BLACK EDUCATORHOOD POSSIBILITIES: ITS PRECARITY, THE NATION’S COLLECTIVE STAGNATION

By

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ABSTRACT

With the historical decline in the presence of Black teachers in the United States’ public schools and the recent calls for the increase in Black educators in the nation, this dissertation will explore the precarious state of six New Jersey K-12 public school Black educators as they attempt to advocate for their profession and organize for racial and social justice within their schools/district communities. Using an African-diasporic onto-axiological centered de/colonial -- constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 1995), while drawing on Black Feminisms (Hills-Collins, 1986; 1990/2000) and Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1980; 1987; Crenshaw, 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 2006) as lenses to explore, I conduct one on one interviews, focus groups, and document analyses to research the study's six participants. The questions foregrounding the research are: 1) What collective/individual narrative emerge as six Black educators advocate and attempt to organizer for racial and social justice with their organizing school/district communities; 2) What are their individual/collective experiences in schools; and 3) What are the individual, group, and systemic barriers/principles that hinder/elevate progress?

The study reveals the precarity (Sharpe, 2016) of Black Educatorhood as experienced by these six Black educators working within a system of anti-blackness and white supremacy. Also illuminated on is Black Educatorhood’s shared linkage to a genealogy of Black educators who preceded them. Most significant are several other common themes examined across participants. These findings were narrowed down to their collective experiences with 1) integration, as experienced through Black Studenthood and Black Educatorhood, 2) their barriers to organizing, as manifested through the internalization of patriarchalism and racism, and 3) their desires to rehumanize for the future of Black Educatorhood possibilities. The study closes with a brief autoethnographic account to help wed together the themes within my narrative--situating it in the
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spirit of Black womxn educators who preceded us such as Septima P. Clark, and Anna Julia Cooper. Consequently, I draw on the imagery of the Akan “dilemma bird,” Santrofí Anoma, to help wrap up the framing of our collective stories as what I posit as “dilemma” and precarious, while also providing recommendations, and implications for future policy, practice, and further research.
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DEDICATION

Dedication, hard work plus patience

The sum of all my sacrifice, I’m done waitin’

I’m done waitin’, told you that I wasn’t playin’

Now you hear what I been sayin’, dedication

It's dedication ~ Nipsey Hussle

I present and dedicate this labor of love—“the sum of all my sacrifice” to my mother, Melvinia Rose Holland, and Grandmama, B. Agnolia Wheeler Holland, who both, having never graduated college, sacrificed every inch of their being so that I might be here writing this dedication. Y’all are worlds away, yet within a prayer’s reach. I am 40 this year, and it has already been 20+ years of a life without y’all. I know you both were with me in spirit as I labored through late nights into early mornings cheering me on. To my children, y’all are just a figment of my imagination. Nonetheless, I write and complete this for you both.

To my and my mama’s namesake, Melvinie; my maternal matriarch. Born into the peculiar institution of slavery deep in the dark shadows of Mississippi. I write this for you and those ancestors I have no name for, but I know exist.

To my babies, Saige Ayikailey and Kaeden Nii-Ayikundzra, I name you both as an act of providence. I do this for you so that you will see and know your greatness. I love you both.

And to my partner, Keith, I cannot thank you enough. You gave up and sacrificed so much so that I might be here. I know this has not been an easy 10 years. We live in a world of binaries and either/ors, where we take in and live out our society’s image and expectations of what it means to be “man” and “woman”. These images and expectations infect and affect our
lives and relationships that often cause tensions and frictions resulting in fractured relationships and communication. Having spent a decade on this dissertation, those years have created space for us to grow, be pushed, and expand together beyond our perceived boundaries.

To my participants, I am not sure how to thank you all for allowing me into your homes, spaces, communities, your hearts, and lives. I will forever be connected to you all. This, too, is your work, and I present it in that manner. Thank you.

And to my ancestors who toiled in agony on this land--whose dreams and imagined yearnings were the fire that burned beneath them to press on so that I might live today--who saw me in their visions and pressed on because their futuristic dreams, possibilities, and prayers to Beyond, who reminded them of their collective and future greatness, gave them a kind of strength that surpasses my understanding.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before I begin this section, I must acknowledge that this dissertation was written on the occupied lands traditionally stewarded by the Indigenous people of this land, including the people of the Lenni-Lenape nation, who are part of the larger Algonquian nations. These nations include the people of the Ramapough Lenape, Nanticoke Lenape, and Powhatan Renape. Today, New Jersey is home to some 5000 Lenape that stretches the entire state and parts of Pennsylvania.

They are still here!

****

There is no me without YOU--the collective you that has shaped me into being—that collective YOU being all the molecular organisms of the earth, the world, the galaxy, and the glimmer of stars and lights in the abyss. To the Infinite Being that has made all life possible--you go by many names for different peoples of the earth and beyond; I call you Beyond. I thank you, Ataa Naa.

Thank you to my dissertation committee, beginning with my chair, Dr. Beth C. Rubin. Thank you for sticking with me and indulging my ideas, (literal) dreams, and sometimes lack of clarity. To Dr. Michelle Fine who has been supportive of me even before I decided to complete this journey. You are always there to talk to and encourage me when I needed that boost. Thank you! Dr. Tami Lee, I am inspired by all you do and thank you for choosing to join my committee even though there is so much you have to take on. And Dr. Lauren Wells, you did not have to do this for me, but you did. Your generosity and time given to me will forever be remembered. Thank you.
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To my sister, Naa Okailey and brother, Nii Ayite, y’all have always been there for me. We go way back to life with quarter juices, Dipsy Doodles, and penny candies in those small brown paper bags. Your check-ins with me were a constant reminder to continue until the end. Thank you. And daddy, thank you for how hard you and mommy fought to protect us all from the harms and the violence of anti-blackness in the schools. You and mommy gave your children a blueprint for what it means to fight back against the violence of anti-blackness in school.

Thank you, Levelle for being a super-cousin who has helped me in more ways than I can quantify. Your support and love are unmatched. I cannot tell you how much I appreciate all you have done and continue to do for me, Keith and the kids. We love you dearly!

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To my village, because --I am because you are. And to the “othermothers” who made this possible. To our family, Keith and Susan Davis, you all were a godsend; taking my family in as your own, filling in as parents and grandparents, supporting me/us in this journey, taking the kids when needed, providing and supplementing with resources and support when we could not. This dissertation was possible because of your love and commitment to us. Thank you! To Nikki and Kyle, thank you for your generosity and support. Saige and Kaeden could not ask for more love.
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I became a teacher because of the Black educators I had in my family who were an example to me. I became a great educator because of the Black womxn teachers who held me, embraced me, and guided me with love. To my new-teacher mentor when I began my teaching career in Jersey City, the late Ms. Lillian Williams. You were sharp and I could not wait to be you when I became more skilled in my craft. To the womxn who showed me Black sisterhood and love, Ms. Doris Allen, Ms. Deborah Flowers, and Ms. Deborah White. Y’all saved me with that sista love and constantly reminded me of my greatness. Y’all taught me solidarity and what it meant to nurture other Black teachers and the Black students in our care—how to insist on their visibility and see them when the system refused to. Y’all treated me like y’all’s own and for that I am eternally grateful. Thank you!

Miisumɔ nye feɛ,

Tsɔoɔ Awo
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Black Educatorhood and the nation’s and schools’ collective well-being is at a crossroads, and it is for this reason that the purpose of this dissertation is to explore the experiences of Black educators in public schools who are also attempting to organize and advocate for racial and social justice within their schools and districts. In this dissertation, I posit that Black educators have historically been disproportionately excluded from the classroom and other educational roles within public schools and are disproportionately unsupported once in these schools. This is the nation and its education system’s collective demise; this is the precarity of Black Educatorhood.

For the purpose of this dissertation, Black educators is defined as people who self-identify as Black or African American, who also work within a public school setting and provide
a direct educational service to students in the United State of America. This information is based off of U.S. Census data. Borrowing from the foundations of an African-diasporic centered de/colonial onto-epistemological (Bhattacharya, 2009; 2015; 2016; Boveda & Bhattacharya, 2019), Black Feminisms, and Critical Race Theory (CRT), I demonstrate that Black educators face layers of challenges that contribute to their experiences in schools, as well as bring a tremendous wealth of gifts.

Additionally, I provide a literature review, or what I call A Review of the Receipts, to provide contextual reference for how Black educators today walk in the tradition of the Black educators on this land, who have historically organized and advocated for their humanity, and the humanity of their students. In particular, I draw from the literature to show how Black educators who attempt to organize and advocate for racial and social justice in perpetual dialogue with historical praxis of Black Educatorhood.

In this dissertation, I address the following questions:

1. What collective/individual narratives emerge as six Black K-12 educators advocate and attempt to organize for racial and social justice within their organizing communities, schools and/or districts;
2. What are their collective experiences in schools, both as students and as educators;
3. What are the individual, group, and systemic barriers/principles that hinder/elevate their collective progress?

This dissertation has implications for Black educators who are organizing for racial justice in their schools/districts, as well as for administrators, teacher educators, union leaders, and policy makers.
We live in complex times. This is no new revelation or prophetic utterance. It just is. Public education, a foundation of this nation’s “democracy” and a life vessel of our humanity, is witnessing a rapid evolution and transformation facilitated by a complex composition of competing and often polarizing forces that both claim to champion the civil rights movement of our time. On one hand, public education has, although superficially, served as a tool for the common person to discover, explore, and build new understandings of learning and the ever-evolving world around them. On the other hand, public education has long been the site for harm, a colonizing project designed to colonize minds, deculturalize the historically marginalized peoples of our world, situated at the cusp of axiological ontological epistemicide, while reinforcing racial and class hegemony, funnelling our most vulnerable populations into the cages of the prison industrial complex, the school to prison nexus, and denying them necessary resources within their schools, menial dead end jobs and inevitable symbolic and material death. An institution founded during legalized racial apartheid, cannot be expected to function as a tool for liberation and freedom. So, what do we do with this information?

