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Kitchen table reflexivity: negotiating positionality through everyday talk

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In this article, we explore the role of self-reflexivity in the understanding of positionality in human geography to argue that self-reflexivity in and of itself does not offer researchers sufficient opportunities to question and critique their fluid, ever-changing positionalities. Drawing on the work of feminist scholars, critical race scholars, and experiences carrying out qualitative research, we argue that formal and informal conversations with colleagues and mentors affords the opportunity to deeply engage with positionalities. This article draws on concepts of 'everyday talk' to encourage researchers to explore their positionalities through kitchen table reflexivity – an exploration of an individual's positionality and its relationship to their research carried out through formal and informal conversations with others. We demonstrate how everyday talk with each other furthered our understandings of our fluid identities in relation to our research participants. Through these conversations, we were able to more critically interrogate our identity and not simply reduce identity to a laundry list of perceived similarities and differences between research participants and us. In conclusion, we encourage all researchers to use everyday talk as one way to complicate their positionalities and to reflect on how this process relates to the broader societal and academic environment within which they carry out their research.

Keywords: self-reflexivity; positionality; everyday talk; qualitative methods; critical race theory; feminist scholarship

Critical geographers conducting qualitative research engage directly with how our positionalities impact our research participants, and how power relations impact the research process. Some researchers do this by simply identifying how they are similar and different from their research participants, presenting a laundry list of identity markers they seemingly check off to determine whether they are insiders or outsiders. We are reminded of a statement (or variation of) sometimes heard during research presentations at conferences: 'I recognize that as a white male studying Black people, I am in a position of power and am in some ways an outsider in a tight knit community.' We do not negate the importance of such a statement, and in no way aim to diminish the importance of reflexive engagements with positionality, which plays an essential role in the research process. Moreover, we recognize that some perceived insiders make such statements, but are heard less in part based off the sheer lack of people of color in geography. Regardless of who uses them, these statements only brush the surface, and we urge researchers to look deeply into their identities and the complicated ways they relate to their research communities.

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The purpose of this article is to encourage a community-minded approach to reflexivity that extends beyond individual and insular engagements with positionality. We propose the concept of *kitchen table reflexivity*, where through informal conversations, researchers critically and reflexively engage with the fluidity of their positionalities throughout the research process. In this way, researchers can recognize and acknowledge self-indulgent moments, some of which are necessary to help us understand our nuanced identities. At the same time, if we are not careful, these self-indulgent moments can become dangerous when they are not unpacked to examine their complexity and multiple influences on research.

Kitchen table reflexivity provides a platform to consider, among other things, what it means to occupy positions of power, how these positions change over time, and how relationships with research participants impacts perceptions of positionality in the research process. We draw on Black feminist and autoethnography literature to explain the methodological approach to this article (Butz 2010; Collins 2009; Ellis 2004; Holman Jones 2005; hooks 1981, 1989, 2000, 2009; Spry 2001). This literature provides a framework to explain why our unintentional choice of the kitchen table has theoretical importance, contextualizing it within a complex racialized, gendered, and classed history (Bennett 2006; Davis 1999; Schenone 2003; Shange 1998; Smith 1989; Weems 1990). Furthermore, literatures on positionality, self-reflexivity, and insider/outsider status in qualitative research highlight how kitchen table reflexivity complicates engagements with our identities and addresses critiques of self-reflexivity (Emirbayer and Desmond 2012; England 1994; Falconer Al-Hindi and Kawabata 2002; Fisher 2014; Kobayashi 2003; Rose 1997). We utilize field notes and collective memories to tell our stories of a Black and African-American female researcher who investigates racial identity formation and spatial practices of Black religious food programs and a white female researcher who investigates identity, storytelling, and landscapes with Black environmental justice activists. Our separate stories are used to introduce ‘everyday talk’ as a methodological tool qualitative researchers can use to interrogate their positionalities through formal and informal conversations (Harris-Lacewell 2004; Liebow 2003; May 2001; Tracy 2002). We draw on these stories, our experiences working through these ideas separately and together, and the collaborative writing process to demonstrate the importance of kitchen table reflexivity.

‘Accidental’ autoethnography

We incorporate our everyday experiences talking about race and research experiences to analyze the impact of these conversations on our understanding of the fluidity of positionality. We draw on autoethnography by incorporating the living and telling of personal experiences, connecting these experiences to broader social and political processes in academic research (Butz 2010; Ellis 2004; Holman Jones 2005; Spry 2001). Informal conversations that began in the fall of 2007 and are an ongoing part of our research, scholarship and friendship are utilized to demonstrate the role informal conversations can have in the research process. Since these conversations began as informal musings about our research and experiences, they were not recorded. As is explained below, such informal conversations are a step in the development of a relationship that allowed us to critically engage with each other through kitchen table reflexivity. Consequently, this article is an accidental autoethnography based on recollections, engagement with our research, conversations with each other, reflections on the processes of writing together, and the intersection of these processes.

We supplemented our stories and recollections with field notes to provided details about specific incidences and turning points in the research process.

