



## **The Value of Love in Higher Education: Ethical Dilemmas for Faculty and Students Racialized as Black in Britain**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In the context of the rise in open racism following post-credit crunch Brexit Britain, movements seeking educational reform to address racism within the academy emerged. However, such efforts must grapple with the ever-increasing corporatization of higher education. This article aims to disrupt the duplicity of widening participation rhetoric, which makes claims to moral values but in practice is governed by a neoliberal agenda. Using bell hooks' ethic of love, I discuss a case study of a widening participation program and a liberal arts university. I claim that so-called resource dilemmas are better understood as moral dilemmas and that centring a love ethic in this process of reframing enables us to rethink how we navigate such dilemmas in higher education.*

**Keywords:** decolonizing higher education, ethical dilemmas, love ethics, students and faculty racialized as black

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*If black folks want to be free, they must want to be educated. Without freedom of mind there can be no true and lasting freedom.*

– bell hooks

**E**ducation has traditionally been viewed as one of the primary vehicles by which people racialized as black can gain access to social mobility and liberation. The fight for the abolition of slavery, independence movements across the global south, the struggle for civil rights on both sides of the

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Atlantic, and the provision of supplementary schools across Britain have all been underpinned by educational ideals. It is not surprising then that in the context of post-credit crunch Brexit Britain, and the Grenfell and Windrush scandals,<sup>1</sup> movements aiming at educational reform, such as Rhodes Must Fall Oxford, Why Is My Professor White, and the range of efforts to “Decolonise My Curriculum,” emerged in the midst of the rise in open expressions of racism. However, what is often omitted in the recounting of the aforementioned social movements is that in addition to education being at the heart of their mission, an ethic of love has also been central to their ideological positioning and their success. It is crucial to note the ethic of love because while education has tended to be at the heart of major social justice movements, social justice is not always at the heart of education. Indeed, education has been a powerful tool of social control and domination. The context of ever-increasing corporatization of higher education has meant those of us wishing to grapple with how to reform and re-form higher education in Britain such that it reflects the needs of students racialized as black, have to demonstrate the viability of proposed changes in commercial terms even as the prevailing narratives around “widening participation” tend to speak in the vernacular of “access,” “inclusion,” and “individual potential” (Archer, 2007; Molesworth, Nixon, & Scullion, 2009). But as Shilliam (2015) noted, “The doors have been opened but the architecture remains the same.” As such, this article aims to disrupt the duplicity of widening participation rhetoric, which makes claims to moral values but in practice is governed by a neoliberal agenda. To do so, I will use my experiences as program lead of one such “widening participation initiative” at a liberal arts university as a case study, relying on bell hooks’ ethic of love as a way to reframe common resource dilemmas encountered by administrators, faculty, and students. I suggest that these resource dilemmas are better understood as moral dilemmas and that centering a love ethic in this process of reframing enables us to rethink how we navigate such dilemmas in higher education.

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<sup>1</sup>The Grenfell Tower fire took place on 14 June 2017 in the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. It was described by some as social murder (“John McDonnell,” 2017). The Windrush scandal involves the coming to light of unlawful detention, deportation and mistreatment of British residents of Caribbean descent by the British Government. See <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/25/windrush-scandal-immigration-legal-aid>

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**WIDENING PARTICIPATION FOR STUDENTS  
RACIALIZED AS BLACK IN THE UK**

In Britain, there has been a significant increase in the number of students racialized as black participating in higher education (Higher Education Statistical Agency, 2018). However, the academy remains a very alienating space for such people (National Union of Students, 2011). Over the past decade there has been a resurgence of educational activism within the academy pushing for higher educational content and experiences that better reflect the demands of today's global university. This has resulted in the launch of a small number of programs across the country at the graduate and undergraduate level that specifically aim to shift the hegemony of whiteness in the academy (Back, 2004; Sian, 2017). These include the first Black Studies undergraduate program opened at Birmingham City University in 2016, and The University of Bristol's MA in Black Humanities, launched in 2017.