Public schools have long been sites of miseducation, while offering faint flickers of liberation for individuals, peering through the walls of their siloed brick and mortar learning milieu, in spite of their dehumanizing structures. Our schools, like this democracy, are complicated and glorious mixes of onto-axiological episteme material contradiction, engulfed with violence, propagandized to the masses into believing in the accessibility of a figment of a collective national imagination: democracy.

Because of the need for a national and collective reimagining of our institutions, the core of this dissertation will follow the journey of six Black educators in their development within racial, social, and educational justice organizing spaces and environment, as they move at the
nexus of understanding their experiences within public schools. For the purpose of this study, racial justice is defined as the organizing and resistance against race-based oppression to change the unfair race-based policies (Ginwright, 2006) and the dismantling of racial domination (Desmond & Emirbayer, 2012) as manifested through white supremacy, colonization, and the genocidal project of the United States. Educational justice is defined as the resistance to educational disparities, inequalities, and concerns of historically marginalized and intentionally looted communities (Stovall, 2013).

Like all other products of United States’ carceral penal democracy (James, 2005), public schools and even their teachers’ unions must reckon with the dilemma that the people within these institutions have consistently failed to confront pervasive inequality and structural violence within schools and the greater society. Part of this dilemma is that United States was birthed out of white supremacy; a system that is inherently anti-black, anti-Indigenous, and oppressive towards other people of color while functioning as a bed of unearned privileges and advantages for those who embody and/or directly benefit from white, elite, male cis-heteronormative and patriarchal ideals and one’s proximity to it; and capitalism, a system of economic and labor exploitation of all people with Black being the ultimate other. The concepts, values, and principles encompassed in the ideals of “justice,” “equity,” and “freedom” were parcelled out luxuries and disjointed dreams and imaginaries at the birth of this nation, as the attempted genocidal project of Indigenous Peoples took hold, couched within white supremacy, anti-blackness, racial capitalism, the perpetual enslavement of African people, land grabs, as well as the disenfranchisement of all “others,” characterized life in the shadows of the young “democracy” at the “birth of a nation”.
By default, the experiences of Black educators will be a reflection of this contextual understanding of Black life in the United States. The history of Black educators and their experiences within public schools is an area that has been studied but not at great length. Many of these stories become oral histories that are passed down from generation to generation, which gets lost and untold.

**Background of Problem**

Black educators have long fought and resisted the pressures within society and schools that have, at times, limited their capacity and ability to reach their students in transformative ways. Many Black educators go into the profession in order to transform and uplift their communities (Perkins, 1993; Siddle-Walker, 1995; 2005; Dixson & Dingus, 2008) and fill a void they knew was missing during their schooling experiences. This is not because of some inherent need to be seen as a superpower, but rather the internal response to bearing witness to incessant oppression, lack of resources, and being denied opportunities in their schooling experiences. At the same time, teaching was one of the few occupations Black folx were allowed to enter professionally. In many ways Black educators created communities of support to help them push through the challenges of an abusive system while using it as a tool to carve out a more perfect future for themselves as a community.

**Statement of Problem**

Black life is under perpetual threat.

\[1 \text{"In the 2008 study that found greater risk for premature death for communities with higher African-American populations, researchers also found greater risk for people living in areas with higher unemployment or higher use of public transportation.8 A 2008 study of Washington, DC, found that while poor air quality and worsened asthma went hand-in-hand in areas where Medicaid enrollment was high, the areas with the highest Medicaid enrollment did not always have the strongest association of high air pollution and asthma attacks.9 A 2016 study of New Jersey residents found that the risk of dying early from long-term exposure to particle pollution was higher in communities with larger African-American populations, lower home values and lower median income.10 However, two other recent studies in France have found no association with lower income and asthma attacks.11"} \]
Black life.

Under threat in perpetuity.


Black joy. Black strolls.


Black worship.


Black life.

Perpetually under threat.

Black educators bear witness to the abuses Black youth endure daily in school. Quite frankly, some Black educators also become co-conspirators and gatekeepers in that process of institutional abuse. Like agents of the state, our roles are to help maintain the structural foundation of an institution built on a colonial project engulfed in racial capitalism, patriarchy,

https://www.lung.org/our-initiatives/healthy-air/outdoor/air-pollution/disparities.html

"This region is also the site of horrendous environmental racism: toxin dumping, pollution, and degradation. Cancer alleys, asthma epidemics, and lung diseases are prevalent throughout the southern Black belt (Bullard 1990). Sadly, the situation has not been remediated since Bullard first published his research over 20 years ago. The capitalist, commodified green economy will not resolve this deeply rooted environmental racism. It will intensify it." (Brewer, 2012, p. 147)

According to the New York Times, for every $100 in white family wealth, black families hold just $5.04. The Economic Policy Institute found that more than one in four black households have zero or negative net worth, compared to less than one in ten white families without wealth.

The Institute for Policy Studies recent report, The Road to Zero Wealth: How the Racial Divide is Hollowing Out the America’s Middle Class (RZW) showed that between 1983 and 2013, the wealth of the median black household declined 75 percent (from $6,800 to $1,700), and the median Latinx household declined 50 percent (from $4,000 to $2,000). At the same time, wealth for the median white household increased 14 percent from $102,000 to $116,800.

https://prosperitynow.org/sites/default/files/PDFs/road_to_zero_wealth.pdf
militarism, the peculiar institution of slavery, and the attempted genocide of Indigenous Peoples. If we are not consciously aware of our roles, we then become the very thing our ancestors feared for us, or what we fear for our own children. And as we bear witness to and assist in the harm projected on Black children, Black educators are also bearing witness to the abuses their other peers’ experience. I posit that if Black students are experiencing abuse at the hands of the institution, its policies, and the adults that help create the conditions, then yes, schools are sites of anti-blackness (Dumas, 2016) for all Black life in these schools. This means all expressions and beings of Black life are the prey. Black students. Black parents and Black families. Black languages. Black custodians. Black educators and other support staff. Black life. This is the precarity of Black life.

Much has been researched about the schooling experiences of Black students and what they face at the hands of the adults in schools. From the excessive forms of testing and test-preparation implementations (Kohn, 2000; Volante, 2004; Rothstein, 2013; DuBose, 2015), to the ways Black children are tracked away from opportunities, and gifted and talent, honors and advanced placement (AP) courses but into basic skills level courses (Oakes, 1986; Oakes & Guiton, 1995), how Black students are funneled into the school to prison nexus (Meiners, 2007; 2011; Meiners & Reyes, 2008; Winn, 2010) and the prison industrial complex (PIC), left in schools that are deeply underfunded (Campbell & Marabel, 1996; Ravitch, 2013), pushed out of school (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Meiners, 2011; Morris, 2013; 2016), the “achievement gap,” opportunity gap, and what Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) refers to as the education debt (p. 5). However, the focus on Black educators post-Brown is not as extensive. What we do see in the media and from colleges and universities, is a clumping of all teachers of color, as if the experiences are the same. While on the other hand, Black parent organizing groups such as the
Journey for Justice Alliance (J4J) and Black-led organizations such as the Movement 4 Black Lives (M4BL), and Black Lives Matter at Schools are specifically calling for more Black teachers and educators in the schools. This clumping together also erases the unique experiences of Black educators and clouds the experiences that non-Black people of color encounter, often distinctly stemming from the residual effects and the collateral damage of anti-Indigeneity, slavery, and anti-blackness.

Therefore, this dissertation will explore some of the experiences of six Black educators, how they navigate these experiences, how they attempt to organize and advocate for racial and social justice in their communities, districts, and schools, the challenges and conflicts they encounter in doing so, how they develop through these challenges and conflicts, and what we can learn from them. It is broken up into their experience within integrated schools both as educators and students, the barriers they encounter, the isolation, and desire to rehumanize themselves. Consequently, the precarity of Black Educatorhood is that, although there is a need for Black educators, their experiences are fraught with the inherent anti-blackness that exist in our society, thereby resulting in the nation’s and its schools’ collective stagnation.

Statement of Purpose

Since the groundbreaking court case of Brown vs. Board of Education, Black educators have been pushed out of the classrooms and schools throughout the United States (Irvine & Hill, 1990; Milner & Howard, 2004; Oakley, Stowell. & Logan, 2009; Madkins, 2011; Nyachae, 2016). Some of the factors that contribute to their push out range from the pervasive racist policies and procedures, the racism they often face daily at the hands of colleagues, administrators, students, and/or parents, to factors that are attributed to policies and bureaucracies in school districts. More recently, with the increase in neoliberal school policies,
specifically under the Obama administration’s Race to the Top (RtT) program, the nation witnessed how federal policies would again lead to the disproportionate and increasedfirings, and push out of Black educators (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015).

As Black educators continue to be pushed out of the schools yearly, there is a need for us to explore some of the challenges and experiences that lead to their pushout, how they organize and advocate for racial and social justice within their schools, districts and communities, while attempting a beloved collective community. Therefore, this study documents the experiences of six Black educators in the northeast of the United States. In the spirit of Critical Race Theory (CRT), it explores and makes visible the counternarratives of their individual and collective experiences as Black educators as well as extract some of the characteristics of their organizing work that hinders and/or elevates progress.

Subsequently, the purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of these six Black educators in public schools as they organize and advocate for racial and social justice within their schools, districts and/or communities, while also unpacking the pitfalls and triumphs that contribute to their errs, and the qualities that enhance their success.