Butz (2010) identifies five forms of autoethnography prevalent in geography; two are relevant to this article. First, we tell our stories and analyze our experiences to reflect on how embodied positionalities impact the research process. Second, we critically examine – separately and together – our lived experiences to question broader social and cultural systems and their impacts on our research. By expanding the notion of everyday talk, which 'refers to the ordinary kinds of communicating people do in schools, workplace, shops, and at public meetings, as well as when they are at home or with their friends' (Tracy 2002, 7), to include conversations between researchers, everyday talk becomes a methodological tool to collect data *and* an analytical tool to reflect on the role of positionality in the research processes. Drawing on the work of Black feminist scholarship brings everyday experiences into the realm of academic research (Collins 2009; hooks 1981, 1989, 2000, 2009). In this way, this article, in and of itself, *is* an endorsement of *and* an act of kitchen table reflexivity. We use our stories to demonstrate the importance of meaningful interaction with others to deepen critical engagement with research. Through writing, we negotiate our personal experiences, memories, and positionalities on the page together.

Everyday talk at the kitchen table

Our conversations about race and research began at about the same time our friendship began in the fall of 2007. We took a class together as graduate students and quickly realized the need for a casual space to freely and openly converse about experiences related and unrelated to the course. Initial conversations occurred in the geography building's courtyard or during walks around the geography building. As our friendship and conversations grew, we sought a space of comfort away from the university. More often than not, this was Ellen's kitchen table, a place that served as a quick getaway as it was close to campus. Ellen's house and in particular her kitchen table was an escape from the stress of the research process, a space far removed from the academic environment. These kitchen table conversations were rarely planned and never forced. Often included in these conversations was a type of interracial race talk where we discussed at length personal experiences as racialized beings in the discipline and department of geography. As we established our research agendas, individual experiences as participant observers in our respective research communities became the focus of many of these conversations. Regardless of how serious or seemingly trivial the topic was, Ellen's kitchen table became a reliable space to have such discussions.

Initially, there was no analytical reason for choosing the kitchen table. In reflecting on our research experiences and the meaning of the kitchen, however, we understand the kitchen as a complicated, racialized, and gendered space (Bennett 2006; Davis 1999; Schenone 2003; Shange 1998; Smith 1989; Weems 1990). The kitchen is not simply a space of labor, where food is prepared and consumed, but rather is a space that creates and reproduces a complex set of relations among individuals. The spaces of kitchens can reproduce patriarchal structures, as Bennett (2006) demonstrates in her exploration of a farm family's kitchen. Contrarily, kitchens can be spaces of power and emancipation as Robson (2006) finds among Nigeria's Muslim Hausa women. For the Hausa women, the kitchen is a feminist space where women controlled how food was prepared and at times used the kitchen to develop a business of selling cooked foods (Robson 2006, 672). Women also use the kitchen to communicate, creating tight-knit 'communities of care'

(hooks 2009, 292), where they enjoy each other's company as much as they enjoy the food (Smith 1989). Importantly, the kitchen and the activities occurring within it do not transcend racial identity or racial history.

Scholars have written extensively about the differing historical meanings and functions of the kitchen for racialized groups of women (Avakian and Haber 2005; Collins 2009; Davis 1999; Inness 2001; Schenone 2003; Smith 1989). Friedan (1963) discusses the feminine mystique, where the image of American women in society and perpetuated in magazines is one in which they are trapped in the home and the kitchen. This conception of the kitchen and Friedan's understanding of American women at that time is arguably limited to white middle-class women. Black women and poor white women also operated under systems of patriarchy, but their experiences were compounded by issues of class and race (Bennett 2006; Collins 2009; Davis 1999). For many Black women, the kitchens of white middle-class women were spaces of employment (Collins 2009). Davis (1999, 366) details Black women's kitchen legacy arguing 'slavery's system of subjugation and oppression further relegated Black women to kitchen spaces, sites of domesticity and silence.' Historically, Black women's work in the kitchen has been marred by stereotypes like 'mammy' that oversimplify and devalue their important work (Bower 2006; Collins 2009; Davis 1999; Williams-Forson 2006; Witt 1999).

Within this system of oppression, Black slave women managed to exhibit ingenuity through cooking (Davis 1999; Williams-Forson 2006). For hooks (2009, 43) growing up in the Jim Crow south, the work the women in her family did in their kitchens was 'a symbol of self determination and survival.' Importantly, the kitchen operates as a safe space, and an organizing space to create sites of resistance outside of the kitchen (Davis 1999). The kitchen remains a racialized space with a history that we acknowledge in contextualizing our conversations. We embraced the complexity of identity and interactions through casual conversations that upon reflection remain central to our role as researchers.

We classify the conversations occurring around Ellen's kitchen table as everyday talk. In the context of Black racial identity, everyday talk occurs in racialized public and private spaces created in part due to exclusion from the broader public sphere (Black Public Sphere Collective 1995; Dawson 2001; Fraser 1995; Harris-Lacewell 2004). Scholars who theorize everyday talk examine how individuals utilize it to share information, build relationships, and challenge beliefs they hold about themselves and others (Battle-Walters 2004; Harris-Lacewell 2004; Liebow 2003; May 2001). Studies on everyday talk range from Liebow's (2003) *Tally's Corner* on Black urban life to May's (2001) *Talking at Trena's*, an ethnographic study of a Southside Chicago Tavern. Individually, we drew on theoretical understandings of everyday talk in our methodologies; upon continuous engagement with each other, we realized that we utilized everyday talk as a reflexive practice to make sense of our positionalities.