The program I am currently leading is part of this recent emergence of degree programs aimed at better serving African/Caribbean communities. Our undergraduate theology program was founded in 2014 by the UK's first professor racialized as black in theology, Robert Beckford. The rationale for the program was fourfold: First, to address the lack of formal theological training among leaders and pastors within Britain's predominantly black Pentecostal denominations. As Beckford outlined (2014), there is a need for more contextual theological training for church leaders and to move away from the practice of "buying" degrees. The second driver was to provide higher education opportunities to people racialized as black, particularly those who have been systemically marginalized from higher education. Given the enduring racial disparities in compulsory educational provision and outcomes in the UK (Coard, 1971; Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010; Strand, 2007), people racialized as black are often excluded from participation in higher education before they've begun. Additionally, we are seeing a within-group variance along the axes of class and nationality such that in some cases, middle class students racialized as black, and in particular mixed students, have had relatively better outcomes compared with working class students racialized as black or mixed, mainly on account of educational strategies adopted by middle class parents, which seem to have some mitigating, though not cancelling, effect on the encounters with racism (Ball, Rollock, Vincent, & Gillborn, 2013; Rollock, Gillborn, Vincent, & Ball, 2015; Vincent, Rollock, Ball, & Gillborn, 2012). Similarly, students racialized as black who are born outside of the UK are

achieving significantly better educational outcomes than those born here. And indeed, as Shilliam (2016) showed, there is a disturbing effect of declining educational outcomes as successive generations of persons racialized as black are born and raised in the UK. Basically, the longer a family stays in the UK, the worse things get. As such, the program aimed to stem this tide. Although the increase in student participation for those racialized as black might be interpreted as an indicator that the higher education landscape is improving for marginalized groups, such statistics should be read with caution and with an intersectional and nuanced analysis of the category of students racialised as 'black'. Third, the program sought to challenge the overwhelming whiteness of academic Theology by offering a contextual Theology degree with a decolonized curriculum, taught primarily by a faculty racialized as black. Implicit here was a commitment to what hooks (1994) called "engaged pedagogy." In order to recruit and provide a genuinely different kind of educational experience for students racialized as black, all aspects of the educational process inevitably come under scrutiny. Finally, in the university's own locale, there was a very real and immediate need to provide a counter-narrative to the increasingly vociferous and public right-wing xenophobia that reemerged during the "credit crunch" and gained momentum in the Brexit referendum (Quinn, 2018).

In spite of its radical intent, the theology program fits squarely within the university's strategic objectives, "To actively reach out to students from disadvantaged groups to raise aspirations, attainment and employment and work in partnerships with schools and colleges." (Strategic Framework 2015-2020) and specifically aligns with its "cross-cutting" Widening Access, Inclusion and Participation theme. However, mirroring the experiences of many other such initiatives (Vignoles & Murray, 2016), in our case, the gulf between institutional strategic objectives and the aspirations of those who develop progressive educational programs that seem compatible on the surface, actually reveal fundamental differences in values and commitments. It is to those conflicting values that I shall now turn.

### **BELL HOOKS' LOVE ETHIC**

Drawing on the pioneering work of Paulo Freire among others, bell hooks has written extensively on education and pedagogy (hooks, 1994, 2003a, 2003b, 2010). However, the values that underpin education are my focus here. As such, for the purposes of this article, my focus is on hooks'

work on love and an ethics of love as a way to frame our discussion of ethical dilemmas in education. Like all ethical frameworks, hooks' love ethic is concerned with how we live, the choices we make, what we do, and whether what we do is consistent with the values that are meant to underpin our actions. There are three core assumptions in her ethics of love: (a) that it is necessarily liberatory and resists domination, (b) that it is relational, and (c) that it is transformative and transforming.

