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Through space into the flesh: Mapping inscriptions of anti-black racist and ableist schooling on young people's bodies

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ABSTRACT

This article responds to the deadly consequences of the ongoing anti-Black racist and ableist educational settings in the United States, including the continuous historical trauma they create in the lives of targeted youth (dis/abled, Black, non-white, gender-variant, poor, immigrant). By way of sampling individual body maps of a New York City-based youth participatory action research study (YPAR), the author frames socially constituted impairments to describe the chronic violence caused by anti-Black racism and ableism. Grounded in critical disability and embodiment studies, the author applies an “ocular ethic” framework to this YPAR study to name some of the injurious effects that pervasive anti-Black racist and ableist schooling practices have on the lives and bodies of Black students. Informed by youth-driven visions of fugitivity, the author argues that critical body mapping disrupts ongoing anti-Black racist and ableist narratives about racialized youth that continue to frame them as helpless, immobilized, and insensate.

KEYWORDS

Youth participatory action research; critical body mapping; ocular ethic; anti-Black racist and ableist education; impairments caused by social structures

Modernity and terror go hand in hand: sovereignty is the power to kill or let live and he who has the biggest weapon—including the weapons of representation—rules. (Casper & Moore, 2009, p. 13)

What clocks? We don't have clocks in classrooms. People think we have nowhere to go. We are always here.

-KD, Youth Co-Researcher

The normalizing master narrative about the curriculum of public education in the United States (US) is lush with white Eurocentrism. The adopted curriculum legitimizes the history, accomplishments, and expansion of Western European heteronormative and ableist¹ cultures as the only epistemological standard by which students learn/ed to measure, recognize, and practice their humanisms (Au, Brown, & Calderón, 2016). This narrative repels anti-Black racist and ableist social markers in that compulsory able-bodiedness (Campbell, 2009) silences the violence done to and nihilation of

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Indigenous, Black, disabled, poor, gender-variant, and other minoritized populations throughout the everyday terrors of their lives. But it is through the absence of disability, specifically, that the curriculum of public education has mirrored “in many ways eugenic ideologies that imagined a uniquely modern utopian fantasy of a future world uncontaminated by defective bodies – either disabled, racialized, or both at the same time” (Mitchell & Snyder, 2003, p. 861). This said, this article argues that the purposes of US public education have always been tainted by a logic of ableism that uses individual racialized (especially “Black”) social, cognitive and physical attributes to determine who deserves to be in school, educated, and ultimately included as a productive member of US capitalist society.

“Special Education” – Enactment of Exclusion, Racism, Ableism

Entrenched centuries ago and foregrounded by the Middle Passage of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the racialization of disability, as well as the disabling of race, points to the fact that race and disability are “not oppositional categories but are instead categories of difference that are mutually constitutive of each other” (Gill & Erevelles, 2017, p. 125). Disability studies scholars (Farber, 1968; Nibert, 1995; Oliver, 1990) have punctuated this historical process of becoming disabled with “materialist analyses to argue that the category of disability has been employed by capitalism to justify the exploitation or exclusion of certain social groups from participating in economic activity” (Erevelles, 2005, p. 433). Erevelles (2014, p. 85) later explains disability “not as the condition of ‘being’ but of ‘becoming,’ and this ‘becoming’ is an historical event, and further, it is its material contexts in which the body ‘becomes’ a commodity of exchange in the neoliberal prison–industrial complex of late capitalism”. By combining race with the historical process of becoming disabled, researchers in dis/ability critical race studies (DisCrit) incorporate this “dual analysis of race and disability” to describe the complex ways “that race and ability shape ideas about citizenship and belonging” (Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016, p. 24).

The persisting enmeshment of race and disability is central to what Saidiya Hartman (2008, p. 6) names “the afterlife of slavery” or, the “skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, impoverishment”. It is hardly possible to imagine the targeted Black body moving through the spaces of today’s anti-Black racist and ableist education system without having daily near-death experiences. This article not only makes visible the colonial aftermath of anti-Black racism and ableism within the contexts of US public education, but also situates public schools as central sites in which the processes of systemic removal, if not erasure, of young people, specifically Black students occur. This article also repositions “impairment” as an embodied effect of ongoing racism and ableism that is constituted as “disability.” With the body maps that appear in this article, students make visible these socially constituted impairments to describe the violence caused by anti-Black racism and ableism. From hereon the author uses “impaired youth” to signify impairments caused by social structures.

Today, the bodies of Black and other impaired youth in public schools continue to be struck by the deadly violence of white supremacist and ableist schooling structures

as these are passed from one generation to another. Through this permanent profit to be made from Black bodies, capitalism produces disabled bodies to be transformed into commodities and exchanged in the market for profit (i.e., unruly Black students are repetitively suspended from school until they age out of school, and are transferred into spaces of the carceral state, including juvenile detention, unemployment, crime, prison)(one of the earlier texts on this phenomenon includes “American Apartheid” by Massey & Denton, 1993). As an exploitable cadre of low-waged labor, the impaired Black body is always “at the height of its profitability for the slave masters” (Erevelles, 2014, p. 86). Today, public school districts with large numbers of students in special education (as determined by different forms of disablement), receive additional state and federal funding, even though their equitable distribution remains questionable.