Research Questions

As noted above, the central research questions for this study are: 1) What collective/individual narratives emerge as six Black K-12 educators advocate and attempt to organize for racial and social justice within their organizing communities, schools and/or districts; 2) What are their collective experiences in schools both as students and educators; 3) What are the individual, group, and systemic barriers/principles that hinder/elevate collective progress?
These research questions seek to shed light on the unique experiences of Black educators in traditional public schools who are also advocating and organizing for racial and social justice in their schools and/or districts. In addition, these questions will not only help to interrogate their identities, experiences, and the barriers but how these barriers impact their racial and social justice advocacy and organizing work. The following section will describe the significance of the research.

**Significance of Study**

With the recent and fervent calls for increasing Black educators in the classroom, there is a need for us to resist approaching this from an ahistorical geography that also reinforces white supremacy, and denounce invoking the racist tropes of the “magical negro” (Bonnilla-Silva & Ray, 2009; Glenn & Cunningham, 2009; Hughey, 2009; 2012)--or as one Black male educator at a BrED Freedom School event referred to as, “The Black Child Whisperer.” We must understand that there are Black educators who not only experience abuse but see it happening to the Black students they serve. As a result, they are attempting to organize to not only shift the conditions, but to imagine a futuristic geography of Black Educatorhood and Black Studenthood.

As Black educators engaged in organizing work, it will be necessary for us to understand the pitfalls that could prevent, hinder, and elevate their success. This study will be educative in that sense. Until all Black people can reach the full citizenship and actual abolition, it will be instructive for us to: 1) explore what helps us get closer towards complete liberation, 2) what dwarfs progress, and 3) how we learn from it all.

The dissertation provides a body of literature grounded in history that contextualizes the experiences of these Black educators in schools, and as they advocate for racial and social justice in their schools, districts, and/or communities that can serve as educative and instructive for
other Black educators. At a time when there is heightened attention on the need for Black educators in the classroom, understanding their experiences, what keeps them motivated, and what barriers hinder their ability to access their full humanity. This body of literature along with the developed theories will be instructive for designing and supporting learning and organizing environments that support Black educators. These theories will have important implications for current Black educators, and those preparing to enter public schools.

In chapter two of this dissertation, I survey the literature and pull out the receipts, in what I call a “Review of the Receipts,” also known as the Literature Review which will be important for us to understand before proceeding into the complete text. I present the lenses of Black Feminisms and Critical Race Theory (CRT) which I use to provide clarity around the experiences of the six Black educators. The review focuses on the lenses used, which is preceded by an overview of labor’s fraught history with Black educators, along with historical literature of Black education/educators prior to enslavement, during enslavement, during state sanctioned “Emancipation," and post-Brown v. Topeka Board of Education. I then explore the manifestations of patriarchy and racial oppression as systems of domination that are internalized by those of us in society and show up in our organizing spaces, schools, and relationships. Chapter two is wrapped up with literature on rehumanization.

Chapter three of this dissertation outlines the methodological framework I used to explore the phenomenon of the experiences of Black Educatorhood, as seen through the lens of six Black educators within the K-12 public education system. Using a de/colonial constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 1995), with hues of autoethnography grounded in a generational Black Feminism praxis. It is my hope that the theories developed from this research will provide insight for Black educators already in the profession and those prospective educators planning to enter
the profession, how to organize with each other and the pitfalls that hinder success and promote solidarity.

The data analyses and findings are separated into four different chapters to focus on some of the themes that presented themselves in the data: Chapter 4 kicks us off with our cast of characters and the characteristics of their school and district communities. Chapter 5 situates us in a discourse around Integration, which explores all six participants’ experiences as children and teachers within “desegregated”/ integrated schools. These narratives are built behind the backdrop of my cousin, Faenita Dilworth and the etymological foundation of the word “integration” and the nation’s inability to reconcile and face the failure --therefore resulting in the nation’s perpetual stagnation; Chapter 6 illuminates on the barriers and hindrances the participants face as they attempt to organize. These challenges that presented themselves to the groups were narrowed down to the structural and individual barriers like, the isolation they encountered, and the ways internalized patriarchy and racial oppression, specifically looking at how patriarchy showed up in Cookie and Eloquence’s narrative, and how internalized racial oppression showed up in the narrative of a few of the participants. These barriers and hindrances serve as warning signs for future organizing. To wrap up the findings chapters, I conclude with Chapter 7--a chapter that magnifies the collective gifts of Black Educatorhood, as expressed through my participants, which I name Rehumanization. This chapter explores how we all can tap into an algorithmic coding to rebuild our collective and individual humanity and embrace a design for rehumanization. The chapter presents an equation for this design, connecting it to a long history and tradition of diasporic African peoples central values.

Finally, the dissertation is concluded with Chapter 8, outlining my own personal narrative and the connective pieces that link to the experiences of my participants, and historical educators
such as Septima P. Clark and Anna Julia Cooper, who also faced similar challenges. Therefore, bringing awareness to the generational perpetuity of the precarity of Black Educatorhood, while also comparing them to the likes of the Akan dilemma bird, Santrofi Anoma. Additionally, this chapter looks at the limitations of the study and the recommendations I have for further research, policies, and practices. This will be instructive for individuals and school professionals (teacher educators, pre-service teachers, school and district level administrators, supervisors, professional development providers, organizers, students, and parents), as well as policy makers who are interested in the well-being, success, and growth of Black Educatorhood. It is my hope that this research would lead to not only better treatment of Black educators, but also will increase understanding around the complexities and dimensions we must be aware of when we, Black educators, come together to organize for liberation. It is crucial that we grasp what propels success and hinders progress.

**Definition of Terms and Organizations**

The following definitions will assist readers in better understanding the ideas and concepts I will be presenting in this dissertation. As with all parts of human life and development, words and language are constantly evolving. How I define these words today may not in fact be how I will define them ten years from now. Please accept what I have today, as this is how I perceive them manifesting in our society today:

**Abolition:** is the act and belief that the state, including all systems of domination, which have caged us all in the physical, internal, and psychological cages that force us to rely on the violence of the state and prevent us from accessing our complete humanity for complete individual and collective freedom, must be completely
rent. Shange (2019) defines abolition as, “a messy breakup with the state—rendering, not reparation” (p. 4).

**Anti-blackness:** is the collective result, feeling, and utter disgust that our society has for Black people, Black culture, Black presence, Black intellect (Dumas, 2016)

**Black Educators:** are people who racially identify with and are seen by the institutions as Black, and who interact with children/students in schools for the collective and individual benefit of the students’ growth and development.

**Black Educatorhood:** the state of being a Black educator in the United States and/or any other race-based society rooted in white supremacy.

**Black Studenthood:** the state of being a Black student in the United States and/or any other race-based society rooted in white supremacy

**BIPoC:** Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color

**Co-conspirator:** people who are not from the dominant culture or experience, who however not only empathize with the marginalization of different oppressed groups, but are actively organizing, working towards, and conspiring together to disrupt systems of domination.

**De/colonial:** it is the active and perpetual centering of the ontological, axiological, and epistemological practices, ideas, and ways of being of indigenous peoples that sustained them prior to European/Western colonization as a way of healing from colonization and rebuilding our collective well-being.

**Desegregated Schools:** all traditional schools that, on paper, could not prohibit the admittance of students based on race.
Folx: is a gender neutral and inclusive term to refer to people/human beings.

Integrated Schools: schools that are racially, socio-economically inclusive often reflective of the community or “forced” integration policies

Isolation: feelings of loneliness that result in pain or an “aversion signal” developed over time to prompt action to remedy the isolation.

Liberation: similar to de/colonization, liberation is a term to refer to the praxis involved in the active freedom-striving that marginalized and oppressed peoples are continuously in the process of attempting to achieve to secure their freedoms.

Misogynoir: is the anti-black misogynistic racism directed at Black womxn (Bailey, 2016; Bailey & Trudy, 2018)

Racial Justice: it is the act and belief (theory and action) that all people are deserving of their full humanity, while understanding that there is a system of racial domination that has imagined white at the height of human achievement, development, intellect, beauty, and accomplishment while working to dismantle that system.

(Re)member: Cynthia Dillard uses the prefix(re) in front of the word “member” to demonstrate how Black/African diasporic people are engaged in cyclical, ongoing, and continuous “processes of gathering our stolen/forgotten/lost histories and knowledges” as processes of “learning to remember the things we’ve learned to forget” (Dillard, 2012, p. 1 as cited in Dillard, 2016, p. 422).

Social exclusion: Related to “isolation” but carrying a structural and systemic meaning. Having emerged from European articulation and paradigm, Ruth Levitas under New Labour defines it as, “the breakdown of the structural, cultural, and moral ties which
bind the individual to society, and family instability is a key concern (as cited in Munck, 2005, p. 34).

**Social justice:** “living happily ever after with the anti-racist distributive state” (Shange, 2019, p. 4).

**Spirit-murdering:** Equivalent to body-murder, spirit murder is the multiple ways in which people and the collective society work in concert to operate to shrink and dehumanize others (Williams, 1987).