### **Liberatory/Resisting Domination**

In her book *All About Love*, hooks (2000) claimed that, "Awakening to love can only happen as we let go of our obsession with power and domination" (p. 87). She further wrote, "Domination cannot exist in any social situation where a love ethic prevails" (p. 98). In this sense, a love ethic is a set of values that enable us to resist, dismantle, and move beyond systems of domination—imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist, or heteronormative patriarchy (hooks, 2005) in any and all domains of life. Loving ethical decisions then are made in acknowledgment of and in reference to systemic domination and power relations. Such decisions neither deny the existence of domination, nor seek to maintain power relations rooted in domination as an ethical standard. Domination by definition requires some group be dominated, thus the fundamental criterion for hooks' love ethic is that it "presupposes that everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well" (p. 87). The existence of certain groups systemically denied these rights is evidence of a lack of love and decisions made in what hooks calls "lovelessness." Lovelessness in this sense is the antithesis of liberatory justice. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his discussion of the way forward for a post-civil rights America that was deeply divided by race and class and dealing with unkept promises of those abusing power who claimed a commitment to justice, reminded us that "Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best," he says, "is love correcting everything that stands against love." (King, 2010, p. 38). Complicity with and the active maintenance of domination is evidence a love ethic is not in operation. For hooks, this is both a micro and a macro issue. A love ethic requires us to "cultivate our awareness" and appreciate the relationship between our ordinary lived experiences and the structural and systemic injustices we seek to address. Drawing on Thomas Moore's *Care of the Soul*, hooks (2000) reminded us that "Embracing a love ethic means we utilize all the dimensions of love—'care, commitment, trust, responsibility, respect, and knowledge' in our everyday lives" (p. 94). Love then is what we must do to resist structural, systemic domination.

## **Relationality**

For hooks then, it follows that an ethics of love is necessarily concerned with the “we” and the “everyone.” A person living by a love ethic cannot limit the scope of their ethical import to themselves as an individual or even to a singular group identification or notion of community that fails to recognize the relationship between perceived members of the group and those deemed non-members. hooks (2000) asserted that living by a love ethic is shown “by embracing a global vision wherein we see our lives and our fate as intimately connected to those of everyone else on the planet” (p. 88). This theme of “interdependence” and connectivity is echoed throughout black feminist scholarship and functions as an important resistance to the individualistic rhetoric of liberal and neoliberal discourse (Davis 1981; Davis & Barat, 2016; hooks 2000, 2005; Lorde & Clarke, 2007). The language of interconnectedness enables us to appreciate the ethical implications of our actions beyond our own front door even as we recognize that for most of us it is actually at the level of the personal, individual, and local that our ethical principles will be tested. Indeed, for hooks (2000) it is a “choice ... to honor the primacy of a love ethic” (p. 87). Here the language of choice is intended to inspire personal accountability rather than the radical freedom of neoliberal discourse.

## **Transformation**

Indeed, it is these kinds of conceptual shifts that are indicative of hooks’ (2000) love ethics: “A love ethic transforms life for the good” (p. 89). For hooks, the current state of global affairs suggests we cannot be neutral in our ethical stance. Right now our societies exist within this dynamic of domination and dominated, and as such are built on fear (hooks, 2000). Therefore, transformation is a necessary aim and indicator of a love ethic. Leaving things as they are is not a neutral choice; it is a fearful, loveless choice. As hooks (2000) urged us to appreciate that change is an inescapable part of life, so seeking to avoid change doesn’t mean we will escape it, rather it means that the changes we will inevitably experience will be ones that are imposed on us from above.

For hooks (2000), failing to overcome our fears is a “betrayal” of self (p. 91). “Our souls feel this lack when we act unethically, behaving in ways that diminish our spirits and dehumanize others” (p. 89). However, the betrayal is not only in that we might fail to live according to our own values insofar as we fail to fulfill our sense of social responsibility. hooks (2000) argued that living by a love ethic is personally and spiritually transformative for the individual who chooses to do so. “I know no one who has embraced

a love ethic whose life has not become joyous and more fulfilling,” she claimed. “The widespread assumption that ethical behavior takes the fun out of life is false” (p. 88). In this sense a love ethic has the power to become self-reinforcing; the more we live it, the better life will be. Ultimately, hooks argued, love is really the only “sane and satisfactory response to the problems of human existence, [then] any society which excludes, relatively, the development of love, must in the long run perish of its own contradiction with the basic necessities of human nature” (p. 92). At first glance, such a bold claim might sound like hyperbole. However, interestingly, it is those disciplines (theology and philosophy) with which our program is concerned and which have proven themselves persistently resistant to change, that are indeed perishing (Hunter & Mohamed, 2013; McIntyre, 2011).