Four important facets of everyday talk influenced our research process and reflexive engagements with positionality. First, everyday talk is cathartic. In *Sheila's Shop*, Battle-Walters (2004) uses an African-American beauty parlor as a site to study relationships and conversations among African-American women finding that many used the shop as a safe space where they could literally and figuratively let their hair down and discuss a host of issues. For us, such gabfests[1] provided a much-needed psychological release during a research process where we were deeply engrossed in research communities. Second, everyday talk occurs in racialized spaces that function as spaces of comfort (Harris-Lacewell 2004). The kitchen table represented this space for us. Although everyday talk occurred within a space of comfort, this space was interracial, necessitating that we navigate discussion of race in nuanced ways and essentially form a 'mnemonic

community' (Zerubavel 1996, 289). In this community, we understand our individual racialized experiences within the context of differing racialized histories. Third, everyday talk was not meant to build consensus. Harris-Lacewell (2004, 12) says about everyday talk, 'none of the individuals engaging in the conversation will be instantly convinced by the arguments of others, [but] all will be affected by their participation in this conversation.' We did not always come to an agreement but utilized these conversations to further interrogate our positionality in relation to our research participants. Fourth, everyday talk reminded us not to romanticize relationships with research participants, a risk of race scholarship (Emirbayer and Desmond 2012). Both of us developed familial like relationships with our research participants, nonetheless everyday talk reminded us of our 'betweenness,' where we remained insiders and outsiders throughout the research process (Katz 1992; Nast 1994). This article privileges the importance of everyday talk as a part of the self-reflexive process, while acknowledging that communication does not invalidate individual experiences that are in part based on race.

Interracial everyday talk necessitates a level of comfort and trust that allow conversations to flow freely. These requirements are even more pertinent when talking specifically about race. In *Can We Talk about Race*, Tatum (2007), a Black female scholar activist and college administrator, turns the mirror on herself through interrogating her interracial friendship with a white female scholar activist. Going into these conversations, Tatum (2007, 93) felt that her white friend 'had examined her own Whiteness, thinking about what it meant to have privilege, about what it meant to be in a relationship with those who might not have the same privileges.' We similarly acknowledge that interracial everyday talk is influenced by our lived experiences of race, each of us embodies and is embodied by race and this impacts our day-to-day existence and experiences. We also recognize that each setting and conversation has its own 'racial vibration,' or 'the constant potential presence of race, existing just beyond feeling and perception, which is amplified under certain conditions' (May 2014, 6). We do not assume that our interracial everyday talk neutralizes differences in racial identity and their influence in a 'wholly racialized world' (Morrison 1992). While in a utopian world, no topic is off limits; in a racialized world we consciously and unconsciously shift our code identities with each other and within our research.

Similar to Tatum's understanding of her friendship, conversations about race were a natural part our friendship from the very beginning. Moreover, like Tatum, consensus was not the end result. We remain able to work through sometimes uncomfortable disagreements, not necessarily to a point of mutual agreement, but to a point of mutual understanding and respect. One reason we were able to do so is because these conversations occurred at the kitchen table, an informal settings that made talking about race easier. To further contextualize the conversations, we turn to a discussion of positionality, reflexivity, and insider/outsider statues to demonstrate how kitchen table reflexivity unfolds.

Positionality, reflexivity, and insider/outsider status

Kitchen table reflexivity builds on trends in critical qualitative research in which researchers critically examine positionality, taking into account the situated nature of knowledge and their identities in relation to their research participants. As researchers, we integrate our positionalities into scholarship to grapple with the impact of difference on research, rather than creating an idealized notion of equality (McDowell 1992, 409). We do so by exploring power relationships that develop through the course of the research

process and recognizing that institutional privilege as researchers always separates us from research participants (Rose 1997, 307–308). As positionality has become commonplace within geography, some have simplified positionality – listing the ways they are different and similar to their research participants, while others demonstrate a complex engagement with the impacts and influences these axes of difference have on the research process.

Complex and nuanced engagements with positionality are most often critically examined through self-reflexive processes. While self-reflexivity can take multiple forms, it analyzes the influence of social position and the politics of identity on the interactions between researcher and research participants and the role of power and identity in everyday lives and research (Dowling 2005; England 1994; Fisher 2014; McDowell 1992; Nagar 1997; Oberhauser 1997; Rose 1997). By employing kitchen table reflexivity, we argue for an in-depth engagement with positionality through formal and informal conversations with other researchers, which develops a richer and more nuanced engagement with positionality that in turn enriches the research processes.

Such conversations highlight and create space where researchers can work through the messy and fluid negotiated relationships with research participants (Merriam et al. 2001). The messiness and fluidity of insider/outsider status necessitates researchers to continuously reexamine their positionalities in space and time as an ongoing process in relation to their research and research participants (Katz 1992; Merriam et al. 2001; Mullings 1999; Nast 1994). Fisher (2014), for example, notes her struggles as a mixed-race scholar with being perceived as white during her research in the Philippines. She used her ‘experiences of hybridity’ to understand the ways in which she and her research participants understood whiteness and race in distinct ways (Fisher 2014, 13). Researchers always occupy a space of betweenness – always both an insider and an outsider – regardless of the similarities or differences that exist between them and their research participants (England 1994; Katz 1992, 1994; Nast 1994; Rose 1997).

