nothing wrong with this, but any spoken creative work has text-based (even if it's not page-based) criteria for excellence, whether it's blues poetry, indigenous storytelling, orature, forensics/public speaking, preaching, acting, or rapping/rhyming. People whose oral poetry precedes (or doesn't include) formal writing must still have specifics to determine if the work is fine-tuned and effective. These specifics not only strengthen the poetry in the short term, but help to take the work forward.

"Spoken word" is a sales term, like "roll out" or "bottom line." "Oration" or even the admittedly awkward "performance utterance" are fairer terms, as they have less ambiguity. They clearly mean "speaking" but don't pretend to be poetry or storytelling. The emph
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sis isn't on a form of writing, and is, therefore, more honest. Judgments about their success is based on how the person is speaking. There are great orators out there, but they are not necessarily poets.

It's taken me some time to adjust to the profundity of accepting the term "poet." I am not making a judgment about people who choose not to see themselves as poets per se, but I do want to address something that is present but is unsaid, even in everyday life: When someone says they're a poet, they're tapping into a genre of art that has deep roots and holds a different cultural place for people. I can't tell you how many times—in elevators or taxis, at supermarkets, even at political events—when someone happens to ask me what I "do" and I say I'm a poet, the very next question is: "Are you published?" I don't take the question as an insult (most times), but rather as an indicator of how all people, even folks who don't read poetry at all, are expressing a respect for poetry that goes beyond the current popularity of our "spoken word" moment.

Those of us who consider ourselves poets and also perform have to convey strong performances, but we are also committing ourselves to writing, no matter what stage of aesthetic development we may be at or level of knowledge about poetry we may have. We go where the work takes us, irrespective of the popularity of a specific style of performance of the time. That's what makes "old" poems endure, and also what inspires us to write poems that build upon, or question, their established place. My journey from self-taught poet to graduate-level poetry professor first started in my journal and continued in those smoky New York clubs and cafés. And it was those venues that really gave me the perspective I needed to take poetry seriously, to work on the art and craft of it, to experiment, and to teach in the best way I can.
Listen Up!
spoken word poetry
edited by
zoë anglesey

ONE WORLD
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This collection of poems is dedicated to
the named and unnamed mentors
who have given the gifts of inspiration and discipline
to these writers
as well as to the makers of this collection.

May we also acknowledge our dear communities
that, with respect and encouragement, embrace
the aspirations of our future writers
as they generously become more committed
to their tasks at hand.
Brooklyn-born Tracie Morris states that she is a poet, not a singer. While this is true, she is clearly a musical poet influenced by jazz, blues, rock 'n' roll, hip-hop, funk, avant garde, Afro-Cuban music, and spirituals. Morris is a poet who uniquely works a tune to hip-hop rhythms in a bluesy way. Within her narratives, she accents syllables in relationship to the beat, but with superb timing and a verbal velocity characteristic of hip-hop freestyling or jazz scatting. She is adept at layering internal and end rhymes as well. Often accompanied by musicians, she recites in sync over articulated rhythms, something musicians appreciate. She knows how to drive the momentum of a poem, or even a set. Since 1991, her unique style has brought her marquee gigs on stages featuring poetry, music, theater, and dance. While her poems seem to literally skip across the page, the wonder of her performances is the sheer speed with which she enunciates her puns, enjambes her syllables, and syncopates her phrasing. This form is not new; it's ancient among the verbal tricksters. The Greeks called this kind of patter without pause _pignos_, a double-quick delivery that leaves one out of breath. Obviously, Morris can keep pace with MCs, or any professional auctioneer for that matter. Amazingly, a poem's savvy insights, fresh in code and lingo, are never sacrificed by the speed of delivery. For all this, Morris epitomizes the spoken word artist.
Morris sat in on one of her first jazz collaborations just like any musician new to a scene. Steve Coleman and the Five Elements were playing at the old Knitting Factory. As leaders typically do between sets, Coleman asked Morris if she wanted to perform. Of the experience, Morris observes, “You know, he is notorious for his odd time signatures, so when I finished sitting in with him, I knew I could hang a little bit with musicians.” She concludes, “If I could get through this baptism by fire, I could pretty much play with anybody.”

With this feather in her twists, she went on to perform poetry with D. D. Jackson, Badal Roy, David Murray, Graham Haynes, Kevin Bruce Harris, Leon Parker, Donald Byrd, Mark Gilmore, Marvin Sewall, Greg Osby, Mark Batson, and composer/conductor Butch Morris. Either they invited Morris to join in on their gigs, or she’s called on them to back her for her own concerts. She has also sat in with Kelvyn Bell and Grammy Award–winning vocalist Cassandra Wilson. Morris often works with Vernon Reid, and she notes that this collaboration “involves more sound poetry.” She says, “It has a much more theoretical framework in terms of how music and words interact.”