### **“RESOURCE” ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

If we take seriously the sociopolitical, economic, and psychic conditions of people racialized as black in Britain, both generally and specifically in higher education, the challenge that education itself might be used in service of social justice or domination is not something that we can take as an interesting historical axiom. And, if, as noted above, we can view educational settings as one example of a context where social control can be exerted such that education functions as a force and/or even a system of domination, it follows that an ethic of love has failed to prevail in that context. From the perspective of a person racialized as black/mixed in the UK, I find it a relatively uncontentious claim to say that a love ethic has not prevailed in the U.K. academy. So what are we to make of the seemingly inclusive, socially concerned, egalitarian rhetoric of widening participation? In this section I discuss three representative dilemmas, one each from the perspective of administrators, faculty, and students, which are typically discussed in terms of resources. Viewing these dilemmas through the lens of hooks’ love ethic, my aim in this reframing is to shift the content and dynamics of discussions about resources such that the ethical import of these conversations is not systemically masked or procedurally erased.

#### **Something or Nothing Dilemma (Administrative/Strategic)**

The fight to justify the allocation and use of resources presents one of the most significant and enduring challenges to providing liberatory education—is systemic change cost effective and who should pay for it? Moreover, given resources are always finite, in the context of competing demands, on what basis can liberatory programs be prioritized? Widening participation agendas offer a window of possibility in this otherwise bleak

landscape. In our university the strategic approach to widening participation includes the following commitments:

*To actively reach out to students from disadvantaged groups to raise aspirations, attainment and employment and work in partnerships with schools and colleges (Strategic Framework, 2015-2020);*

*The University will actively work towards providing a fully inclusive curriculum as part of the strategy to ensure student success and attainment (Learning and Teaching Strategy 2015-2020).*

However, what it actually costs in real terms to make this aim a reality is often either grossly underestimated or not considered in sufficiently concrete terms at all. Any given program or initiative needs resources for it to operate and those needs will change over time, so there needs to be institutional backing that is willing to bear the financial burden of start-up and also respond to changes in need in order to sustain the initiative. As Martin Luther King noted, “Power without love is abusive and reckless and love without power is sentimental and anemic” (King, 1967/2010, p. 38). This presents a dilemma for those faculty/administrators wanting to start up and develop programs that meet the needs of disadvantaged, marginalized, or underserved students: One must request resources to start or sustain the initiative. However, if on the one hand, resource demands are too low, the initiative will have to find a way to start and/or sustain itself without sufficient resources, thus compromising the program and everyone invested in making it a success. On the other hand, if resource demands are too high, the initiative will be deemed not cost-effective and might never get off the ground. I call this the *something or nothing dilemma*. Does one do what one can and make lemonade out of lemons as we are well practiced in doing, or does one refuse to do anything until proper resources are made available and thus accept that liberatory programs and student opportunities might not, and indeed, might never, be implemented on account of being perceived as financially nonviable?

Although, clearly, discussions of resources are necessary for any educational provision, the ethic that underpins them invariably impacts the parameters of such discussions. Where a love ethic is the driver, such that higher education is viewed as a vehicle for the basic right of all people to be “free,” to “live fully,” and to “live well,” *why* an institution should allocate resources to fulfill its WP agenda and what resources are available for this purpose would not be at the forefront of discussion. Rather, the need to



sustain such initiatives would be taken as a given, and discussions of resources would begin with “where” and “how” and not “why” and “what.” How and where are the institution’s resources going to be used toward these ends, where resources refers to all resources allocated to educational provision, not a percentage ring-fenced for special activities that are viewed as supplementary or additional to the core business. If a love ethic prevailed, WP would not be a cross-cutting theme but rather the primary mission for any institution that recognized higher education as transformative and saw its mission as “transforming individuals, creating knowledge, enriching communities and building a sustainable future” in line with its “core values,” which include, “the development of the whole person, respecting and nurturing the inherent dignity and potential of each individual” (Canterbury Christ Church University, 2015).