The non-expiring profitability of anti-Black violence through space and time is a daily unfolding of history, or, what Christina Sharpe (2016) calls “living in the wake:”

Living in the wake means living the history and present of terror, from slavery to the present, as the ground of our everyday Black existence; living the historically and geographically dis/continuous but always present and endlessly reinvigorated brutality in, and on, our bodies while even as that terror is visited on our bodies the realities of that terror are erased. (p. 15)

Public education that favors punishment often performs the enclosing of this space–time lapse in that schooling practices arrest the freedom and mobility among impaired youth. As enclosures, schools embody the selective removal and denial of “services and programs that are key to the stability and long-term well-being of communities” (Sojoyner, 2016, p. xiii).

The opening words by youth co-researcher KD,² a Black male student who was in his third year at a public high school in Manhattan at the time of this PAR project, hint to the omnipresence of slavery’s aftermath in the public school he attended. Not displaying any clocks in any of his classrooms tended to reproduce a supervised holding space for young life not worthy of time or keeping time for. No access to clocks while in school also alienates targeted youth from important adjoined spaces and places central to their survival (i.e., employment, college, family). Further, the unavailability of clocks denied him practices of self-evaluation, naming of destinations, and recognizing accomplishments. Immobilizing Black youth by instilling in them a directionless and aimless educational journey potentially traps and holds them “in the knowledge that we are living in the afterlives of slavery, sitting in the room with history, in a lived and undeclared state of emergency” (Sharpe, 2016, p. 100). It is a dangerous and deadly space that does not beget remedy nor rescue of young people’s socially and physically impaired, and thus, disposable bodies. More significantly, the extent to which public schools are complicit in the quiet reproduction of anti-Black racism and ableism is what Ruthie Gilmore (2007, p. 28) named “the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death” among Black youth.

This article situates anti-Black racist and ableist schooling logics of US public education within said colonial aftermath. The article also contends that punitive schooling practices ossify anti-Black racist and ableist narratives about Black-as-living-dead and

disability-as-by-birth-defect, and how these narratives accumulate inside the bodies of targeted youth (Black, non-white, gender-variant, poor, immigrant). With a sample of body maps that high school students created during a New York City-based youth participatory action research project (YPAR) to visually document stories that their bodies hold about current anti-Black racist and ableist high stakes education regimes, this article claims that their bodies hold an archive of collectively lived expertise with the social and historical contexts of ongoing racist and ableist education and in which they are expected to move, grow, and learn. Despite the surplus production of pain, terror, and insecurity that current neoliberal carceral schooling practices etch into their bodies (Laura, 2014; Meiners, 2016), youth researchers also reclaim their humanity, refute the anti-Black racist and ableist gaze imposed onto them, and grow strategies of resistance while in school. More noteworthy, youth co-researchers use their body maps to perform courageous acts of fugitivity that frame imaginations and images of themselves for possibilities of learning away from and outside their oppressive schooling spaces. It is through these fugitive visions of themselves and for each other that young people raise daring questions central to the breaking away from the anti-Black racist and ableist realities that await them inside school spaces that hold them captive. These questions include: What kind of life must racialized and impaired students always be prepared for in light of the possibility of not surviving the violence of anti-Black racism enacted within their public schools? How does one memorialize bodily injuries caused by anti-Black racism and ableism in schools? How does one measure their impact? How do young people live through these ongoing atrocities committed against them by the curriculum of their schools? How do targeted youth resist and escape anti-Black racist and ableist schooling practices? What social conditions would embrace non-exploitative capitalist schooling practices and policies?

Theoretical Framework: An “Ocular Ethic”

The relationship between what we see and what we know is often skewed by what is not always visible, observable. Lived time and space—whether or not under the jurisdiction of anti-Black racism and ableism—remain soundless, tasteless, and unseen when abstracted from life and land. The tyranny of empirical westernized research logics seldom acknowledges the spatialization of time and processes (i.e., embodiments) behind the makings of subjects and subjectivities. The positioning of students’ embodied experiences within the ongoing history of anti-Black racist and ableist schooling practices needs to be supported by a theory that acknowledges that public education is haunted by the “ghostly matters” of colonialism (Gordon, 2008). This haunting, according to sociologist Avery Gordon, “registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained by a social violence done in the past or in the present. But haunting ... is distinctive for producing something-to-be-done” (p. xvi). The process of body mapping, as well as the reading of the body maps, had to be guided by the prioritization the voices and bodies that anti-Black racism and ableism have historically and ontologically silenced, immobilized, and made invisible. In addition, exposing and highlighting the skin cracks, damaged fissures, overworked nerves, and surplus production of regulated emotions inside students’ bodies also connect the living with those who lived