Reflexivity has received its fair share of criticisms across multiple disciplines, but most scholars acknowledge the benefits of reflexivity (Emirbayer and Desmond 2012; England 1994; Falconer Al-Hindi and Kawabata 2002; Kobayashi 2003; Rose 1997). Kobayashi (2003, 347–348) provides a particularly poignant critique of the ways reflexivity and positionality have been used in geography:

> For several years now, I have struggled with a mounting dis-ease over the reflexive turn in human geography, and with a mounting conviction that much of what passes for anti-racist scholarship, by including a reflexive acknowledgement of the writer’s ‘positionality’ with respect to her subjects, is actually a privilege and self-indulgent focus on the self that provides anything but an anti-racist lens and ends up instead distancing the writer-by virtue of her power to name (even if she is only naming herself) and to situate-from the very people whose conditions she might hope to change.

Kobayashi’s dis-ease (2003, 347) reflects the uneven power relations to name within society and within academia. The power to name, and the power to deny the ability to name and effectively ignore certain voices, has a particular political authority within both spaces. We share Kobayashi’s dis-ease with the reflexive turn in geography, especially when researchers use a positionality script to uncritically list their identity or when the researcher’s internal struggles with their positionalities dominate their research. Nevertheless, as Kobayashi does, we see the benefit in critical engagement with positionality. One way researchers can become more critical and recognize the multiple power structures that impact their research is through ‘everyday talk’ with colleagues and mentors.

To do this, this article draws from debates about reflexivity in race scholarship to inform our conception of kitchen table reflexivity (DaCosta 2012; Emirbayer and

Desmond 2012; Moore 2012; Winant 2012). First, reflexivity is not a process that occurs only on a grounded level; how we engage with our identity is in part informed by our knowledge base. While we did not set out to purposefully decenter 'white domination over knowledge production' (Moore 2012, 615), our commitment to critical engagement with our research participants requires that we utilize geographic and non-geographic theories, in the process rethinking what counts as geographic knowledge. 'Everyday talk' arises from the oral traditions of Black people in the USA who navigate a racial and racist society in part through formal and informal conversations. We used everyday talk, turning the mirror on ourselves, to make sense of how to navigate racialized bodies during the research process. Second, while everyday talk between scholars is an important step in the reflexivity process, we are fully aware that our individual experiences with race and racism in society and in geography as a discipline are distinct. Everyday talk does not negate these racial differences. Nor does everyday talk allow us or force us to become representatives or spokespeople for our race. We do not aim to diminish the importance of race; instead, our conversations encouraged a deeper engagement with reflexivity where we wholeheartedly question and examine our racial differences in sometimes uncomfortable, but always productive, ways.

As we demonstrate below, at times as researchers we are so embedded within our work, it is difficult to determine how our insider/outsider status changes and how this impacts our research. Simply acknowledging, as opposed to unpacking, one's positionality not only is self-indulgent but also does little to further our thinking in how one's positionality influences the research process at multiple scales. Kitchen table reflexivity is one way; through the external reflexive engagement with our positionalities and research by others, we can gain a better understanding of how our states of betweenness impact our research. In the next section we analyze how we utilized casual conversations to deepen our self-reflexive process.

Priscilla's story

The purpose of my research was to interrogate spatial and racial identity formation through the lens of Black faith-based food and agricultural programs: the Nation of Islam's (NOI) Muhammad Farms, the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church's (PAOCC) Beulah Land Farms, and Wheat Street Baptist Church's Action Mission Ministry (AMM). At two of these sites, Beulah Land Farms and the AMM, I conducted extensive participant observation and open-ended interviews with volunteers of the food programs. At Beulah Land Farms, I worked alongside PAOCC members pruning trees, painting fences, and at times tagging cattle. At the AMM, I served food and water to AMM guests twice a week for two years. My goal in both programs was to interrogate Black identity and community formation through the lens of volunteers to gain a deeper understanding of how they used food and agriculture to define their work, the surrounding geographic community, and their blackness. My purpose in volunteering was not simply to gain trust in hopes of facilitating a more purposeful interview. I knew through instinct undergirded by scholarly inquiry that being privy to their daily and casual conversations would provide insight into their identity formation in a way that even open-ended interviews could not. 'Everyday talk' (Harris-Lacewell 2004) was one of my theoretical commitments, and in the space of the emergency food program it required that as a researcher, I should not perform my blackness in a way that was unnatural. I sometimes used colloquial language alongside volunteers not to fit in, but because this reflects my behavior and speech patterns in similar situations. For me, participant observation required that I continuously examine my

positionality in a critical and uncomfortable way. Everyday talk with Ellen helped facilitate this process.