**Research Approach**

To conduct this research study, I employed an African-diasporic centered de/colonial constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 1995), with Critical Race Theory (CRT), and a Black Feminisms lens (Hills-Collins, 1986; 1990/2000). Constructivist grounded theory has its roots in the classic grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a counter to the positivist ideological and methodological leanings dominating research practices during that time. The most significant feature of grounded theory is that it creates the conditions for the researcher to build theory from collected data; the theory is co-constructed and developed by the researcher using the mediating artifacts, and research tools, such as interviews, focus groups, observational data, and extensive memoing. The theory comes from the ways the participants describe their interactions, and interpretations of personal and/or collective lived experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For this research study, data were collected using a series of interviews, focus groups, document analysis, and observations. The research questions sought to explore and understand the experiences of Black educators involved in racial and social justice organizing. Because I am interested in the personal and collective experiences of these six Black
educators, I chose to use one on one interviews, formal and informal focus groups, document analysis, and observations.
CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF THE RECEIPTS

Many Black women do make a difference in how bureaucracies operate. Without much fanfare, they push for policy changes that move their organizations closer to basic fairness. Rarely mentioning words such as “racism,” “sexism,” “discrimination,” and the like, they find innovative ways to work the system so that it will become more fair. (Patricia Hill Collins, 2000)

This review of receipts, a vernacular that I use to express and provide “proof” or “evidence” to support and back up one’s claims— or for those of you who desire a more academic vernacular—this literature review, helps us glean what other scholars and researchers have to lend to the phenomena and issues that surfaced during the research. I cannot examine the experiences of Black educators in the United States without an awareness of the history of Black/African education prior to, during, and/or after Emancipation. I cannot understand the experiences of Black educators without exploring Radical Black Feminisms and their “we all gonna win” dispositions. Nor can I understand their experiences today without understanding Brown v. Board of Education, post-Brown, and the ways in which CRT provides a lens to appraise these experiences.

In this section, I will provide a brief overview of the following: 1) Black Feminisms; 2) Critical Race Theory; 3) an abridged historical background of education for Black folx in the United States; 4) brief overview of isolation; 5) manifestations of oppression (specifically

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4 I was first inspired to refer to the literature review as “A Review of the Receipts” after a writing session with Dr. Venus Evans-Winters (2019). In her session she referred to the literature as “receipts”.
patriarchy and racism); and 6) rehumanization and the impact that policy had on Black educators, and their socio-emotional well-being. Radical Black Feminism offers an essential lens to make sense of the layers of experiences and policies that Black educators interact with in this world. Critical Race Theory (CRT) helps us explain the experiences of these Black educators as workers in a school as well as what their experiences were like as children who attended schools in the United States, post-Brown. Because isolation, as well as structural and internal barriers, was a common thread with all participants, we need to explore how they prohibit growth, development, and overall transformation of an unjust immoral system by which schools help facilitate. And lastly, what are the actions and re-learning we can collectively take to rehumanize ourselves.

Like most areas of my (life) research, what started out toward one direction, ended in a different geography; one I could not have predicted nor anticipated where this would land completely. A combination of the conversations I had with my participants as well as the ont-axio-epistemological exchange I had with the texts transformed what started out heading in one direction but landing in another. This literature review, or what I refer to as A Review of the Receipts, will cover the historical, cultural, and political context that Black educators faced prior to Brown vs. BOE, to make known the parallels and contrasts that sit on the thin line between then, now, and the future.

Using a de/colonial (Bhattacharya, 2009; 2015; 2016; Boveda & Bhattacharya, 2019) interpretive, constructivist grounded theory methods will converge with both critical race theory (CRT) and Black Feminisms. Similarly, Pratt-Clark (2010; 2012) conceives of the Transdisciplinary Applied Social Justice (TASCJ) model which she describes as being, “an Afrocentric praxis-oriented, theoretical, and methodological approach for addressing
marginalization, exclusion, and disenfranchisement of people of color, and women of color in particular” (p. 83). Its connection to Black Feminisms and Critical Race Feminisms, and its contribution to Africana studies, as well as, also bear similarities to how I approach this research.

It is with this understanding that I enter my review of receipts, adopting a Black Feminisms framework and CRT to understand the historical, political, and cultural context of Black educators while also helping us to understand the experience of my participants as connected and intertwined with history. It is essential that I raise the usefulness of these lenses to interrogate the self, collective, and society. Collins (1990) articulates an understanding of Black Feminist Thought (1990; 2000) that is relevant to African American womxn, and writes, “the experiences and ideas shared by African American womxn provide a unique angle of vision on self, community, and society” (p. 22). Additionally, Collins also states, “a process of subconscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanistic vision of community” (p. 39).

Black Feminisms

It is essential for the continuation of the feminist struggle that Black women recognize the special advantage our marginalized perspective grants us and make use of it to criticize racist, classist domination and sexist hegemony, as well as refute and create a counter-hegemony. I’m suggesting that we have a central role to play in the realization of feminist theory and a contribution to offer which is unique and valuable (bell hooks)

My Grandmama was a goddess. She was Black Girls Rock before hashtags were a thang. Grandmama glided across mahogany wooden dance floors with the grace of Mississippi
Southern Black-girl class, bellowed out octave tunes in (re)membrance of her days as a soprano singer at Arts High School in the city of Bricks--Brick City--Newark, NJ. Grandmama commanded the respect and attention of everyone in every room she walked into. I remember her cadence, annunciation, and the rhythm in her tongue as she uttered these words, “I’m not a feminist,” while at the same time, smoking her Kools 100 with a small glass of her nightly Coke and rum. Grandmama had a nightly Coke and rum. Johnny Appleseed to be exact. Cousin Faye, (re)members my Grandmama as the immensely independent and sophisticated Aunt Agnolia from the North. Northern Black folx were seen as more sophisticated, Faye tells me. I chuckle at her (re)membrance of my Grandmother and cringe at the distinction. But she right, though.

When Grandmama would recite Maya Angelou’s Still I Rise, she would be sure to utter the stanzas conjuring up the youthful past incarnations of herself into existence--in that very moment. If you shut your eyes, block out all other audible noise and distractions, you may see her 100 pound --dark cocoa bean body sashaying across her off-white linoleum living room floor, hips forced into a rhythmic sway, and hear the whisper in her voice as she projected loudly, her right hand patting her salt n’ pepper curly-afro, and her left hand positioned gently positioned above her hips, “Does my sexiness upset you?/Does it come as a surprise/That I dance like I’ve got diamonds/At the meeting of my thighs?”

Everything I remember about my Grandmama embodied beauty, dignity, self-determination, justice, and liberation for all people--womxn, men, and non-binary alike. She was Black Feminism before I or she had the language to articulate that in theory. I understand now her rejection was not a rejection of Black Feminism it was a rejection of the ideals that embodied mainstream white feminism. It reminds me of a conversation I and few of the Bridgeville-Denwood (BrED) Freedom School colleagues and co-founders had with Barbara Smith where
she stated, “Black Feminist is a noun. I am not a feminist who is Black. I am a Black Feminist” (August, 2019). Grandmama, on the other hand, was telling me, “I am not a mainstream feminist…” in that she did not ascribe to the theories associated with white feminism.

Grandmama, although having only completed high school, was well read, having introduced me to Alice Walker, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, June Jordan, Maya Angelou, Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, Carter G. Woodson, W.E.B. DuBois, etc. and I could go on. I know her praxis was informed by not only her cultural Mississippi/Newark upbringing, but also by her readings, relationships, organizing, and onto-axiological values.

This praxis I witnessed my grandmother exemplify happened mostly at the Georgia King Village Tenants Association meetings I would often accompany her to. I saw her hold court, interrogate the facilities superintendents, district representatives, council people, and other city officials and even go toe to toe with Mayor Sharpe James. She was relentless and unapologetic. In fact, I remember those spaces being mostly Black womxn, all advocating for their collective and community well-being.

It was a Black Feminist/Womanist praxis I witnessed. And because of the ways in which our bodies and very beings have interacted with and been abused under chattel slavery and settler colonialism, and the current manifestations of racial capitalism, “it is extremely complicated for Black women to separate the subtleties of sexism, and racism,” (Bell, 1990, p. 460). Black womxn are caught up in a matrix of oppressions coded against every expression of identity oppressed by the larger systems of domination.

**Black Feminisms**

So, when they met, first in those chocolate halls and next through the ropes of the swing, they felt the ease and comfort of old friends. Because each had discovered
years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and
triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creating something else to be.

Toni Morrison, Sula (p. 51).

It is crucial for us to acknowledge that Black Feminisms is not one homogenous theory of
thought. In all of its variations, and iterations, one of the ideals shared is its quest for collective
liberation for all Black people. Echoing Morrison’s description of Sula and Nel’s relationship,
holding both, “creating something else to be” and the model of society we desire, these ideas will
be necessary to uphold and instrumental in helping us to understand this research, as it will be
equally as much of an examination of a problem as it will be a desire to recreate and reimagine
something else and a society we dream of.

Djamila Ribeiro (2016) reminds us that Black Feminisms is a theoretical and critical
framework, offered by Black Feminists, which serves as a tool for thinking not just about Black
women, a broad category in itself, but also about the model of society we desire” (p. 100). Black
Feminisms ask that we examine not just race alone, but the structural ways that race, class, and
gender intersect. According to Carruthers (2018), Radical Black Feminisms “are rooted in the
lived experiences and interlocking oppressions of all [emphasis mine] Black people on the basis
of race, class, and gender, and the aims to dismantle all forms of systemic oppress” (p. xi).

Although Patricia Hill Collins (1990; 2000) wrote Black Feminist Thought, the ideas
associated with it can be traced back further; she, along with many other Black womxn helped
name and articulate their experiences within a framework we are naming as Black Feminisms.
Black Feminisms elucidates how Black womxn experience the world, a world deeply rooted in
oppression--particularly racial and gender violence and the ways in which they intersect with
each other. When the Combahee River Collective (1977/2002) wrote about this, they named this
phenomenon “interlocking oppressions” (Beale, 1969) to theorize around the experiences of Black womxn, as well as those they referred to as “Third World Women”. Smith (1978) asserts that having a Black feminist approach to understanding literature, life [emphasis mine] is essential to unearthing the realization that the politics of sexuality, race, gender, and class as significant interlocking factors” in the works of Black women” (p. 21).