before inside the brutality of white supremacy. Such body mapping creates an optic with an ethical commitment to connecting the present with the past, thus interrupting the reproduction of dominant ableist knowledge systems, and inviting the viewer into imaginations towards political and social change. Hence the tracking of the ghosts in anti-Black racist and ableist education and the footprints these ghosts have left on young people's bodies is the underlying ethical commitment of the stories youth co-researchers' body maps tell. An "ocular ethic" framework has made possible such work that situates bodies as "enacted in and through social relations while also retaining corporeal agendas of their own" (Casper & Moore, 2009, p. 16).

Under the guidance of an "ocular ethic" this youth-centered and participatory body mapping methodology moved beyond the scope of data collection into the political realm of revealing the social processes of bodily erasure, exposure to white supremacy, ableism, and physical enclosure in public schools. Grounded in ethnography and discursive analysis of social patterns and practices of embodiment, an "ocular ethic" centers on the three dimensions: focusing, magnification and visualizing (Casper & Moore, 2009). "Focus" refers to making visible targeted bodies entangled in unequal social patterns and practices that shape and control them. But more importantly, their bodies are seen in their own terms. Casper and Moore emphasize that "The act of seeing them, of focusing on them in a critical way, is an ethical responsibility" (p. 15). Through techniques of "magnification" and "visualization" the maps of young people foreground their bodies to reveal, resituate and recuperate narratives often hidden and concealed within westernized and Eurocentric traditions of empirical inquiries. An ocular ethic contributes to critical disability studies by making visible the daily experiences that students have within their lifeworlds at school and that are also soaked in anti-Black racist and ableist ideologies. The focusing, magnifying and visualizing components of an ocular ethic make it both a theory and method that illuminates how anti-Black racism and ableism are intimately and co-constitutively intertwined with each other as meta curriculum that moves beyond the confines of special education.

The remaining pages introduce the youth research collective and some of the settings for this YPAR study. The author then presents two sample body maps to make palpable some of the physical sensations that anti-Black racist and ableist schooling practices instill in young people's bodies. With critical body mapping as a youth-centered research method, this article highlights how the stories on youth co-researchers' body maps counter normalized anti-Black racist and ableist beliefs about Black bodies being inherently more resilient to and tolerant of pain and physical injury. The article concludes with student-centered knowledges about bodily injuries and how these also generate life-saving fugitive visions for seeking more supportive and youth-centered learning conditions outside and away from the schools they attend.

Contexts for Student Supporting Action and Awareness

Although this YPAR study is nearing its tenth anniversary (it ran from 2008 until 2010), anti-Black racist and ableist education continues to produce record-breaking and disproportionately high rates of school suspensions, expulsions, school non-completion

rates and school closures in the lives of Black and other minoritized youth (Laura, 2014).

The 10 members of this research collective attended six different public high schools in three of New York City's five boroughs. They were between 15 and 18 years old and were in grades 10–12. Five co-researchers self-identified as female, the other five as male. Together, youth co-researchers implemented a mixed-methods study about the embodied and spatialized functions and purposes that young people experienced within their policed and surveilled public schools. In addition to the body maps ($n = 10$), this YPAR collective created a citywide youth survey ($n = 114$) and various visual narratives consisting of space maps of their schools ($n = 10$), and personalized video narratives ($n = 10$) to document the lived experiences students have within the surveilled spaces of their public high schools. As the academic researcher in the collective, the author's link to the university provided the research team with weekly meeting spaces, office supplies, and access to computers and technology.³ All research findings and discussions are based within a New York City (NYC) context.

Data collection took place a few years after NYC school safety was delegated to the mayor and the New York Police Department (NYPD) in 1998, and 7 years after the September 11 events. In tune with the nation's intensified approach to securitizing public spaces, NYC public schools were also increasingly equipped with heightened safety measures (armed police officers on school grounds, daily use of metal detectors, and installations of surveillance cameras) to lower the rate of school-based violence. In 2006, NYC reported that 21% of middle schools and high schools (total of 82 schools) were scanning students with permanent metal detectors at the beginning of the school day (Winston, 2008). In addition, during the 2005–2006 school year there were 4,625 school safety agents (SSAs) and at least 200 armed police officers working inside NYC public schools, which would have made the city's safety division the fifth largest police force if NYPD's safety division had been its own police division (Mukherjee, 2007). To this day, there is no data available that correlates increased use of school surveillance and safety technology with fewer number of incidents of school-based violence. Instead, relying on intensified police presence and surveillance practices to address behavioral issues among students while in schools have led to disproportionately high numbers of school suspensions and expulsions among non-white students, kids in special education programs, and working class, immigrant and gender fluid youth (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