Everyday talk with Ellen encouraged me to interrogate my identity in relation to my research participants in more nuanced ways, in part because she asked questions about how I performed my identity that were based on our different racialized bodies. One of our kitchen table gabfests centered on my choices of hairstyle when going to both food programs. The PAOCC is a Black nationalist organization, and I understand Black nationalism as an ideological commitment that is in part expressed through the body and appearance. During one of our kitchen table conversations, I casually mentioned to Ellen that I decided to wear my hair natural on my initial visit the PAOCC. Ellen asked me 'why?' Her simple question of my hair choice encouraged me to think about the historical politics of Black women's hair, and the ways through which hair relates to racial identity.[2] Her question required that I interrogate what at the time seemed like an unconscious decision. I realized that subconsciously I was performing and legitimizing my blackness through my hair.

Everyday talk with Ellen provided a level of trust and comfort that allowed her to probe aspects of my identity in a way that was not received as tokenism. One question about my hair allowed me to think about times during the research process that I was in fact 'shifting' (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2009, 6). The below definition is worth quoting at length.

> Black women in our country have had to perfect what we call 'shifting,' a sort of subterfuge that African Americans have long practiced to ensure their survival in our society. Perhaps more than any other group of Americans, Black women are relentlessly pushed to serve and satisfy others and made to hide their true selves to placate White colleagues, Black men, and other segments of the community. They shift to accommodate differences in class as well as gender and ethnicity. From one moment to the next, they change their outward behavior, attitude, or tone, shifting White then shifting Black again, shifting corporate, shifting cool. And shifting has become such and integral part of Black women's behavior that some adopt an alternative pose or voice as easily as they blink their eyes or draw a breath-without thinking, and without realizing that the emptiness they feel and the roles they must play must be directly related. (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2009, 6–7)

Shifting does not inauthenticate a person or his or her behavior, but is a coping mechanism that is tied to Black women's complicated racial and gender identity. Ellen's simple question of 'why' caused me to think about the changing nature of my identity and how my experiences as a Black woman translated to my interaction with my research participants even in such ways as hair choice.

Everyday talk with Ellen was also cathartic. As a Black scholar, I recognize that my research carries with it a level of supposed authenticity that I am at times uncomfortable with. Expressing this discomfort sometimes seemed to fall on deaf ears or was minimalized by others during the research process. Carolyn Finney (2011), a noted Black female geographer who studies the intersection between race and the environment, has this to say about the nuanced nature of insider research:

> Often, when people ask me about issues of race, and in particular the African American community, they forget that I'm also the thing itself. It's emotional for me. So if I'm going to be authentic in talking about race-and I'm most interested in being authentic-that really messes with people's heads, because they sometimes forget that I'm both the voice and the thing itself (3).

I am passionate about my research, but readily admit that being both the voice and the thing itself is emotionally taxing. While being Black does, in some instances, permit entry into the field, my blackness also creates a separate set of concerns about remaining true to

myself, my research, and Black people during the analytical process. We fully recognize that I do not speak for all Black people as Ellen does not speak for all white people. Yet, at times, I was able to express to Ellen the things that I felt uncomfortable saying to other white people within academia either out of lack of familiarity or perceived power differentials during my PhD journey. To fully engage with my complex identity, there were times when I just needed to get something off of my chest, and she was a listening ear regarding my concerns about how to be a Black responsible scholar. She did not minimalize my concerns about the way in which my research represents Black people. She sought to understand my trepidations about presenting research findings that could be used to negatively stereotype Black people. Simply, Ellen represented the right mix of curiosity and concern that pushed me to work through my identity in instructive ways.

As a trained geographer, I am to an extent reproducing disciplinary boundaries. Conversations with Ellen helped me to navigate a sometimes frustrating research process where including the voices of scholars, often of color, beyond the discipline of geography was sometimes challenged. Our conversations reinforced a personal commitment to include a wide range of scholars who could help me understand the spatial and racial manifestations of Black religious food programs. This included scholars who are not trained geographers and even geographers who study race that are sometimes excluded in spaces labeled critical and radical. Our conversations encouraged me to always keep race on the table not simply in terms of my positionality and research participants, but also in how I chose to conceptually ground my work.

Despite our closeness, Ellen's whiteness remains present, and I am sometimes uncertain as to whether I, from a Black feminist perspective, can classify her kitchen table as a 'safe space' where 'Black women speak freely' (Collins 2000). My kitchen table conversations with Ellen do not negate my value and desire for such spaces in which I can come together with a community of Black women to relax, let my hair down, and be free. I am constantly reminded, however, that these 'safe spaces' (Collins 2000, 100) are rare in a discipline that is overwhelmingly white. The ability to get together with other Black female geographers is a luxury that often only occurs during annual meetings or other organized gatherings. It is a reminder that Black women are spread out in geography departments throughout the world, making regular kitchen table conversations difficult. Making sense of my perceived place in geography's racial order is painful in part because race and racism in geography are not divorced from race and racism in US society. The struggles to include a wide range of scholarly voices that inform my research is directly connected to a personal struggle to create a safe space for myself as a Black female geographer.

Ellen's story

My research examines the processes that lead to persistent urban environmental injustices by examining the relationship and influence of invisibility, race, and political efficacy in environmental and urban policies on the interactions between environmental justice activists and environmental regulators. To do this, I examine how the stories and narratives told by environmental justice activists, federal environmental regulators, and local city officials reinforce, redefine, and challenge environmental injustices.