Our struggle with racism is a shared struggle we have together with Black men, while at the same time, sexism and misogynoir is a struggle we have with Black men and all others. This struggle we have with Black men, and all other men to be exact, is one that places us, geographically, in a place of precarity. This phenomena, Kimberle Crenshaw (1989; 1991) names as intersectionality to theorize how Black womxn’s bodies experience the legal system. She explains:

“A conception that seeks to name and capture the problems, experiences, structures, and dynamics of interactions between two or more axes of subordination. It deals specifically with the manner in which racism, patriarchalism, and class oppression along with other discriminating systems create basic inequalities that structure the relative positions of women, races, ethnicities, class, and others” (Crenshaw, 1989)

Connected in essence is Moya Bailey’s theorizing and articulation, and Trudy’s uplifting and further conceptualizing of misogynoir to give language to and name the overall violence (sexual, physical, emotional, psychological, and physical) and misogyny that Black womxn must endure (Bailey, 2016; Bailey & Trudy, 2018).

There are four core themes of Black Feminism which acknowledge: 1) That there is a long history and legacy of Black womxn's struggles against racism, patriarchy, sexism, and
social class exploitation; 2) The unapologetic centering of Black womxn’s voices while refusing to remain silent; 3) A convergence and necessity grounded in the interdependence of thought (knowledge) and action to inform their praxis; and 4) A natural interconnectedness in the liberation of all Black people—naming specifically all Black womxn, and Black men, particularly those having a trans-experience—in our common struggle (Hills-Collins, 1990).

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT), a movement birthed out of the Critical Legal Studies (CLS) movements of the 1970s and 1980s, is an analysis to challenge the ways that race, and white supremacy are constructed and built into the American legal system, and most importantly American society as a whole. During its inception, CLS scholars, and their organizations, consisted of mostly white academic men, which Crenshaw (1996) explains, gained their analysis of the legal system from their study of Antonio Gramsci, an Italian neo-Marxist, who theorized an approach to interrogating domination as being a convergence of physical coercion and ideological control. In Gramsci’s analysis, he also conceived the term hegemony to articulate the ways in which a system of attitude and being permeate both popular consciousness and the ideologies of the elites. These ideologies end up reinforcing the already existing social structures while convincing the majority of the people that the existing structure and order of things are inevitable and just the way things are (Crenshaw, 1996, p. 108).

One of the tenets of CLS is that power is not an evasive nebulous structure out there in the atmosphere; but is built into institutions and relationships that shape not only our society, but our personal lives, community, and organizations. What CRT scholars want to draw attention to is that this hegemonic power must be examined with a race consciousness and lens. They believe that race and racism are critical pillars to hegemonic structures and power. It is because CLS
BLACK EDUCATORHOOD POSSIBILITIES

scholars failed to adopt a racial analysis of the power they were critiquing that many CRT scholars felt their analysis was not only incomplete, and “unsatisfying” but were “indistinguishable from those of the dominant institutions they were otherwise contesting” (Crenshaw et. al., 1996, p. xxiii). This is a critique and foundation that CRT scholars and Black feminist scholars share in common; that CLS failed miserably in their critique of power via racial domination, white supremacy (Alexander-Floyd, 2010, p. 812).

Matusda (1996) explicates that CLS’ central descriptive message is, “legal ideas are manipulable and that law serves to legitimate existing maldistributions of wealth and power—rings true for anyone who has experienced life in non-white America (p. 64). This framework CRT scholars used agreed with, however, with the caveat that race is the glue that holds all of these systems of domination in place.

Although CLS scholars do not fundamentally disagree with the goal of racial equity, they contend that the only way of achieving racial equality is through the use of legal rights. The absence of race and racism from their discourse alienated many legal scholars of color. This analysis by CLS scholar, according to Crenshaw (1996) “ignores the particular role that the struggle for rights has played in Black liberation politics and the practical possibilities given the mainstream ideologies against which civil rights proponents worked” (p. 61). CLS scholars believed that legal “rights” was one of the ways the law helped to legitimize the order of society by representing it as not only logical, but “rationally mediated by the rule of the law (p. xxvii).

CRT begins with the fundamental premise that racism is a normal fixture in American Society (Crenshaw, 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 2006; Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), including all systems sanctioned by the State like education. CRT is useful for analyzing systemic and systematic patterns and how they relate to race, and socioeconomics in society.
Because our society is highly racialized, we cannot examine impoverished urban communities and affluent suburban communities without using a CRT lens. When studying institutions, particularly those in urban areas, one must “be explicit about the salience of race,” in how policies are constructed, implemented and enforced within any community (Matias & Liou, 2014, p. 602). The critical lens helps us understand the ways in which people are impacted under those variables and factors. Therefore, it is only fitting we interrogate Black Educatorhood under these circumstances.

CRT, was birthed out of the legal scholarship of lawyers, activists and legal scholars because they realized the victories that were achieved during the civil rights movements of the 1960s, were stagnant, and in many ways also regressing (Delgado, and Stefancic, 2006, p. 2). They believed that their scholarship could provide a useful theoretical vocabulary for understanding progressive social and racial politics in America (Crenshaw et. al., 1996, p. xxvii). “CRT helps us understand how race consciousness implicitly informs the court's paradoxical insistence that the norm of color-blindness requires a voting rights regime which effectively deprives racial minorities of political advantages that are accorded to other organized social interests” (p. xxvii). As a theory, CRT helps provide a foundation and analysis for understanding how race is experienced by people of color, as well as white people (Critical Whiteness Studies) in the U.S. Earlier writers such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado converged, along with other early adopters, to frame the genesis of the theory.

Out of their planning and meeting, they developed these tenets of CRT: 1) Racism is an ordinary and permanent fixture in American society; 2) Expresses skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color evasiveness, and meritocracy; 3) Challenges
ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis of the law; 3) Presumes that racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage; 4) Insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color and our communities of origin in analyzing law and society, often by using storytelling or counter storytelling; 5) Is interdisciplinary; and 6) Works toward eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression (Matsuda, 1995).

Even though this was developed after a careful examination of the United States legal system, the tenets found here in CRT also applies to our public education system and are useful in examining formal and informal learning environments. They will also help us understand the experiences of Black Educatorhood and Black Studenthood in this country. The “interest convergence” (Bell, 1980) will help us develop a vernacular and analysis to explain the how and the why surrounding the experiences of Black people in schools and any other institution in a nation founded on racial hegemony and hierarchies of power to benefit those from a racial dominant class—namely white and white passing people.

There is a growing sentiment in white folx, fueled by fear that any institutional and systemic change in support for Black people and other people of color will result in a shrinking and threatening of their position within the racial hierarchy as well as harm them personally. In education, “interest convergence” can be seen in the lack of diversity of teachers, class tracking systems, school selection processes in elite magnet schools, and school integration of which the last two former happen to be by-products of integration.

to interrupt the active avoidance of race, the impact of people’s racialized experiences, and how it is normalized (Annamma, Jackson & Morrison, 2017).
CRT in education examines race’s critical role in every aspect of the school system, how students are viewed, educated, disciplined, and cared for in the schools. It also offers a lens for understanding the experiences of Black educators in schools, how they are recruited, hired, retained, treated, valued, and how they, too, participate in the oppressive system (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). As an analytical lens, CRT regards every American institution as the property and foundation of whiteness, which is maintained and protected through the execution of the constitution, (Harris, 1993), order, and the penal system. According to CR theorists, the only times these problematic systems are slightly reevaluated, changed, and/or reformed, are when whiteness stands to benefit (Bell, 1980; 1987; Harris, 1993, p. 1754).

**Interest convergence.** As legal scholar Derrick Bell (1980; 1987) began to analyze the impact, efforts, and benefits of Brown v. BOE and desegregation, through his observation, he concluded that white people only advocate for issues that will support Black people as long as it benefits them and converge with their interests; this is the texture of interest convergence. Having reconciled with the permanent state of Black existence in the United States, Bell (1992) states, “racial equality is, in fact, not a realistic goal” (368). In what Bell (2006) calls the “cyclical pattern of advancement and loss in Black rights” is attributed to two basic rules: 1) society is always willing to sacrifice the rights of Black people in order to protect important economic or political interests of whites; and 2) the law and society recognize the rights of African Americans and other people of color when and for as long as such recognition serves economic and political interests of greater importance to white” (p. 146). Interest convergence theory provides clarity for why, even after more than 60 years, Brown v. BOE we can still say that “most Black children attend public schools that are both racially isolated and inferior” (p.
58). It provides clarity for understanding why Black teachers today are 6 percent of the teaching profession, a decrease since pre-Brown.

**Counter-narratives.** A key tenet of CRT, counter-narratives and stories, are abolitionist tools and technologies to share (counter)stories--stories that strategically disrupt and counter the deficit, damaging, and harmful dominant narratives of marginalized people (Matusda, 1995). Critical to the counter-narrative is understanding where the power lies, whose stories are dominant, whose stories are on the margins, and how these stories can be used to shift dominant discourse and imagine new possibilities.

In addition to counter-narratives being a tool to uplift the narratives of those on the margins, it is also a tool for analyzing, critiquing, and challenging the master narratives, the status quo, and systems of dominance (Delgado, 1989; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso & Solorzano, 2005). Some of these methods can take the form of, poems, art, theatre, dance, humor, oral histories, histographies, mockery and humor, hashtag campaigns like those found on Black Twitter, etc.