The high school youth who responded to the author's citywide call to document their lived experiences with surveilled and securitized public education grew into the self-named *Student Supporting Action and Awareness* youth research collective (Krueger-Henney, 2012). Collectively, they self-identified as "multilingual and globally schooled, working class, South Asian, Black American, Caribbean, African, Latino, Native American, LGBTQ, immigrant youth, spoken word artists, community activists and youth organizers" (Krueger-Henney, 2009). While all youth co-researchers self-identified as non-white, three of the 10 youth co-researchers shared that their daily school schedule was organized according to an individualized education program (IEP) that laid out special education instruction, supports and services while they were in school. Youth co-researchers did not share any details of any specific disability. Hence the

author is not in the position to apply their body maps to a discussion about the educational journeys of students who are learning and living with one or multiple disabilities. This said, the individual impaired student body is not the unit of analysis in this study. Instead, this YPAR critically and visually examined the socially damaging effects that anti-Black racist and ableist schooling practices in New York Public schools have on already socially and economically marginalized student populations.

The stories that young people tell with their body maps remain current and relevant because they re-insert young people's living presence, as well as their refusals to participate in master narratives about them that maintain them as deviant and negative, into school spaces that were originally designed to destroy them (Baldwin, 1963). Further, this study speaks to public education as a system of precarization of non-white and impaired bodies who are caught in the ongoing crossfires between anti-Black racist and ableist schooling processes from where they are not allowed "to aspire to be whole" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 185).

YPAR Methodology: Body Mapping

This article highlights and discusses one of the visual narratives that this YPAR produced: a selection of body maps to present young people's narratives about how they experience the effects that carceral anti-Black racist and ableist schooling logics have on their bodies. Said body maps were inspired by the "X-ray maps" developed by YPAR scholar Jessica Ruglis (2011) during her research with youth about the bio-political power young people exercise when they deliberately leave school to refuse to endure the violence of structural racism they encounter in public education. However, the body maps in this YPAR differ from the "x-ray maps" in that they make visible some of the visceral—real and imagined—impacts that current neoliberalized, punitive, and high stakes education practices have on the physical and emotional well-being of targeted high school students and their bodies. Whereas one could choose to distinguish between real and imagined injuries, or conscious and unconscious processes and encounters, the author decided to not engage in their distinctions because the physicality of the lived encounter and its imagined consequences become embodied under the same anti-Black racist and ableist material conditions that produce them both. Embodiment is, according to social epidemiologist Nancy Krieger (2005, p. 351), "how we, like any living organism, literally incorporate, biologically, the world in which we live, including our societal and ecological circumstances". In other words, the actual school suspension and fear of the anticipated verbal assaults from armed police officers in the hallway produce similar sensations and inscriptions in the flesh of young people's bodies. According to Erevelles (2014), these flesh markings also produce impairments that are not just biological or natural but rather exist "in a historical, social, and economic context where the very embodiment of blackness and disability" (p. 87) "bears in person the marks of cultural text whose inside has been turned outside" (Spillers, 1987, as cited in Erevelles, 2014, p. 87).

Youth co-researchers' body maps were created under the guidance of some of the following questions students had identified throughout the YPAR:

What is it like to be a public high school student in New York City? What specific sensations or feelings do you connect with encountering punitive schooling practices? How do you imagine these affecting your body? If a medical doctor were to do a scan of your body in search for harmful effects schooling has had on you, what do you imagine would the image display? What advice do you have for students with similar experiences?

While key findings disclose specific areas of physical and emotional injuries that young people both endured and predicted, their body maps also speak to youth-centered knowing-what-to-do about surviving and fleeing physical enclosures that restrict their intellectual development, academic achievement and social inclusion.

The following selection of body maps make visible a series of embodiments that young people gathered inside the enclosed anti-Black racist and ableist spaces of their schools.

A Focus on Body Map 1

Youth co-researcher DC Schwartz, a Black male and senior in high school at the time of the study, chose to draw a CAT scan of his brain to offer a detailed vision of how he imagined anti-Black racist and ableist schooling practices impact its different parts. He used a two-color coding system to distinguish between depicting a more general overview of his student status (blue) and a few red areas filled in yellow to point at what he perceived to be severe injuries creating physical damages on his brain and body (Figure 1).