Despite the use of egalitarian language in many WP strategies, U.K. university funding is student-performance-based. The default to a loveless ethic based on the primacy of commercial viability is compounded by the use of color-blind profiling of student performance. On the one hand, such thinking attributes previous low academic attainment to students despite the real and enduring presence of intersectional structural disadvantages that distort and constrain academic ability in compulsory education. This means such students are less likely to be seen as attractive degree candidates because they are perceived as needing more support (read as higher costs) to get a good degree classification. On the other hand, this same thinking overlooks the persistence of structural factors in the job market that find graduates racialized as black struggling to find employment relative to other groups, once degree classification is accounted for. The result is that students who would be ideal candidates for a program underpinned by the values espoused in the rhetoric of a WP program become glaring financial liabilities that place at risk the commitment to commercial viability assessed using color-blind performance metrics (Hunte, 2017; Zwysen & Longhi, 2018). Without systemic resistance to the use and application of such metrics and the performance-based model of funding more broadly, WP strategies and indeed any other strategic goals that operate from a more loving moral foundation, will be thwarted by the capitalist ethic that invariably prioritizes profit over people (Lorde & Clarke, 2007). As hooks (2003b) warns, “[W]ithout serious educational reform, education will continue to mirror the plantation culture where the slave was allowed to learn only forms of knowledge that justified enslavement” (p. 93).

Taking it further, however, a love ethic would demand that we resist the dominator perspective that views students racialized as black on a

“deficit model” (Shilliam, 2016) and/or seeks to explain the persistent differences in educational outcomes of students (and faculty) racialized as black and their white counterparts in terms of factors that are either individualistic or beyond the university’s purview. Instead, the academy would take a critically reflective look at itself, recognizing it is an agent of transformation. It would respond to the evidence that shows how its own policies, procedures, and practices maintain and reproduce racial disparities both inside and beyond the academy. Subscription to a love ethic would open up the possibility to genuinely view “learners as partners” in the educational process such that commitment to transform would be equally transformative. A university operating from an ethic of love would appreciate that in actuality, to fail to listen to and learn from students, faculty, and the scholarship produced by persons racialized as black, is to not only commit a kind of epistemic violence that is morally problematic (Dotson, 2011), but also is to commit one’s institution to providing a substandard education for all its students because to only be knowledgeable about the intellectual traditions of the Eurocentric mainstream is to be inadequately prepared to navigate the global context the 21st-century student occupies. In embracing transformation, a university governed by an ethic of love would itself be renewed and elevated for the betterment of everyone concerned.

### **Wellbeing Dilemma (Faculty)**

Working to educate non-traditional-aged students from Africa and the African diaspora, who have complex, globally connected lives beyond the classroom, who are largely unprepared academically for higher education, and for many of whom English is a second, third, or fourth language, might well be called a labor of love. Doing so as a team comprised of only one full-time faculty, one full-time professor split between programs, and between five and eight sessional faculty, with remote administrative support and minimal and remote student support, within an off-site undergraduate theology degree program might also be called insanity! Given the need and the demand, however, when presented with the something-or-nothing dilemma outlined above, the founder of our theology program chose to turn lemons into lemonade. However, such pioneering decisions have ramifications for all faculty working on the program. It is important to note here that in the creation and development of liberatory educational initiatives in higher education, the lines between administrator/founder/program starter and faculty is typically non-existent; those faculty who push for change will invariably be the ones expected to

carry the lion's share of the work and responsibility for the initiative they champion. Faculty committed to liberatory education will work toward those ends in the capacity of faculty. Insofar as WP agendas speak to "innovative curricula," "interdisciplinary dialogues," and "integrating teaching and research excellence," such activities are assumed to be standard expectations of one's role. However, the amount of work meeting such aims, especially for disadvantaged groups, takes in reality does not fit into the framework of their role as faculty at all or indeed the time one is being paid to allocate to any given aspect of the role (Gorcynski, 2018; Gorski, 2018).