For my research I work with the Newtown Florist Club (NFC), a social and environmental justice organization in Gainesville, Georgia. The NFC is primarily made up of women who live in or have a connection to the Newtown neighborhood. The Newtown neighborhood, located on Gainesville's Southside, has a history that parallels that of many

environmental justice communities – it was built on top of a landfill, there are 14 polluting industries within a one-mile radius, and the CSX railroad runs on its southern border.

I conducted extensive participant observation with the NFC and open-ended interviews with NFC members, representatives of the Environmental Protection Agency Region IV (EPA IV), and representatives from the city of Gainesville. My commitment to extensive participant observation was grounded in feminist and activist research methodologies. The women of the NFC have been studied extensively and in the past had felt exploited and used by researchers. With this in mind, I did not want to be just another researcher who came in, researched the community, and left. Instead, I intentionally established relationships and worked with the community to make my presence, resources, and skills an asset to their organization. Throughout my research, I worked with club leadership to reassess my relationship and contribution to the club's goals. It was through my interactions with the women of the NFC that the importance of everyday talk for my research arose. The conversations I participated in and was present for lead to a deeper understanding of their lived experiences of invisibility and environmental justice.

Everyday talk with Priscilla fulfilled multiple professional and personal objectives. First, through everyday talk, I continually reconsidered my fluid identity in complex, relational, and nuanced ways. It made me further contemplate how I negotiated relationships with my research participants and the role that positional spaces played throughout the research process (Mullings 1999). When I began working with the NFC, I was always aware of my whiteness and my role as a white researcher doing research on primarily African-American activists. My over-awareness became apparent in conversations with Priscilla when she would point out the importance of the relationships I was building that went beyond the simplistic facets of identity with which I was concerned.

Through our conversations, I also reassessed how my relational conceptions of identity changed over time. For example, after six months of preliminary research I was lamenting the prospect of asking the women of the NFC if I could do my dissertation with them, acknowledging that while I was dedicated to taking their perspective into consideration, in the end, it was going to be my research. Priscilla helped me recognize that to the women I worked with I was no longer just another researcher, but I was someone they had relationships with, and that they would most likely want me to succeed and to recognize their role in my success. Through the course of our conversation, Priscilla commented that I should not worry because they considered me one of their own and would always help their own. At first I was confused and taken aback by this comment – I was not one of their own, I was not Black, I was not even from Gainesville, how could they possibly think of me as one of their own? She helped me realize that the relationships I was building were just as important as the cultural identifiers society places upon us. This did not eliminate or take away the importance of race in my relationship to the women I worked with, but it did change our relationship in their and my eyes. Unbeknownst to me, I had entered a state of 'betweenness' (Nast 1994). I was still and would always be an outsider, but I now was also an insider as one of the women of the NFC articulated after four years of working with them when she turned to me in a meeting and asked me 'Ellen, what do you think, you're practically one of us.'

Everyday talk with Priscilla also brought to light our own preconceived notions about race, identity, and how these factors intersected with our research. My whiteness and her blackness were never far from the surface, but the trust and mutual respect we established through at times blunt conversations about race enriched my own understanding of race and how it impacted my research. At the same time, our relationship allowed us to recognize each other as individuals, not ambassadors of each other's races. Furthermore,

while Priscilla and I did not always agree, it was through the moments when we had to agree to disagree that the most learning occurred.

We also made mistakes, blundered along in conversations, and offended one another. There was more than one occasion when I made an off-handed comment I did not even think about that was offensive. More often than not, if Priscilla was offended, she would bring up my comment and explain why it had offended or upset her. My first instinct was, and still is, to be defensive, explain why I said what I said or what I really meant. Overtime, I realized that it was out of respect that Priscilla even bothered to point out that she was offended, she did not have to, but our relationship is built on trust and honesty and letting those moments slide would do a disservice to our friendship and to our work as scholars. As illustrated in the following paragraph, everyday talk does not always result in immediate mutual understanding. Moreover, reflexivity does not end when our fieldwork ends as the below example occurred during the revision process of this article.

As a response to requests for specific examples, I came up with one based on an experience the two of us had, where we utilized everyday talk to work through deeply sensitive and personal racialized experiences. When I shared it with Priscilla, she immediately rejected the idea of using the example, and contended that we had interpreted the experience differently. My first reaction was to explain what I *really* meant, assure her we would not use the example, and to apologize for my misstep. Upon further reflection, I realized it was deeper than that. To me, the example was a single isolated incident that illustrated our point, and for Priscilla it was one of a continual stream of micro-aggressions she deals with on a daily basis. It was not in her past, as it was in my past, a privilege afforded to me by my whiteness. Moreover, Priscilla expressed a continuous desire to keep certain experiences and her reaction to them private, fighting against the notion of putting portions of herself on display regardless of the purpose. This example represents the extent to which dual autoethnography is a continuous process that does not end when our fieldwork ends, as we continue to reflect on our experiences during the research process.

Our candid conversations made me more aware of my own preconceived notions about identity and how my identity impacted my research. On more than one occasion, we would relay an experience we had during our field work and subtly, or as we became more comfortable with our everyday talk bluntly, ask each other were we interpreting this experiences because we were white or Black, or was there more to the situation. More often than not, there was more to the situation we did not see because of our preconceived notions based on our lived experiences of our identities. Through everyday talk, we were encouraged and sometimes forced to think through these experiences and interpretations in different ways.