Reflecting on her craft as a poet and as a musician, Morris says, “I think of the instruments as speaking, and I’m having a conversation with them.” While working on a commission to provide lyrics for choreographer Ralph Lemon’s Geography Project, Morris realized that no matter what it’s termed she works within language, oral and written, even though, as she points out, “I am in the musicians’ union. I consider myself a writer [who] talks with instruments.” Morris is also a member of the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP).

The music world has not always been kind to Morris. She went to a Living Color concert in 1989 and lost her first collection of poems, a journal, passport, and personal address book in the vicinity of a mosh pit. She recalls: “All my tickets to the out-
side world were lost, and I couldn't write for two years. . . . I just kept thinking, my best [work] is gone; I'm never going to remember this stuff." Morris did write again and went on to win the Nuyorican Grand Slam Championship in 1993.

For two years, Morris hosted the Monday night open-mic readings at St. Mark's Poetry Project in the East Village in Manhattan. Full-time poet Morris has performed in England, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Korea, and Japan, and has toured extensively throughout the United States. She has recently recorded with Emily XYZ on her *Take What You Can Live* (she is co-poet vocalist on "If They Don't Get It"), Elliot Sharp on *Time Bomb*, Leon Parker on *Awakening*, and Graham Haynes on *Tones for the 21st Century*. Morris also appears on the compilations *Nuyorican Symphony* and the *Best of the National Poetry Slam*. Her poems are included in the anthologies *360 Degrees: A Revolution of Black Poets*, edited by Kalamu Ya Salaam and Kwame Alexander; *The United States of Poetry*, compiled by Joshua Blum and others; *Rock She Wrote: Women Write about Rock, Pop, and Rap*, edited by Evelyn McDonnell and Ann Powers; *In Defense of Mummies*, edited by S. E. Anderson and Tony Medina; *Soul: Black Power, Politics and Pleasure*, edited by Monique Guillory and Richard C. Greene; and *Aloud: Voices from the Nuyorican Poets Cafe*, edited by Miguel Algarín and Bob Holman. Morris's collections of poetry include *Chap-T-her Won* and *Intermission*. Besides winning the 1993 National Haiku Slam, she received a New York Foundation for the Arts Poetry Fellowship. Morris leads weerdz-n-muse, a seven-piece band, and teaches a course in performance poetry at Sarah Lawrence College.
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TRACIE MORRIS
CONCEPTUAL POESIS OF SILENCE:
STOP AND GLOTTAL
(Notes on Practice)

Stop:

Sound poetics is as much about silence as it is about speaking. The stunned expression after a slap to the face, inarticulate fit of rage or muffled weeping are variations of the concept of loudness. We more clearly hear all the sounds around the silence as well as the implications of the sonic value in the unaccompanied visual cue of blood rushing to one cheek, a repressed growl or onomatopoetic disappointment. (The Sniffles: Congestion? Tears? Blood in the nose? Held down diaphragmatic sighs?).

The sound poems that I've been experimenting with over the last dozen plus years, I'm realizing more and more have as much to do with ambiguities of silence as with sound and I would like to separate these silences into two categories: no sound and muffled sound.

No sound would be stunned silence, anticipatory pauses and pregnant pauses (e.g. the distinction between an inhalation and a held breath). Furthermore, some silences are valences in that sound substitutes the absence of one sound the hearer is accustomed to following by replacing it with another track of sound (usually with a strong metrical/rhythmic energy to distract the hearer from the sound they had previously been listening to), and therefore the totality of the 'argument'. I became clearer about this application of sonic substitution after seeing the wonderful poet/human beatbox Rhazel, a.k.a., The Godfather of Noise, from the band The Roots, perform multiple times.

In the last live show that I saw in Toronto several years back, I figured out that he was doing this intricate sound substitution (it sounds as if he's making an impossible number of very different sounds at the same time), and confirmed it immediately after the show by asking him point blank if that's what he was doing. He was shocked by my ability to discern this sonic variance, but did mutter an acknowledgment that this was one of the techniques he employed.¹

One of the elements that sound substitution relies upon is the limitation of the hearer to follow different sound tracks at once. We generally "hear what we want to/what we think we hear" based on established patterns and/or expectations. That is to say we also substitute with our hearing. Rhazel and others² have to have an extremely attuned
ear and vocal facility to do the type of substitution I’m describing. This sound substitution is different from throat singing and other types of “multitrack” organic multiple vocalizations that require the use of different parts of the total vocal instrument (vocal folds, diaphragm, mouth, teeth, tongue, chest cavity, nasal cavity and other head cavities, uvula, etc.) to utter different tones at the same time (that technique is also used by Rhazel and other vocal performers). In the case of Hip Hop performers, they also use significant amounts of microphone distortion—as do I—to present multi-vocal effects. By this I mean I take advantage of the natural limitations of the microphone’s range of clarity to generate distortion, not the use of echo or other effects added by the sound board operator. I hope these remarks clarify how and why sound substitution engages with and employs an aspect of sonic silence. Now I’d like to return to the two aspects of complete silence I referenced previously.