This brings us to a question that plagues any faculty member committed to liberatory education—how does one use their time? There are multiple sites of tension here. One involves doing the multiplying work of developing decolonized courses of the kind they themselves have never sat in and for which there are no standard texts, course books, or teaching materials, and that are not supported by existing institutional infrastructures such as library materials. Another involves providing the necessary pastoral support for any and all students racialized as black, whether assigned formally as those students' tutor or not, and which itself will be far more demanding precisely because of the alienating culture of the academy. Others involve having to serve as "diversity" rep on every board and committee, showing up for every Black History Month event, and jumping through the mental and linguistic hoops of trying to make one's own research projects fit the criterion of legitimacy when applying for grants and other opportunities (Dotson, 2012). Moreover, how does one articulate these difficulties when policies appear to suggest there is institutional support for such activities. How does one articulate the gap between what is on paper and what happens in reality? This *wellbeing dilemma*—a tension between faculty's own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others—is acutely felt by those who view their position as a purpose and not just a job (Gorski, 2018). How does one, on the one hand, contribute to the struggle and, on the other hand, ensure one's own personal and professional wellbeing are not sacrificed in the process?

The corollary to this is also linked to the administrator's dilemma. If faculty and administrators do indeed manage to make lemonade, it sends the message to those who control resources that the liberatory educational initiative can indeed be sustained with the existing level of funding, thus undermining efforts to acquire more institutional support. But if the lack of or need for more resources is highlighted, faculty/administrators can run the

risk of giving budget controllers the impression that the program requires more money than it's worth.

Again, in this case, operating from an ethic of love opens up new possibilities. In addition to addressing the material elements of the dilemma noted in the previous section, hooks' (2000) noted that

*commitment to a love ethic transforms our lives by offering us a different set of values to live by...we learn to value loyalty and a commitment to sustained bonds over material advancement. While careers and making money remain important agendas, they never take precedence over valuing and nurturing human life and well-being. (p. 88)*

Consequently, professional success must be reimagined on one's own terms.

### **Social Mobility Dilemma (Students)**

Like faculty, students must also weigh up their own ethical resource dilemmas. Getting a degree is an expensive business in Britain (Kentish, 2017). The promise of higher education is that it will, as our WP strategy states, improve student's social mobility. However, a student racialized as black in Britain wanting a liberatory educational experience is confronted with a complicated web of structural and personal forces with which they will have to grapple. In addition to the more obvious classist currencies that operate in education and the workplace—an Oxbridge or Russell group degree will lead to more income and opportunities than a non-Russell group degree (Grove, 2017)—students racialized as black are acutely aware of racial biases that can also diminish the benefits of higher education. It's important to note that in Britain, the better a person racialized as black is educated, the greater the disparity between theirs and their white counterparts' earnings (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010). Consequently, students racialized as black are often further concerned about the potential negative impact studying a subject with "black," "African," or "race" in the title might have on their future job prospects or earnings. While such a degree might suggest "diversity" and a willingness to "think outside the box" to the future employer of a white graduate, for a black student such phrases are more likely to signify racial trouble, disruptiveness, and an unwillingness to comply. So when a student decides to embark on a degree they are faced with a *social mobility dilemma*: On the one hand, do they spend their (or their parents'/ family's) money on a degree with a liberatory curriculum that exposes them to the kind of material and experiences that are edifying and run the risk of decreasing their

employability or, on the other hand, do they enroll in a degree program that exposes them to the kinds of materials and experiences that are alienating but that at least are perceived to minimize the difficulties they will have translating that certificate into material gain and social mobility?