Everyday talk with Priscilla was cathartic. As a white scholar doing research on the activism of African-American women I am constantly aware of the complex history, relationship, and criticisms of white scholars doing research on communities of color. I explicitly recognize my white privilege and while I know intellectually that guilt is not a productive emotion for anti-racist work, at times I question my legitimacy. These emotions are difficult to articulate and are not always welcome in academic circles beyond the recognition that white privilege exists and positionality impacts research. It was through everyday talk with Priscilla that I was able to make sense of and find productive avenues for my questions of my legitimacy as a researcher. These candid, honest, and personal discussions on race and research highlighted how my unique, fluid positionality contributed valid and important interpretations and insight into my research topic. At times, our conversations were self-indulgent and just as Kobayashi (2003) warns my self-indulgence further separated me from my research participants. Through our everyday

talk we were able to push through these moments to generate 'sincere and engaged moral discussion that goes well beyond the confines of any individual' (Kobayashi 2003, 349). Everyday talk with Priscilla gave me the space to work through my self-indulgent guilt and self-doubt not in a superficial manner, but in a way that surpassed my individual confines and made me a better researcher.

Conclusion

Everyday talk is a method we all use whether we acknowledge it explicitly or not. It has practical implications in how we as researchers make sense of the world around us, our place in the world, and our place among our research participants. We talk to people at conferences and other professional meetings. We talk to our research participants. We have casual conversations among friends, family, colleagues, advisors, and mentors. So in some ways what we are advocating is not unique, instead, we urge researchers to become and remain aware of everyday talk and the role it plays in facilitating a more nuanced understanding of ourselves, our research, and the relationships between the two.

Everyday talk can bring to light the relationship between the power structures within which we are embedded and how we make sense of our research at multiple scales. Through our stories, we demonstrated that kitchen table reflexivity did not change who we were or force consensus. Instead, by talking to someone removed from the situation, their perspective can lend insight into the relationship between the power structures within which we are operating and our role as researchers, because they do not have to simultaneously look inside and outside (Rose 1997). Through everyday talk, we can help each other see situations from a different perspective, a perspective that can push our understandings of ourselves and our situated, fluid, and relational positionalities. Everyday talk made us consider even unconscious decisions like choice of hairstyle. Through these conversations, we teased out the nuanced ways in which we, similarly to all researchers, perform our identity, continuing to challenge each other on assumptions about our identity and its effect on the research process.

Kitchen table reflexivity provides a safe space, in a discipline where safe spaces are sometimes difficult to come by. The need to create these spaces is in part based on conscious and unconscious exclusion from broader disciplinary spaces. Most would agree that talking about race is hard work, and a topic that some find difficult to discuss in even the most critical of disciplinary circles. We think of the kitchen table as a space where these conversations can be had, and where the importance of race is not diminished. Our kitchen table reflexivity is cross-racial, and during our conversations, words flowed as freely as they could in part due to our preexisting relationship and explicit acknowledgment to each other that while conversations of race were challenging, they were worth having. We both recognize, however, the need for spaces where people of color can have frank and honest conversations among other people of color. The kitchen table is a safe space, but we do not think of it as a space where societal power structures are magically erased.

The cathartic nature of kitchen table reflexivity should not be underestimated. Even though it is not often discussed within the academy, research is hard. Qualitative research methodologies such as feminist and critical race methodologies encourage the researcher to deeply engage themselves within their research communities. These methodologies also necessitate a level of action, reminding researchers that their work should go beyond discovery to improving the lives of research participants and combating injustices more broadly (Delgado and Stefancic 2011; Jones, Nast, and Roberts 1997; Moss 2002; Twine

and Warren 2000). As we demonstrated in our stories, for each of us, in different ways, kitchen table reflexivity provided us with the support, confidence, and at times strength to carry on with our research. The need for support might be indicative of our positions within our career paths, but we suspect that due to our passion about our research, we will lean on each other and others throughout our careers.

Kitchen table reflexivity should elicit some follow-up questions including, but not limited to, (1) What do you mean by positions of power?; (2) How are you an insider and an outsider?; (3) Is this first-hand or assumed knowledge? To begin to answer these questions, it is necessary to pay close attention to the content of our research conversations and the spaces in which they occur. We present a detailed list of questions to serve as a starting point in the process of kitchen table reflexivity.[3] These questions are not designed for yes or no answers with an end result of simply recognizing insider and/or outsider positions through a self-indulgent process. Instead, we offer a challenge to researchers to complicate understandings of self, and through this process, to understand and challenge power structures within and outside the academy. Furthermore, we encourage you to personalize these questions based on your research experiences. As can be seen from this article, reflexivity is a never-ending process. Moreover, if deeper questions are not being elicited through formal and informal conversations with others, it might be useful to change or expand your kitchen table guest list.