By reading the blue shaded areas from the top to the bottom of his brain image, a significantly sized area reveals his “untapped potential.” Other blue shaded areas include “routine to get to school,” a grown “tumor” from “cell phone and trauma,” and “unused space.” He labeled a very small area on the left side with “things learned in school.” “Imagination” occupies a space near the bottom. Naming all red and yellow areas in counterclockwise order,

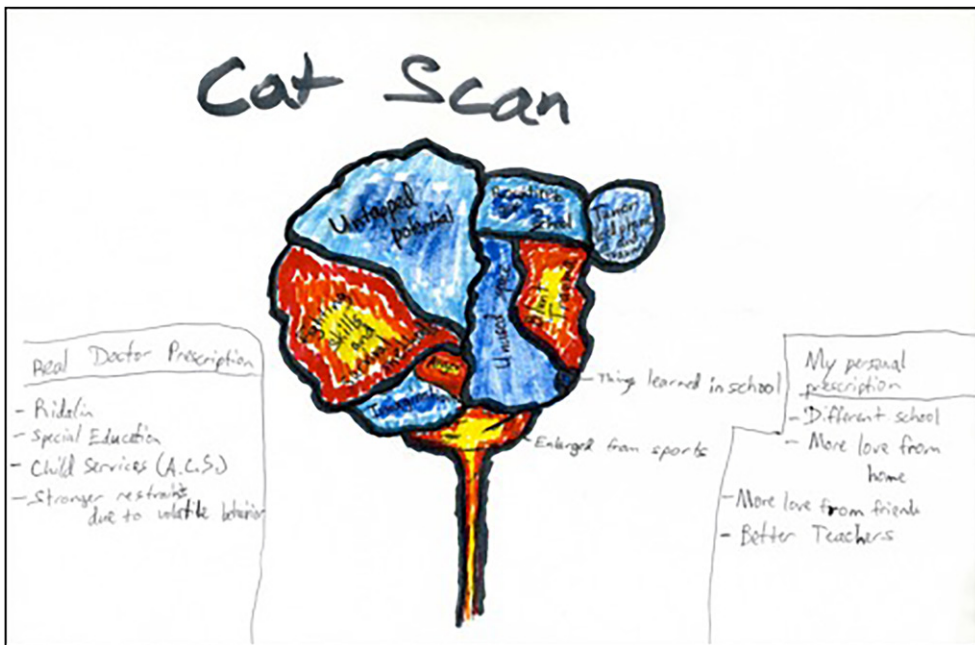


Figure 1. Cat scan of brain drawn by DC Schwartz.

“fighting skills and survival methods” fill a large sized brain area on the left. Adjacent to it is a much smaller space filled with “anger.” The lowest part of the brainstem is “enlarged from sports.” And one additional larger sized area is labeled with “blunt trauma.”

With the mapped status of his brain, DC Schwartz also answered a second question: *What advice do you have for students with similar experiences?* Perhaps grounded in the knowledge he acquired through prior real conversations with medical professionals, he predicted a medical round of advice (state-sanctioned protocol) in handwritten words to the left of his brain image. “A real doctor prescription” would include “Ridalin,”⁴ a referral to “special education,” involving “child services (A.C.S.),”⁵ and “applying stronger restraints due to volatile behavior.” He counters this state-sanctioned, medicalizing and further institutionalizing protocol with “my personal prescription” on the right side of his brain image, and recommends a “different school,” “more love from home,” “more love from friends,” and advocates for “better teachers.”

A Focus on Body Map 2

Piper, a Black Caribbean female senior in high school created two separate body maps to first speak to how current punitive schooling practices have led to “the sickness” she felt inside her body (Figure 2) followed by how she imagined what her body under “the cure” would feel and look like (Figure 3). She included her personal advice in the map of “the cure.”