The absence of sound, after the sound-rich environment of a live, non-stop performance, is very much an aspect of sound poetry and performance as has been relentlessly demonstrated by John Cage in *Empty Words, Part III: Live Teatro Lyrico Di Milano, 2 Dec. 1977.* Here, Cage intersperses his sound with silence, and it is the unreliability of the pauses that frustrates the listeners in Italy (driving them to violence), as well as the extension of vowels and consonants by Cage.

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Glottal:

Over and against those who argued that sex is a simple matter of anatomy, Lacan maintained that sex is a symbolic position that one assumes under the threat of punishment, that is, a position one is constrained to assume, where those constraints are operative in the very structure of language and, hence, in the constitutive relations of cultural life.

— from "Identification, Prohibition, and the Instability of Positions" in * Bodies That Matter,* Judith Butler

In “a little” (an improvised poem about sexual abuse of girls in the home) and other sound poems like it, I have attempted not to rearticulate silence through silence but by, in a way, silencing the originating sound that’s open-throated for one that’s severely contained and sometimes one that’s tightly constrained. These two distinctions between contained and constrained are also quite concrete in my mind. While both are unvoiced, the contained sounds (and I probably use this type of sound—silence substitution more often) force a sound to be restricted where its vibratory force resonates (in the throat or jaw or teeth, etc.). A constrained sound may employ this structure but is mostly noted (for
... for its tone. It sounds like it's straining to come out or that the voice is strained. This deliberate sonic choice does not actually hurt my voice (I happen to have an unusual vocal range/flexibility), but it sounds/seems to be 'hurt.'

In addition to the Hip Hop influences on my particular type of sound poetry, I thought about one of the earliest examples of restricted 'non-word' sounds that I have heard. It is a predominantly African Diaspora range of sounds that has since been integrated into some mainstream usages: the various types of 'sucking of teeth.' This sound is the deliberate containing of sound in the jaw between the lips, upper, and lower sets of teeth/gums. The sucking of teeth is a sound produced by the sucking in of air, not the use of the vocal folds. In this way, the glottis (the gap between the folds that is closed) is stopped in order to create the utterance. In one improvised version of another sound poem, "The Mrs. Gets Her Ass Kicked." I employ multiple glottal stops and intersperse them with the plosive sound of a "pretty laugh" and other sounds.

Not speaking:

Say something whose phonetic substance will be impossible to reduce, whose cuts and augmentations have to be recorded. Speak and break speech like a madrig, like a matrix (material, maternal). Read aloud about the out, loud reading of a set of inscriptions, of and against cruelty and terror, amputation and administration, the disciplinary subordination to the instruments of production. From "Tonality of Totality" in In the Break, Fred Moten

These shifts in meaning from the conventions of sounds, or the repurposing of the performance of sounds of everyday, were the bedrock of the sound poems I was working on until recently.

The sounds I'm trying to get at have taken on a deliberately sung quality that is different from the "sampling" (e.g., excerpts from the refrain of the tune "Dancing Cheek to Cheek" used for "The Mrs. Gets Her Ass Kicked"). For many years I was inhibited from employing my singing voice fully. One reason was simply a matter of confidence. (The African American female singing tradition is formidable and intimidating! I'm not what one would call a "power singer.") The other reason was a serious concern I had that my initial forays into sound poetry be considered poetry (not song). Because I'm a Black woman extending notes with my voice, I was very concerned about the assumptions that people might make about what I was doing with my voice—what it meant. I wanted to adamantly assert that I was (and am) making poems, not songs.
It wasn't until I finished graduate school for the last time that I was able to release that final concern. Part of my thesis emphasized how African Americans used the performative utterances of song to mask speech performances that resisted slavery within earshot of the slavers in Ring Shouts. I also wrote and sang a blues song for Elliott Sharp's band Terraplane called "Katrina Blues" and was hired as one of his singers for some shows. After those experiences and almost twenty years on the poetry scene, I figured I didn't have to worry about being presumed a poet first, so I could try out some singing. This led to the incorporation of abrupt stopping of some sounds in my "sung poems," which are then substituted with other sounds in unexpected ways. Unlike Rahzel's use, I didn't choose, in these later sound poems, to mask this substitution but to emphasize it. The sounds I have used lately, and heard in the other before working with them, are sounds from the early days of Black female singing after Reconstruction. The presentation of those "old timey" early-Gospel-inflected utterances requires an almost operatic narrowing of the passageway of the throat (especially for upper register nouns). This early temporal sound vocabulary is pretty jarring to modern ears. Combined with the abrupt changes, it can be shocking to both myself and the audience. These rapid, jarring substitutions reference yodeling and other unusual combinations. Some of those sounds are then abruptly substituted for open-throated uncontrolled sounds including screams and non-screamed abrupt changes in register.