Moreover, it is crucial to highlight that counter-narratives are not fictional stories. They are the stories of those who occupy a peculiar yet acute view of their oppression and experiences. This view is not easily perceived or even acknowledged by those in dominant positions without it being brought to their attention. In this case, the counter-narrative centers the voice and perspective of our most marginalized thereby visibilizing and empowering them (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007). Atwood and López (2014), contend that the counter-narratives are not necessarily about telling a more true account, but “a more honest account of reality” and account that is more “authentic, and situated – coupled with research that is courageous, transgressive, and unapologetically political (Atwood & López, 2014, p. 1148).
Racism and inequality

America’s implicit and explicit obsession with race and its constructed hierarchies have occupied the nation for over four centuries (Howard, 2003). These hierarchies, rooted in pseudoscience (Sexton, 2012; Howard, 2003; Picower & Mayorga, 2014; Taylor, 1995), forced by fraud (DuBois, 1903, p. 56), and preferential manipulation (Harris 1993), places whiteness at the peak of the racial mountain and all peoples of color at the bottom of the mountain, with Indigenous and Black people situated at the fault line because of their historical and current relationship to the nation. A report from the United States Department of Education affirmed what so many people have stated, “...the everyday education experience for too many students of color violates that principle of equity at the heart of American promise,” (U.S. Department of Education, 2012), therefore positioning the “American promise” as the American myth.

The ongoing racism, as experienced by students of color on a daily basis can be seen in the implicit bias study conducted by Yale University which examined the implicit bias Black students are exposed to in schools beginning as early as preschool (Gilliam et. al 2016). Because whiteness is at the “peak” of the racial hierarchy, and present in every U.S. institution, one must understand what it is, how it manifests, and what one can do to disrupt it in order to create a more just and equitable society. Some researchers would even say there needs to be a decolonizing of the land, relationships, and the institutions that uphold racism and other inequities (Darder & Torres, 2007; Patel, 2016) in order for us to reach one’s full future possibilities.

While reviewing the literature, it became evident that the various ways scholars define “whiteness” differ. Matias (2013) defines whiteness as being, “a social construction that embraces white culture, ideology, racialization, expressions and experiences, epistemology,
emotions and behaviors that get normalized because of white supremacy,” (p. 69). CRT scholars define whiteness as “sources of privilege and protection” under the law, granted to people who can identify as white (Harris, 1993). However, just because a person is not white does not mean they cannot or do not help perpetuate whiteness (Ahmad, 2007) and maintain its functioning. Because whiteness is a symptom of white supremacy, one must understand how our schools are hubs for reproducing people, white and peoples of color, who will maintain white supremacy, which results in inequality, and perpetual oppression, dominance and harmful practices.

Due to the inherently oppressive nature of whiteness and racism, students of color are educated to feel inferior fueled by deficit thinking (Natesan & Kieftenbeld, 2013). Deficit thinking is often rooted in the educator’s implicit bias (Gilliam et. al., 2016; Haberman, 2010), and maintained by false conceptions of “normal” --often code for white middle class artificial standards. Woodson (1933) draws on these sentiments when he accounts for how a Black student questioned and responded to a white teacher who proceeded to teach a course on the “Negro” that emphasized the inferiority of Black people (p. 7). And because children do not always instantly shed what has been internalized as inferior, they grow up to become adults who embrace these “ideals,” imaginations, and fantasies of whiteness. Although it may not explicitly happen this way, those messages are still carried, expressed, and demonstrated in how students of color are treated. Nonetheless, as Allen (2004) recounts DuBois’ conjecture, they posit that there will be no social or economic changes within our nation until whites examined their own racism and the ways in which they perpetuated it in their own lives while preventing coalition or solidarity building across racial lines.

There is an assumption that the only educators who need to have a racial, class, and anti-oppression lens are those who will be educating and working in the communities that are highly
concentrated with Black, Native American, and Latinx students, and people in other historically under-resourced and underserved communities. However, it is believed those who will be teaching in areas that serve mostly white students do not need to have these lenses. Because of the normalization of whiteness, it is believed that the only people who are racialized are those who are non-white, while white people are not racialized and therefore are the default (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Chapman, 2013; Matias, Montoya & Nishi, 2016). This gets communicated through schooling, the curriculum, and even who can and cannot teach. On the other hand, there are those who do not see the importance of educating any student with an analysis of how racism and classism have impacted their lives, so they approach teaching from a “neutral,” color evasive stance (Ladson-Billings, 2000), which ironically is a manifestation of whiteness. This take on education has propelled a rise to a breadth and depth of research trending toward the need for critical pedagogy, anti-racist pedagogy, culturally relevant teaching, cultural competency, ethnic studies, etc. (Garrett & Segall, 2013), as well as an increase in recruiting, and retaining Black educators and other educators of color.

The American Dilemma (and Public Schools)

In Ellison’s “An American Dilemma: A Review,” (1944/2011) he goes through great lengths to examine Swedish sociologist, Gunnar Myrdal’s analysis of America’s “dilemma” Ellison is explicit and intentional about naming the American dilemma, which he believes Myrdal falls short in communicating. Like many Black literary writers and scholars, Ellison highlights that the illusion of democracy is countered by the “moral conflict” and presence of anti-black practices in our nation (Ellison 1944/2011; Woodson 1934). These same anti-black practices will be recounted and reinforced over again in legal texts which have most prevalently been explored by CRT scholars, within and outside of the education sphere (Bell, 1979; 2000;
Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1997). Consequently, this “American dilemma” is more than enough to show the failure of this democracy.

Because schools are also a reflection of the larger society, the “American dilemma” situated within the DNA of the nation is reflected in schools and classrooms. Propped up as one of the foundations of this democracy, schools and educators perpetuate a system of patriarchy, coupled with undemocratic, anti-black, anti-Indigeneity, and classist ideology. Children are taught from the moment they enter school that one of the most important elements of this “democracy” is free public schooling for everyone. However, students are not taught to critique schooling beyond it being a “right” nor do they examine [United States] democracy’s relationship to systems of domination that result in (de)humanization of different people, patriarchalism, settler colonialism, violence, and exploitation.

Although public schools in the United States will serve mostly students of color by 2020, currently, students of color make up approximately 47 percent of the students who attend public school (National Center for Educational Sciences, 2016), while the vast majority of teachers - 82% - are white (NCES, 2012). Many white Americans, because of racial segregation, and their implicit and/or explicit inclinations towards segregation, never have to interact with Black or other peoples of color (DiAngelo, 2011). This shield has prevented white teachers from being able to develop the stamina and fortitude to engage in critical discourse about race, power, privilege, or even how to have authentic relationships that are not rooted in power and privilege. Whiteness in education goes undetected due to its normalization and naturalization with the U.S. education system (Matias & Mackey, 2015). Given this, whiteness operates insidiously and pervasively within every inch of the school building and school day.
The insidiousness of whiteness is not just limited to white teachers but can be found in Black and other teachers of color (Matias & Mackey, 2015, p. 35). On account that all institutions in our nation were built on the foundation of the racial project of white supremacy where whiteness has shaped and molded every aspect of the country, many do not question its presence and the harm it does. When one appraises the impact racism has on schooling and education, it is clear that schools and unions privilege and reward whiteness which ultimately marginalizes and punishes blackness (Gorski, 2016; Wu, 2016).

**Racial Justice = Labor Justice**

...there are costs for side-stepping racial and gender justice issues in an organizing campaign. These campaigns can fail to organize a number of workers for whom racial and subordination are inextricable from worker imperatives, and also tend to alienate community based support and allies (Bunnage, 2014).

We cannot talk about the experiences of Black educators in our nation, who are mostly Black womxn, without having a frank conversation about labor justice. Labor unions have long had an instrumental role in the fight for class struggle within the United States. Yet, labor unions have also become “agents of injustice” by structurally ignoring race and gender oppression within the larger society, and within their organizations. In many cases, they have intentionally supported and created policies and practices that have impacted marginalized groups (as stated in Bunnage, 2014; Kurtz, 2002, xvii). Even after the New Deal was passed, DuBois (1935) reminded us that, “Negro children are systematically denied education; when the National Education Association asks for federal aid to education it permits discrimination to be perpetuated by the present local authorities” (p. 265). This is a history of past and present labor
unions must reckon with. Today, even though the NEA has taken on progressive policies within the organization and rhetoric that range from support for immigration rights, addressing institutional racism, (dis)ability rights, the results and movements on these issues are inconsistent, slow, and often lacking any significant and sustainable follow through.

In *Black women’s manifesto; Double jeopardy: to be Black and female* (1969), Francis M. Beale argues that the labor movement in the United States has suffered because of the hyperexploitation of Black people, including white womxn. Conversely, contrary to the ideals of collective uplift for all workers, labor unions have notoriously upheld the white capitalist patriarchy, which made the founding of this nation possible (p. 424). Beale calls this problem a “severe cancer” on the nation as it ultimately impacts the majority of workers, unionized and non-unionized.

There has been a complicated history of labor unions as proponents of social justice for all versus interest-driven protections for their singular interest group, which are often mostly white. Nonetheless, there has been a growing push for a new kind of unionism; “...one that fundamentally alters these organizational structures and practices in order to create campaigns that address the various race, class, and gender injustices workers and organizers confront” (Bunnage, 2014).

Re-Imagining Teachers Unions (Labor Justice = Racial Justice = Educational Justice)

Like all other public sector unions, teachers’ unions in the U.S. are under attack by those who seek to dismantle public education (Noguera & Fine, 2011; Pogodzinski & Jones, 2014; Walker, 2016) and public sector’s strength (Walker, 2016). Considering the complexities with the combination of tensions between politicians, reform advocates, corporations and other
special interest groups, the future of educators and their unions have been left in the hands of everyone but educators.

Following Brown, when Black Teachers Unions feared and forecasted their demise and the demise of who would be left to advocate for Black children, Black communities, and Black education, their fears became a reality. Tillman (2004) explains Ethridge (1970) observed that the Black Teachers' Union ended up subsuming into the all-white Teachers Unions, the unions that had no track record, experience, or interest in advocating for Black children, Black communities, and Black education. Propositioned as being progressive, the NEA pushed for integration of the union as the nation’s Supreme Court ruled on the desegregation of schools. Now seen as a more symbolic gesture to financially benefit the all-white segregated NEA. This being an actual representation of interest convergence.