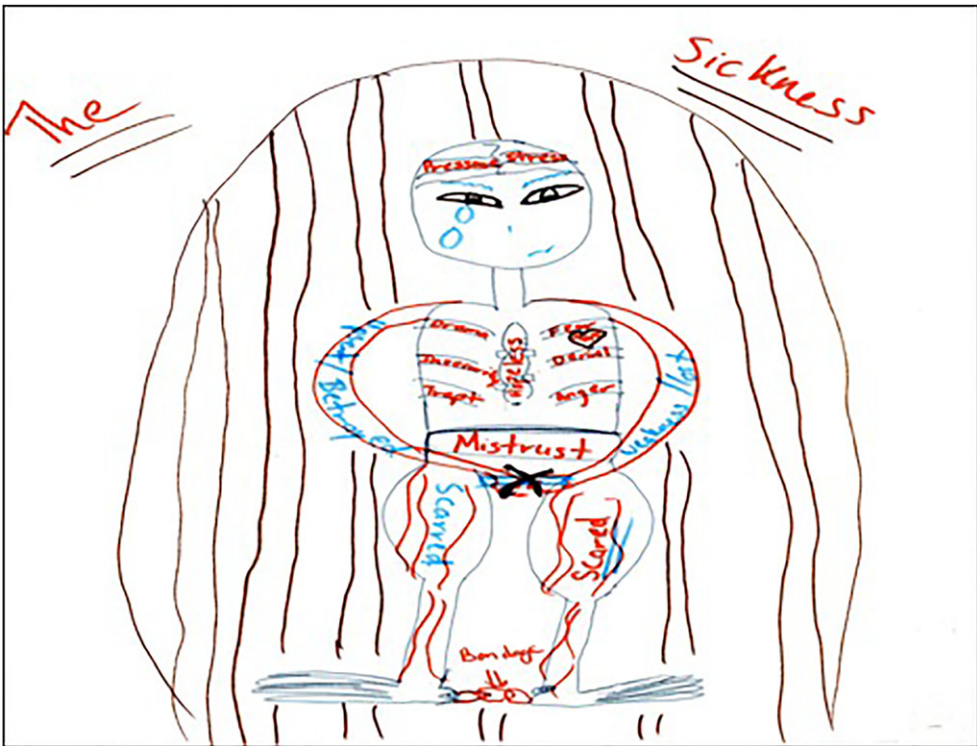


Figure 2. Body map of “sickness” drawn by Piper.

To visualize her state of sickness, Piper created an image of her body completely enclosed by vertical bars resembling those commonly associated with prison cell bars. In “sickness,” the forehead is tagged with “pressure” and “stress,” while two large tears are flowing from one eye. With three ribs running on either side of her rib cage, she attached one of the following labels to each one: “drama,” “insecurity,” “trapped,” “fear,” “denial,” and “anger.” Her heart is small and carries tiny, nearly, impossible to read letters that spell “hope.” Her spine holds her to be “hopeless.” The left arm is marked with “upset” and “betrayed,” while the right arm is tattooed with “weakness” and “lost.” The hands meet in front of her stomach area and hold a book that she crossed out in thick black ink. Her waistline is tightened by “mistrust.” Her left thigh reads “scarred” and the right thigh “scared.” Her toes point to the sides, bringing her ankles close together. They are chained together with an arrow pointing at their “bondage.”

Analysis: Magnifying and Visualizing An Embodied State of Sickness

The engravings on DC Schwartz’s and Piper’s bodies were not produced by a single damage or an occasional injury. Rather, both body maps frame deep-tissue harm done to them repetitively, continuously, systemically and historically over long periods of time. Whereas a superficial cut to the skin, for example, causes temporary blood flow and waves of pain or discomfort, chronically endured physical and emotional sensations linked to structural forms of violence (“hopelessness,” “blunt trauma,” “fighting skills,” “betrayal”) are not afforded the time or space to develop scabbing layers to shield new cell growth. The social and physical environments of anti-Black racism and ableism in education continue to be loaded with flying blades readied to penetrate through layers of skin and flesh and anchor themselves into the bones. These ongoing assaults place the body into a permanent state of life-threatening injury. Moreover, the body is denied lifelines to rebuild itself and left unable to respond to antidotes. As DC Schwartz noted, available cures (“A.C.S.” and “special education”—state-sponsored institutionalized social and educational services) are programmed by the same social and material conditions that also created the original harm. In other words, embodied forms of systemic neglect and institutional disinvestment (i.e., injuries, impairments) may change by sending a young person into spaces of cure led by specialized and medicalized expertise (i.e., rehabilitation centers, psychoanalysis); however, the ideology and structures of ableism that support and fund these remain unchanged. As disability activist Eli Claire (2017) astutely observed, “cure saves and end lives, propels eradication and promises us that our body-minds can change. It is a tool in the drive to normalize humans to shrink the diversity of shape, form, size, and function among us” (p. 70).

This sample of body maps also makes visible a socially immobilized young body, thus echoing the functionalities of schools as physical and ideological enclosures (Sojoyner, 2016). The arrested development of the mental and intellectual growth displayed on DC Schwartz’s CAT scan of his brain (“untapped potential” and “unused space”) as well as the instilled fear (“scared” thighs) and enchained ankles on Piper’s body map speak to how the historical use of enclosures during the US slave plantation

regime continues to choke Black freedom and social and emotional mobility, and destabilizes the educational advancement of racialized and thus disabled communities (Woods, 1998). The extended use of enclosures in schools (i.e., suspension and detention rooms) frame the reactivity of the (white Eurocentric) US nation-state as it secures its economic and political interests at the expense of foreclosing educational access and school completion in the lives of racialized and impaired youth. Once their education has been denied access to curriculums and knowledge they need to graduate (the crossed-out book on Piper's body map), the modes and forms of schooling that disabled youth receive link them increasingly to an everyday grammar of "fighting skills and survival methods," as noted on DC Schwartz's imagined CAT scan of his brain.

The individual body, when examined with the techniques of visualization and magnification of an ocular ethic during critical body mapping work, reveals its compromised fissures and textures after receiving and surviving multiple life-threatening attacks from within colonial, anti-Black racist and ableist educational contexts. Reading across mapped scales of institutionalized forms and practices of ableism also allows for seeing evidence for an unchanged anti-Black atmospheric pressure over time and over space, on one hand, and an un-silencing of trauma and terror in Black lives, on the other hand. Finally, DC Schwartz and Piper support what education scholar Michael Dumas (2014) termed "schools as a site of black suffering". Dumas writes, "black suffering is a kind of constant travelling between historical memory and current predicament, that there is a psychic link between the tragedy of antebellum African bondage and post-civil rights (indeed, 'post-racial') black suffering in schools" (p. 3). The next section discusses how enduring anti-Black racism and ableism intersect with resistance work that young people do on a daily basis to harvest anti-oppressive visions and practices for their survivance (Vizenor, 2008).