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Notes

1. Harris-Lacewell (2004, 3) uses 'gabfest' to describe everyday talk among Black people stating any discussion of Black political ideologies 'must begin with the study of the conversatin', shit talkin', gabfest, rap sessions, where Black people are just kickin' it on the set.' We use the term to describe the often-informal conversations occurring around Ellen's kitchen table that we critically reflect on in this manuscript.
2. For a detailed discussion of the historical politics of Black women's hair, see Byrd and Tharp's (2002) *Hair Story* where they trace the roots of phrases like good hair and bad hair that refer to the curl pattern of Black women's hair. During slavery, good hair referred to the hair of Black female slaves who were of mixed race ancestry and generally had looser curl patterns. Bad hair on the other hand referred to tightly curled hair. With the rise of the soul movement of the 1960s and 1970s, many Black women directly challenged racial assimilation by wearing their hair in a natural or Afro state. This was a political act, as white society often defined natural black hair as ugly and unkempt. Black nationalist groups like the Black Panther Party, the NOI, and the PAOCC championed natural hair as a representation of blackness. To some Black nationalists, hair that was straightened through chemicals or by a straightening comb represented a desire by Black women to adopt European standards of beauty that Black nationalists adamantly rejected.
3. The list of questions below is to help researchers to become and remain aware of everyday talk and the role it plays in facilitating a more nuanced understanding of ourselves, our research, and the relationships between the two. This is in no way a finite list and we hope that these questions will illicit even more questions throughout the research process.

   Broader question: Who is at my kitchen table?

   Who do I have conversations with about my positionality and why?

Colleagues?

Friends?

Friends who are colleagues?

Research participants?

What identities do people at your kitchen table have and how might this affect my collective understanding of positionality?

How can I cultivate relationships with others (both professionally and personally) to expand the number of people and diversity of ideas around my kitchen table?

Broader question: What type of conversation am I having at my kitchen table?

How does my lived experience relate to others around the table?

In what ways are my conversations self-indulgent, and how might I push pass these moments to deeper understanding?

How do conversations about my positionality impact the research topic that I am studying?

How do conversations about my positionality impact my understanding of how I engage with my research participants at all stages of the research process?

How does my academic speak about my positionality differ from everyday talk about my research experiences? What is added or lost in the process?

What aspects of my identity am I silent about during these conversations?

Broader question: Where is my kitchen table?

Where do you I have conversations about my positionality and why?

Academic settings?

Spaces of comfort (home, etc.)?

How can I work to create a space that bolsters deep and meaningful conversations about my positionality?

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ABSTRACT TRANSLATIONS

Reflexividad cotidiana: la negociación de la posicionalidad a través del diálogo cotidiano

En este artículo analizamos el rol de la autoreflexión en las formas de entender la posicionalidad en la geografía humana para sostener que la autoreflexión en sí misma no ofrece suficientes oportunidades a lxs investigadorxs para cuestionar y criticar sus posicionalidades fluidas y siempre cambiantes. Basándonos en el trabajo de académicxs feministas, investigadorxs críticxs de la raza y experiencias de investigación cualitativa, sostenemos que las conversaciones formales e informales con colegas y mentorxs son oportunidades para involucrarse profundamente con las posicionalidades. Este artículo se basa en conceptos de ‘conversación diaria’ para estimular a lxs investigadorxs a explorar sus posicionalidades a través de la reflexividad cotidiana – una exploración de la posicionalidad de un individuo y su relación con sus investigaciones llevada a cabo a través de conversaciones formales e informales con otras personas. Demostramos cómo las conversaciones cotidianas con otrxs mejoraron las formas de entender nuestras identidades fluidas en relación con las participantes en nuestra investigación. A través de estas conversaciones, pudimos interrogar nuestra identidad de forma más crítica y no simplemente reducirla a una lista de aparentes similitudes y diferencias entre lxs participantes y nosotras. En conclusión, invitamos a todxs lxs investigadorxs a utilizar la conversación cotidiana como una forma de complejizar sus posicionalidades y reflexionar sobre cómo este proceso se relaciona con el ambiente social y académico más amplio dentro del cual llevan a cabo su investigación.

Palabras claves: autoreflexión; posicionalidad; conversación cotidiana; métodos cualitativos; teoría crítica de raza; investigación feminista

餐桌上的反思性：透过日常对话协商位置性

我们在本文中探讨自我反身性之于理解人文地理学中的位置性所扮演的角色，并主张自我反身性单就其本身而言，并不能提供研究者足够的机会来质疑或批判其流动并恆常改变的位置性。我们运用女性主义与从事批判种族研究的学者之研究，以及从事质性研究的经验，主张与同事和良师益友间的正式及非正式交谈，提供了深刻涉入位置性的契机。本文运用“日常对话”的概念，鼓励研究者透过餐桌上的反身性来探讨其位置性——透过与他人的正式及非正式交谈，探讨个人的位置性及其与研究的关联性。我们将展现，与他人的日常对话，如何增进我们对于自身的流动身份认同之于我们的研究参与者之理解。透过这些对话，我们得以更加批判性地探问自身的身份认同，而非仅是单纯将身份认同化约成如待办事项般的清单，列举研究参与者和我们之间的异同。我们在结论中，鼓励所有的研究者运用日常对话作为复杂化其位置性的一种方式，并反思此般过程如何连结至其所进行研究的更普遍的社会及学术环境。

关键词：自我反身性; 位置性; 日常对话; 质性方法; 批判种族理论; 女性主义研究