hooks' love ethics encourages us to consider the situation differently, and indeed many of our students clearly do. This might be in part on account of their age. Our students do not necessarily view the degree as the primary vehicle for improving their employment outcomes. That being said, this is not because they are financially comfortable. Many have made extreme sacrifices, financial and otherwise, to participate in higher education. Their motivations are typically rooted in a desire to help their communities and be more impactful in their church contexts. Interestingly, the national student satisfaction survey, the other primary metric used for performance-based funding in UK higher education, does not enquire about these kinds of motivations or benefits of higher education.<sup>2</sup> "Employability" after the degree is the focus. But what does that mean for a program that graduates non-traditional age students who either already have a job, work part time due to family or community commitments, and/or whose motivations to attend university were not related directly to employability?

As is the case with the wellbeing dilemma, the social mobility dilemma requires this kind of reorienting one's values away from the limited version of the good life offered by capitalism and making life decisions according to that process of reorientation. A love ethic, insofar as it resists making the individual the central unit of analysis, means we can imagine our life aspirations in terms of its core themes—do my aspirations contribute to dismantling domination? If so, I must start by rejecting the classist and racist assumptions that prevail in higher education and the work place. Is my life's work going to be toward my own individual advancement and thus consistent with the aims of capitalism, or will it be concerned with projects that work toward ensuring all people are free and living well? If so, I will seek employment in organizations that are similarly committed to an ethic of love and as such will not interpret my interest in racial or any other kind of justice as a threat or problem. Am I looking for my degree to be part of my own transformation and in turn to be a platform from which I am

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<sup>2</sup> The National Survey of Student Engagement was piloted as an alternative measure in the UK in 2016. It contains some questions that enquire about the application of students' learning beyond the classroom, but it is primarily concerned with whether a student engages in the kinds of behaviors that are viewed as maximizing the educational experience rather than their motivations for studying.

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empowered to transform others for the better? If so, avoiding the kind of psychological trauma reported by students who have endured the diminishing effects of so much of the U.K. academy will supersede the desire for prestige, mainstream validation, and even material gain (Lawton, 2018; National Union of Students, 2011).

### **Valuing Love**

Ultimately, a love ethic is about what we value and the normative impact of what we value. In the context of higher education, programs that show themselves to place little value on the presence, histories, intellectual traditions, and humanity of people racialized as black thrive on an ethic of what hooks (2000) called lovelessness. Such lovelessness at the heart of education tends to support placing value in practices and thinking that maintain systems we know devalue people racialized as black. The idea that higher education is primarily about a bottom line is an idea, but it is not the only idea. hooks' love ethic offers us an alternative approach—a vision of love that values care, respect, knowledge, integrity, and cooperation. Hooks (2000) stated that,

*Individuals who choose to love can and do alter our lives in ways that honor the primacy of a love ethic. We do this by choosing to work with individuals we admire and respect; by committing to give our all to relationships, by embracing a global vision wherein we see our lives and our fate as intimately connected to those of everyone else on the planet. (pp. 87–88).*

Taking this assertion in the spirit of love as critical reflection, we can ask ourselves different sets of questions than those posed in the ethical dilemmas outlined above. When we say higher education, what does that higher really mean? Is a liberatory education that empowers and can be passed down to our children and community more valuable than the one that is not? How do we ensure education is edifying for all people? Do we admire and respect the people we work with and did we choose our place of employment according to that criteria? Do we prioritize work over our relationships, and what if we didn't have to because we work with people we love and respect? What does social mobility really mean for a person racialized as black in the UK? Are there additional reasons education is valuable? How different would our life choices be or have been if we lived by a love ethic? If we take seriously the impact the constant barrage of fear-mongering and messages of hate and division has on our psyche, if we believe in the profound possibility of education, then it is not such a stretch

to, in hooks' (2000) words, "collectively regain our faith in the transformative power of love by cultivating the courage, the strength to stand up for what we believe in, to be accountable both in word and deed" (p. 92). In the context of Brexit Britain, Grenfell, and the Windrush scandal, can we really afford to do otherwise?

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