Body Maps as Resistance Work: Curating Fugitive Visions

According to Piper, curing a sick body is imaginable, possible (Figure 3). In its cured state, "freedom" runs across her forehead. Her now smiling face does not make way for any tears. Both arms are raised, one signaling "hope," the other "success." The heart is now visibly larger and filled with "hope." Four ribs compose messages of "secure," "strong," "truth," and "heal." "Voice" holds her waistline, while "guidance" and "action" run across her thighs. Her ankles are no longer linked together in bondage; instead they stand apart at shoulder-width. Similar to DC Schwartz, Piper has some personal advice for other young people who have endured comparable sickness under punitive school discipline practices. On the right side of the mapped body, she recommends other students to "speak up!," "be heard!," "transfer," "make a group," and "educate self and others."

Even in the heat of facing uncertainty, disinvestment, fear, anger, and dispossession, Piper's vision of what "the cure" can do to liberate her body from the violence of anti-Black racist and ableist schooling practices seems to be worth fighting for. A recuperated body, as well as the work of generating a physical and emotional state of well-

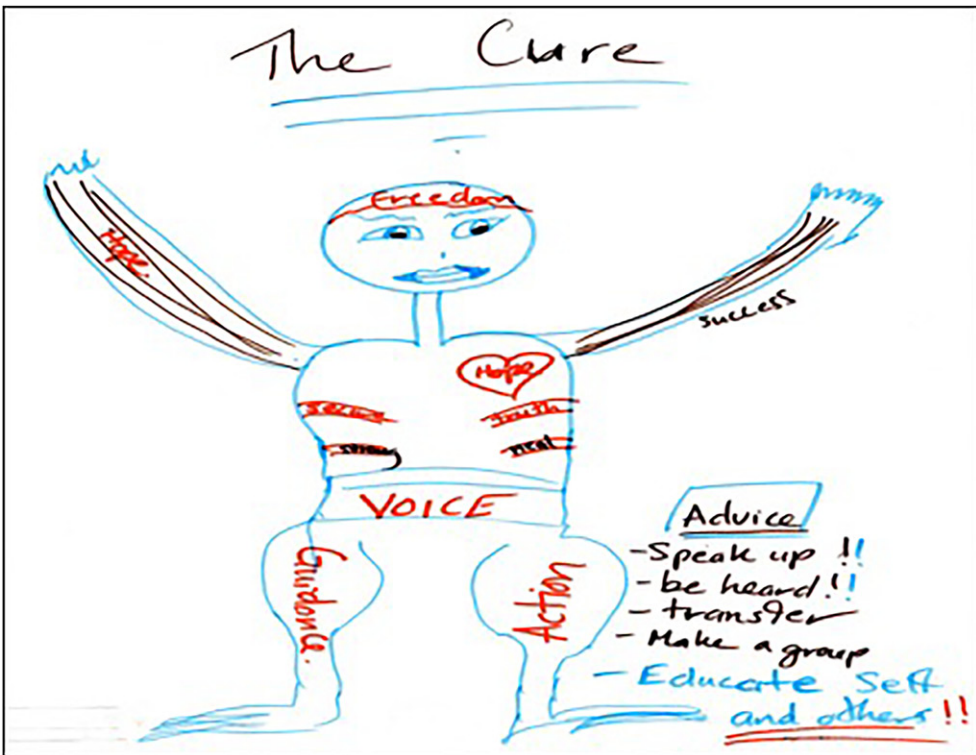


Figure 3. Piper's mapped embodiment of "The Cure".

being, is only possible by way of flight from the current public education system. What Piper names as "the cure" seems to be an intentional rejection of, and similar to what DC Schwartz advised, existing places and services within current structures of schooling. The fugitive visions of both Piper and DC Schwartz rely on a politicized knowing about escape routes defined by support systems located outside their schooling settings. This knowing is informed by a clear understanding of the incapacitating power that anti-Black racist and ableist education has over Black lives. Robin Kelley (2016) explains:

I want to think about what it means for black students to seek love from an Institution incapable of loving them—of loving anyone, perhaps—and to manifest this yearning by framing their lives largely through a lens of trauma.

Piper's and DC Schwartz's visions of freedom are hinged on their radicalized love for their own lives worth living. Both students are profoundly aware of how their survivance (Vizenor, 2008) can only fully unfold outside the inherited gaze of white supremacy enacted through ableist education policy and reform. Their visions also seek fugitive justice by imagining themselves and other targeted youth in the spaces of an ontological threshold: between the no longer and the not yet, or, "between the destruction of the old world and the awaited hour of deliverance" (Best & Hartman, 2005, p. 4). As such, their freedom remains an unfinished, ongoing project.