In some instances, there has been a disconnect between the teachers’ unions, the members, and the communities with which they serve. This, mostly stemming from the fact that the teaching profession and their unions are predominantly white and lack an innate and internal connection to the community. It is because of the possibility of a complete dismantling that Weiner (2012) calls for more accountability or else “most students in the U.S. will end up trained for a life of menial labor, poverty, or imprisonment” (p. 39). If unions do not begin to shift toward what Weiner (2012) calls a “social movement union” and what Peterson (1999) calls “social justice unionism” where the unions move from the current hegemonic model where “members are mostly passive except when it comes to voting on a contract and electing officers” (p. 39) to a structure of unionism that is grassroots and allow members to drive the union’s direction using practices that dismantle the white male patriarchal structure. For this to happen, there has to be more opportunity for unions to reimagine a new system to have agency and act.
This was the structure and praxis of unionism that was inherently characteristic of the Black educators and their unions prior to submerging with the NEA.

However, because this society is inherently inequitable, and built on a racist, classist and colonial project, there must be an intentional approach to re-imagining unionism through a racial, and class lens. In Peterson’s (1999) articulation of social justice unionism, he states “Social justice unionism views itself as part of a broader movement for social progress rather than merely focused on narrow self-interest. It calls for participatory union membership education reform to serve all children, collaboration with community organizations, and a concern for broader issues of equality” (p. 11).

**Historical Background of Black Education/Educators**

Because our origins are the same, we have the same intellectual capabilities. I am not hoping to say by saying that, however, that Blacks are more superior to whites; that would also be false. No race is superior to any other. All races have the same intellectual capabilities. ~ Cheikh Anta Diop (1985)

At the center and nucleus of all humanity Africa sits. With over 100,000 years of street cred and OG status, Africa is the central location for the genesis of human existence before several cycles of migration, which scattered Africans all over the world to develop new societies and community of people (Diop, 1991; Hillard, 1995). As a society and social community, Africans developed sophisticated systems and institutions of learning found in the Nile Valley Complex of cultures which included “Chushites, and Kemetic centers of high cultures, that is ‘Ethiopia’, Somalia, Sudan, Nubia, and Egypt” (Hillard, 1995, p. 6). Although there is well documented evidence of institutions of education prior to colonialism, who the actors and
educators were is not as widely accessible. What did education look like pre-colonialism, what were the pedagogical approaches, who were the teachers, and students?

The ways our current education system is set up has been grounded in an ahistoricalization that erases the accomplishments of Black/African people prior to European colonization and the Maafa. The belief that human progress, existence, intellect, science, and art and culture came from Europeans is a pervasive and damaging myth that corrodes our quest towards valuing all human beings. Specifically, with regards to understanding the contributions made by Black/African people, having a collective understanding of the activities within institutions of higher learning like the University of Timbuktu in Mali, which also included a sophisticated trade center that was central to all of Africa (Chawane, 2016) is essential to unlearning deficits of Black Educatorhood and Black Studenthood. Discoveries in science, astrology, astronomy, medicine, literature are overlooked in our society, particularly in the schools frequented by most students in the United States. The community of scholarship and learning in Timbuktu, Walata, and in ancient Egypt speak to a history of Black education that has been erased and buried to strip Black people of their humanity.

Pre-colonial education in Africa existed in various forms; some taking on the format embedded in a cultural setting and not necessarily formally executed (Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2013). However, education and schools of higher education have been traced by some scholars as far back to the pyramids of ancient Africa, Ethiopia, the Kingdom of Timbuktu, and Morocco (Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2013, p. 35). The projects of colonialism, chattel slavery, and European white supremacy aimed to erase the future existence of Black peoples, in

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6 Maafa, a Kiswahili word that means “The Great Disaster” was coined by Ani (1994) to represent the circumstances that surrounded the African Holocaust—colonization, and slavery (Parham, 1999, p. 798; Utsey, Adams, & Bolden, 2000, p. 196).
order to “white-out” the past that would help all diasporic Black people develop a sense of self. The erasure helps construct a mythology created in the white imaginary to serve the purpose of white supremacy and domination. At the same time, it functions as a technology of anti-blackness and perpetual Black death, further disconnecting Black/African people from their land, identity, culture, and ultimately from humanity. Consequently, coding all people into a social programming that embraces and justified anti-blackness and perpetual Black death.

What Afrocentric education scholar, Asa Hilliard (1995) reminds us is that we cannot begin the history of diasporic Black/African education in the United States without understanding the education of Black/African people pre-colonization. He states, “The collective African cultural deep structural perspective on education and socialization in its pre-foreign or non-foreign form, must be the starting point for our discussion” (Hilliard, 1995, p. 2). According to scholars such as Hillard, the act of beginning the history of Black/African people at slavery not only erases the history, scientific discoveries, astronomy, architectural, artistic contributions, contributions to humanity but it also validates the dehumanization of Black people. Hillard (1995) contends:

This discussion is necessary because of the common practice of beginning an analysis of African education/socialization problems as if there were no pre-slavery antecedents, or as if pre-slavery indigenous African education antecedents were 'primitive, 'pagan' or 'savage,' and therefore unimportant or irrelevant, if not detrimental. Even if these views are not held explicitly, few educators seem to know anything at all about the education/socialization experience of Africans, pre-slavery, during slavery or post-slavery (Hilliard, 1995, pp. 2-3).
Beginning at a place of assets allows us to disrupt the myths common to the white imagination, of African and Black inferiority, and myths that narrate a story of Black existence beginning at slavery. It is the absence of this fundamental information that allows Black people to be othered. Hilliard (1995) reminds us that in order for us to understand the African and African diasporic people’s education, we must go back as far as ancient Africa--and what is referred to as the Nile Valley complex.

If one were to begin the history of Black/African diasporic education at slavery, it would read not only as incomplete, but also as a violent and inaccurate representation of the “horr-story”\textsuperscript{7}, serving only to magnify the imaginative framework of white as inherently more powerful, “civilized,” more deserving, and more human. That Black people were mathematicians, artists, scientists, architects, engineers, gets buried and violently erased to present a manufactured and bastardized caricature within the white imagination.

In Gist (2018), one of the research participants, Natu, reminds us that at the heart of the evils of colonization and assimilation they faced growing up, “the education system was used as a tool to aid in my genocide” (p. 525). Educators of color with a sociopolitical pedagogy and framework tend to be hyper-sensitive and aware of their experiences, and their role in the larger structure that contributes to the status quo of education.

The pre-colonial system of education had many pillars and foundations that can be described as a system of linkages between: 1) general knowledge and practical life. The normal method for the transmission of knowledge was a series of practical exercises; 2) the production of goods and services; 3) linked to social life; 4) linked to culture through the use of the mother tongue; 5) education was linked to culture through the incorporation of cultural practices like

\textsuperscript{7} Horr-story: is defined as the narratives and stories of the horror endured by oppressed and marginalized groups, particularly those who are Black.
spirituality, games, dancing, music and sports; and 6) the pre-colonial educational system and ethical values that existed were absolutely clear (Brock-Utne, 1999, p. 89).

Minicka (2006) shares a brief history of the educational and philosophical richness of African educational tradition. African scholar, Ahmed Baba (1564-1627), from the renowned and leading Timbuktu/African scholarly family during the 16th century, not only claimed his personal library was extensive and overflowing, with some 1,600 volumes of written texts, which he states to be his smallest library of his whole family, others like Leo Africanus, not only corroborated the importance of texts, books and the written word in Timbuktu, but that they were most valued in the region. Africanus reports, “...hither are brought diverse manuscripts of written books out of Barbary, which are sold for more money than any other merchandise” De Villiers & Hirtle (2003, p. 212).

Black people in the United States, whether they came willingly on their own or were stolen from Africa and brought here unwillingly, have, since that time, fought. Fought for their freedom, individual, and collective, freedom, by way of maroonage (Davis, 1972; James, 2013); fought for their human rights; fought for their civil rights, like the right to an education, the rights to quality education; the right to have access to quality public facilities and institutions; the right to life free of police brutality. This list could certainly continue on well beyond the length of a well written and researched book. However, what is important here is understanding that Black people have always resisted their dehumanization since it began.

Prior to the Maafa, African Black people were scientists, educators, philosophers, astronomers, literary scholars, architects, engineers, historians, strategists, organizers, religious scholars, agricultural scientists, doctors--and occupied all the important professions that make up
a civil society (Hillard, 1995). Understanding this as a factual point in our existence will be useful for us moving forward.

Africans believed in an education that was not only holistic, but incorporated a convergence between the mind, body, and spirit as inseparable and inextricably linked. Because of this, the African world view of education centered the collective as opposed to the kind of individualistic education found in Western ways of knowing and being. African ontological epistemology embraces the individual as being linked to the group (Hillard, 1995, p. 9). Hillard (1995) continues to argue that this ideal centers what Theophille Obenga (1995) calls the Core African Values of MAAT—grounded in the principles of truth, justice, order, reciprocity, harmony, and balance, which were reflected in Black educators in the United States during slavery, post Emancipation, and during present day (p. 9).

**Pre-Emancipation Black Teacher Experiences/Educators of Color**

So much of what Black folx in the United States create becomes the trend and frames and shapes the culture of the United States. From theory development, pedagogical approaches, dance moves to music, art, literature, language, dress and fashion; so much of what we create and innovate and influence shapes the discourse and trends of the nation. Why would Black people not be just as innovative, creative, thoughtful, and powerful as educators within the classroom setting? And yet, as this section will describe, Black people are systematically erased, and pushed out of the teaching profession in a perpetual death—when we can fundamentally help build and support the growth and innovation of more Black children en masse, and all children, no matter their race.