My first completely uncompromised effort in this regard was the "Coda" to a poem I began working on about 5 years ago entitled "My Great Grand Aunt Speaks to a Bush Supporter." The "Coda" started formulating (itself?) less than 6 months after its "accompanying" poem. It usually takes about 6 years for me to develop a real rapport with the sounds in my poems (until then I feel as if I’m "feeling them out"), so the construction of a coda to the poem so quickly was surprising to me. In the last year or so, the Coda has been eclipsing its precedent as I become more committed to the extremes of this new type of poem that is quite distinct from the first forms of sound poems that emerged.

I am happy to be writing this short analysis of the possibilities of silence-substitution as I generally do not "deliberately" force these techniques on the voice. All my sound poems are improvised. I do hope these formalized categorizations are helpful, however, in explaining ways in which sound works, as well as some unexpected sources that contribute to poetic dynamics.
Notes

1 I attribute his muttering to the fact that I was bugging him, like a nerd, about this right after he got off stage. I was really worried about forgetting to ask him about this or not seeing him anytime soon. I am immensely impressed by his aptitude for this, even after (maybe even more so) figuring out one of the ways he was doing it.

2 I also discuss the work of beathoofer Kenny Muhammed (a.k.a. "The Human Orchestra") in relation to one of Jasper Blonk's poems in episode 6 of the podcast Poem Talk from PennSound (May 4, 2008).

3 In my opinion, this is because of two factors concerning the time these techniques were being developed: a) the listeners were comfortable with the distorted sounds applied by turntablists using low-fidelity records; and b) Hip Hop pioneers performed in notoriously unreliable live (often outdoor) conditions and could not depend on the more pristine environments required to ensure that a sound board operator could produce those effects from the board. People were socialized to do this with their voices. Furthermore, the origins of Hip Hop vocal techniques are very much rooted in the sound-rich, improvised and acoustic freestyle cipher. In these contexts, microphones were not used at all.

4 Released in 1991 by AmperSound 06. The liner notes by Allen S. Weiss are illuminating here.

5 Butler, Judith, Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex', (London: Routledge, 1993), 95-96.

6 "I mean this in the linguistic sense (albeit loosely at there is some vibration), not in the conventional sense that there is no sound made.


8 And therefore is more formally an "unvoiced" sound.

9 This was the version that was recorded for and presented at the 2002 Whitney Biennial and is, unlike most of my sound poems, archived. I generally don't recall exactly what improvisations I come up with during a sound poem reading.

10 On p. 44 of William Vennard's Singing: The Mechanism and the Technique, (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967) he states: "The objection is sometimes raised that an aspirate attack results in a breathy tone. I am willing to concede that in cases of extreme breathiness the glottal plosive may be a means of overcoming this fault, but it is a dangerous remedy. The glottal rattle...or 'fray' as the speech authorities call it, is better. However the aspirate attack need not be breathy. Indeed there can be a very complete reaction from the breathiness of the [h] to the clarity of the vowel. Think of the laugh for a moment. Breath flows generously between the 'ha's' but the vowel sounds themselves are loud and clear." Needless to say, I
Tracie Morris Website
The Source for Information on Tracie's Happenings, Projects and More!

This is Tracie's official, low-key little website. Find brief information about upcoming projects here. More details are in the clickable links.

Hope you enjoy your visit. Thank you for stopping by!

Happenings/Itinerary/Events
Tammie Jenkins
I am a doctorate student at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I am currently writing my dissertation on the intertextuality in spoken word poetry. I would like to include excerpts of your poem Project Princess in my work as the embodiment of this intertextuality. My email address is: tjeni6@tigers.lsu.edu

9/5, 4:02pm

Tracie Morris' Friend Page
Sure, Tammie. As long as it's just for your diss and not commercially published right now, no problem. Feel free to contact me for feedback, etc. Best of luck, btw. I've been there!