Conclusion

To do critical research in education, one must think upstream against dominant narratives in education. This is the only way to write ethically about human lives without reproducing anti-Black racist and ableist narratives of pathology. This article takes the pulse of how Black youth especially experience some of the enactments of special education in the US and then magnify, visualize and describe them by way of reading critical and youth-centered body maps that both reproduce and resist anti-Black racist and ableist constructions of student identities in schools.

Additionally, participatory body mapping encourages young people to further question and interrogate historical perspectives they learn in schools: a) young people's visualized memories and predictions of their bodies' physiological responses to ongoing anti-Black racist and ableist schooling are fundamental insights to documenting what it means to be young and Black growing up while in school; b) it takes strength that is anchored in courage and optimism to speak back to the destructive forces of anti-Black racist and ableist school structures; and c) grounded in an "ocular ethic," the body maps of this YPAR study reveal a series of details about body mapping joining the curricular and political work of taking on an anti-colonial stance without contributing to the metaphorical specters of "decolonization" (Tuck & Yang, 2012) in multiple ways.

First, this particular cognitive body mapping method magnifies the human body to position it as a fundamentally essential site to gather narratives about how people experience structures and systems of violence. As a result, the body is foregrounded as expert curricular source and text. Focusing on the social and ideological inscriptions of westernized and Eurocentric education on the body refuses knowledge systems that prioritize and hierarchize mind over matter. Instead, cognitive maps dislodge the reigning divisive mind-body duality and suggest, according to Indigenous and Afrocentric knowledge systems (Chilisa, 2011; Smith, 1999), the body and mind can be injured in the same way.

Secondly, this critical body mapping method privileges images and visualized narratives over the written word. In this light, body maps reduce any ontological distancing between the reader and subject by pulling each other into an increased intimacy along a moment-to-moment awareness of what is happening to bodies, their own and others', and the multi-faceted realities that our socio-political environments produce. Moreover, critical body mapping methods invite communication, reflection and reflexivity. The visual texts they produce are neither static nor permanent. Instead, their narratives are always in flux and responsive to our social historical living environments.

Thirdly, these critical body maps in education research can work against the grounds of grit- and resilience-centered research that rely heavily on abled bodies to examine academic achievement (Duckworth, 2016). Grit research does not question our social systems that racialize, and thus disable, lives and maintain them in their daily grinds against state-sanctioned white supremacy. Instead, grit and resilience research maintains anti-Black racist and ableist groundings of the status quo, and celebrates relentless work that ostensibly alleviates people's hardships. Grit research also normalizes the punishment of the "feeble minded" and celebrates individual drive for

surplus production of physical energy and mental focus needed to fit into the bootstrap ideology it serves.

Finally, the body maps of this critical YPAR nourish the working grounds of abolitionist epistemology as they question the “socially proper” and silent Black body that does not reveal emotionality, even when it is contained and controlled against her will. Whereas ongoing anti-Black racist and ableist schooling mechanisms (i.e., grit-based knowledge production) require that the body be objectified, immobilized, silenced, passive, obedient, emotionally stunted and not be placed outside the language of dominant master narratives of what it means to be human (Wynter, 2003), critical body mapping makes visible the production and power of suffering, terrorized, traumatized, hurt, injured, fighting and refusing bodies in relation to anti-Black racist and ableist structures of colonial education still pervasive in public education today. According to abolitionist scholar Erica Meiners (2016, p. 131), “to be harmed, a body must be sensate, capable of experiencing pain, and count as fully human. Establishing this point has been part of the abolitionist strategy”. The body maps in this YPAR study display the impaired but nonetheless sensate body to interrupt monolithic and dehumanizing narratives about Black lives. Practicing such a “Black Optic” (Moten, 2008) drives the political work of dismantling legacies of white supremacy by looking and seeing without hierarchizing humans’ social worth.

Notes

1. “Ableism” and “ableist” refer to institutionalized structural oppression leveled against disabled bodies.
2. All names of people are fictitious.
3. This YPAR study fulfilled the dissertation research requirement of my doctoral degree. I discussed ethical tensions between an individually awarded academic degree and co-ownership and -authorship of participatory and collaborative research processes elsewhere (Krueger-Henney, 2011).
4. *Ritalin*, an addictive stimulant with severe side-effects, commonly given to children with high levels of activity or with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. According to D’Agostino (2014), “6.4 million children between the ages of four and seventeen have been diagnosed with ADHD. By high school, nearly 20% of all boys will have been diagnosed with ADHD—a 37% increase since 2003.”
5. The ACS is the New York City Administration for Children’s Services, a governmental agency that provides welfare services to children and their families in the City of New York.

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