9/5, 4:55pm

Tammie Jenkins
Thank you very much. I promise its only for dissertation. I just enjoyed the poem and it fit really well with what I wanted to do my research on. Your work lends itself so well to education as well. The way you use sounds is so helpful providing alternative instructional experiences to my students. I would love for your input and will keep you updated. Thanks Again.

9/5, 4:58pm

September 5, 2012

Tracie Morris' Friend Page
My pleasure!

9/5, 10:16pm

September 6, 2012

Tammie Jenkins
You are awesome.

9/6, 11:30am

September 7, 2012

Tracie Morris' Friend Page
Thx, Tammie!

9/7, 9:38am

March 21, 2013

Tammie Jenkins
Hi Dr. Morris,
I am still working on the dissertation using your poem project princess. I have really enjoyed using it to analyze the intertextuality in spoken word poetry. My major professor suggested that I ask you if you wanted to view a "finalized" version after my defense in the fall of this year (fingers crossed its this year). Just let me know, also I have "Rhyme Scheme" and I absolutely love the poems in it. Thanks for sharing your great gift with us.

3/21, 2:13pm

Tracie Morris' Friend Page
Nice of you to say, Tammie. Sure. I'd be happy to see it! Best of luck!

3/21, 2:18pm

Tammie Jenkins
Thank you...I will contact you when it has been finalized.

3/21, 5:05pm

May 23, 2013
Tammie Jenkins
Hi Dr. Morris

I am doing a biographical sketch for my dissertation chapter where I discuss you and your beginnings as a poet. I would like to show your caliber as a poet and academic. I found some information regarding your degrees and awards. I was trying to locate the title of your dissertation. I recall it was regarding Jane Austen, but I don’t remember whose work the full title was in. I would be eternally grateful for your assistance.

Tracie Morris' Friend Page
Hi Tammie: You got the J and the Austin parts right, but it’s the philosopher J.L. Austin, not Jayne Austen (although he did riff off her title, Sense and Sensibility with his own "Sense and Sensibilia" a compilation of his ideas... My dissertation was called "WhoDo With Words: Rapping a Black Tongue Around J.L. Austin"

Tammie Jenkins
Thank you. I see now how I thought it was Jane Austen. You have been a big help. You are awesome.

October 13, 2013

Tammie Jenkins
Hello Dr. Morris,

The final revisions to my dissertation have been completed. I was wondering whether you wanted a hard copy mailed to you or electronic copy. I will defending on the 28th of this month. Thanks again for allowing me to use your work in my dissertation.

October 13, 2013

Tracie Morris' Friend Page
Yay! Wishing you great luck, Soon-to-be- Dr. Tammie! Have a great defense. Don't worry. You already have it or you wouldn't be defending. Hard copy is fine. You can send it to me care of: Pratt Institute 200 Willoughby Ave. Brooklyn New York, 11205

October 14, 2013

Tammie Jenkins
Thank you. Dr. Morris. I will get it to you as soon as possible.

October 28, 2013

Tammie Jenkins
My defense was a success and they found your work provocative and interesting. Thank you for everything.

Tracie Morris' Friend Page
*CONGRATULATIONS!!!*

November 17, 2013

Tammie Jenkins
Hi Dr. Morris,
I would like to apologize for the long delay. I just finished my revisions from my October 28th defense (My major professor had some workshops, conferences, etc. pre-scheduled out of state). As a result, I didn’t get the committee’s suggestions for revisions until November 15th and completed them on the 16th. My major professor advised me to send you the final version of the dissertation. I am taking it to kinkos in the morning to have it bound. Hopefully, you will receive it by Friday. Thank you again for allowing me to use your work.

Tracie Morris’ Friend Page
Again I say: Yaaaay!

11/17, 8:38pm
THE VITA

Tammie Jenkins grew up in Plaquemine, Louisiana. She attended Southern University where she received her Bachelor’s degree in 1992 and her Master’s degree in 1997. Upon completion of her Master’s program, she worked as a Qualified Mental Health Professional and Case Manager in Plaquemine, Baton Rouge, and Morgan City, Louisiana. In 2004, she changed careers and began to work as a public school teacher in the Iberville Parish school system. She later left the Iberville Parish school system to begin her employment as Director of Special Education in the East Baton Rouge Parish school system in 2009, before returning to the classroom in 2010. In 2008, she made the decision to return to graduate school to pursue a doctorate degree in the School of Education, College of Human Sciences and Education. She is scheduled to receive her doctorate degree in May of 2014.