Prior to Emancipation, there were independent schools created in secret by African people in the U.S. as well as flourishing and thriving schools post Emancipation. These schools
would eventually be destroyed by legislators who created laws and policies curtailing the rapid and increased influx of schools for the formerly enslaved and other Black people on the land. (Hillard, 1995). In the African sense, the traditional teacher was one’s mamma, dad, an elder in the community, and not so much a “technical” instructor as Hillard (1995) reminds us. This means a teacher, in the African tradition of thought, was not only part of an ecosystem of nurturers to help build and grow the future; there was a level of what Hills-Collins (1990) has theorized as being “other mothering.”

In *Revolutionary Mothering*, Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2016), encourages us to rethink how we articulate “mother” as a non-gendered concept. Mother, as an onto-axiological way of being is a non-gendered theory and praxis, and in education, can apply to Black educators of all genders who are committed to love; defined as being committed to the spiritual growth and development of oneself as well as others (hooks, 2000). Using this framing, it is essential that we divorce ourselves from the gendered patriarchal conception of “mothering” but embrace it as a spiritual way of being.

**Education during and post Enslavement**

During the period of chattel slavery, African people on the continent of North America occupied different social statuses depending on a complex combination of circumstances, their geographical locations, and at what point, and under what circumstances they were here. The vast majority of African folx in the United States were enslaved with some 12.5 million in total during the time, going as far back as 1519 (although the slave trade has been traced even further to the mid 1400s) when the Portuguese dominated the slave trade (U.S. Department of the Interior NPS, nd), to 1619 which marks the genesis of British rule in the slave trade (Jones, 2019). Stories of enslaved Black/Africans being taught by free Black/African people, white folx,
and even other enslaved Africans have been documented as part of Black people’s quest for education on this continent. Due to the laws that were created and built into the governing of the slave states, which prohibited the teaching and education of enslaved people, those caught teaching enslaved Africans would be punished by the full extent of the law. It is here where I mark the constructed penal carcerality of schooling for Black people in this nation. A system of schooling grounded in a penal carceral state (James, 2005) monitored by lay--often poor white citizens who served as gatekeepers of white dominance.

During slavery, organizations such as The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts’ in 1701, provided education to Black/African people who were enslaved. Their goal of educating enslaved Black people was not about giving enslaved Africans power, or even actually making them educated; it was about maintaining white power, control, and using their bodies for the purposes of advancing and spreading white supremacy amongst Black people. Birnie (1927) explains the purpose of their efforts was to school them “in the principles of Christianity and the fundamentals of education, to serve as schoolmasters to their people” (Birnie, 1927, p. 14). This was a strategic effort to use Black people as educators who would perpetuate the status quo of epistemic violence by way of religious literacy education that they intended to be turned keyed to other enslaved Black people. This was an education to serve the power structure of white domination, patriarchy, and Judeo-Christian values and principles processed and cycled through a lens of white supremacy. These kinds of “schools” have been traced as far back as 1695 and were reported to have had at least 20 Black/African students in 1705 (Birnie, 1827, p. 13).

The fear that Black people would gain political and legitimate power once they became literate, sat at the impetus for the educational and literacy borders that were manufactured to
maintain power and control. Poor whites relied heavily on the white elites to maintain and
protect their distance and status above Black folx, which included education as well. As a result
of this fear, Southern states developed legislation prohibiting Black people’s access to literacy,
particularly when there was unrest amongst enslaved Black people and threats of slave uprisings.
In response to the slave revolts happening throughout the African diaspora, the white
establishment began to double down on halting access to literacy and education for not just
enslaved Black people, but free Black people. The slave revolts were catalysts to impose punitive
and often deadly consequences on Black people attempting to gain access to education, further
securing and grounding the penal carcerality of schooling for Black people. Butchart (2007)
states:

Thus, South Carolina and Georgia proscribed formal schooling for its African-
American population in 1740, after the Stono Rebellion, and much of the rest of
the South passed similar laws in the 1830s, following publication of David
Walker’s Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World and Nat Turner’s abortive
uprising. (p. 62)

Even though the prohibition of literacy and education for Black people was not always codified
by law in all states, there was collective white opposition to it that ensured it would have the
same impact as if it had been law in those states.

Staffed by mostly poor whites, slave patrols would scour through the streets and area
searching for Black folx reading and learning. The punishment enforced by these patrols would
range from having thumbs amputated, to prevent them from writing and holding a writing utensil
(Buchart, 2007). For example, in December of 1834, two Charleston lawyers proposed a law
prohibiting literacy access to all enslaved and free Black people, while also abolishing their
schools. But April 1, 1835, the law was voted to be enforced, therefore prohibiting education to enslaved Black people while free Black people had their education placed under extreme scrutiny. Birnie (1927) explains, “For instance, where the school was taught by a person of color some white person had to be present to act as a restraint on the teaching. (p. 18). Although these Black people were not enslaved, their education was monitored with white overseers, therefore never rally having education free of white supremacy.

These laws prohibiting literacy for Black people and the gatekeepers of them who included white people with positional power, as well as poor whites with proximal power, ensured the literacy of Black people would remain limited or non-existent. The outlawing of literacy training for all Black people, enslaved and free, was able to maintain a solid stronghold because of the policing of these laws by both literate and illiterate white people.

In spite of the whitelash, opposition, and systematic barriers propelled by the residual effects of slavery, such as extreme poverty and hardship, formerly enslaved Black people began to demand full access and re-invent schooling and education for the Black children they would serve. While education during slavery and Emancipation was poorly staffed and resourced, Black educators during this time made the best out of their experiences and accessible resources to ensure their children were educated and gained literacy. Their schools, their pedagogy, and structures articulated a message of perseverance and intentionality; they were determined to provide children with the tools and knowledge to gain a sense of their own power.

**Post-Emancipation Black Education**

The education of Black people post-Emancipation was an opportunity to fully expand the quest for education and literacy for all Black people.
the ex-slaves, themselves, organized and began to carry out educational ventures
designed to spread literacy and enlightened citizenship among Black adults and
their children. Given their mistrust of White southerners, the first impulse of the
ex-slaves was to control their own education. Thus, except for collaborations with
Black teachers from nearby free Black communities, the earliest forms of Black
education were organic (Anderson, 1988).

Immediately following the Civil War, scores of womxn, Black and white applied to teach Black
students in the South. When the reasons supporting why these womxn were driven to move to
the South to teach, the differences are starkly opposite. While white womxn expressed a desire to
“do good” or “to be busy,” Black womxn were more concerned about the educational health and

Until the late 19th century, Black womxn had no real status in the teaching profession.
According to Collier-Thomas (1982), Black men were left with few career opportunities with
preaching and teaching leading in those options available to them. Although Black womxn had
opened and/or were operating schools, the majority of the teachers in the schools were Black
men and it was not until the last decade of the 19th century where Black womxn became a major
presence in the education of Black children in segregated schools (Collier-Thomas, 1982, p.
175). After 1890, the number of Black womxn in the teaching profession began to grow. This
was attributed to the number of Black womxn now attending college, and the demand for
teachers to provide an education to Black students. as well as the limited options that were
available to them. By 1890, the United States Census had reported there were approximately
15,100 Black teachers and professors in colleges. 7,864 were womxn, and 7,236 were men.
Collier-Thomas (1982) continues to explain that, “After 1890, fewer Black men were pursuing
teaching as they were choosing careers in religion, medicine, journalism, law, government, and the theatre” (p. 175).

Because of white terrorism against Black people, after Emancipation, formerly enslaved Black people did not trust white people to be in control of their education and therefore took steps to govern their education (Anderson, 1988). As white educators from the North would journey to the former slave states to offer their services as educators, they were often shunned and rejected by Black folx. Scholars have reported that many white educators were astonished to discover that formerly enslaved Africans valued education and were motivated to an extent “that in some ways exceeded that which they associated with the achievement aspirations of free white families and children” (Cross, 2003, p. 73).

Black-led post-civil war Emancipation education took on the formation of one that projected aspirations for “race-uplift” (Perkins, 1983, Siddle Walker, 1995; 2000; 2003; 2013). The role of Black womxn as educators was theoretically different from the role of their white counterparts because they fundamentally had different goals and purposes for why they entered the profession. On the other hand, Black womxn and men believed in a collective “race-uplift” while white teachers embraced a more individualistic approach. Since slavery had positioned Black womxn in the same role, positions, and given the same responsibilities as Black men, they were not provided the same courtesies white womxn were offered. Davis (1972) reminds us of these roles and the ways Black womxn were not afforded the images of femininity as white womxn were. At the same time, the education and schooling experiences of Black womxn and Black men during this time did not experience the same gender separation found in the education and schooling experiences of white womxn which was segregated based on gender.
There was a level of interconnectedness in their desire to attain literacy. Even though many Black scholars differed philosophically with regards to the practical purposes and approaches to education, they were aligned on the ideal that all Black people needed to be educated for the collective uplift of them all. From W.E.B. DuBois, to Frederick Douglass, Charlotte Forten, Anna Julia Cooper, Carter G. Woodson; Black scholars, in the traditional sense, and scholars in the community sense, were united and unrelenting in advocating an education system to see all Black people into a future where they were creators and innovators of that future.

Even though Black Feminism had not yet been conceptualized and theorized, there were Black women who understood and had clarity around the inextricable links between their freedom and the freedom of Black men; one could not be achieved without the other. And just like Black women saw their freedom linked with the freedom of Black men, Black educators saw their purposes as collectively united; they entered the profession because it was an opportunity to build collective educational power. Understanding this fact makes it easier to understand how even before Black Feminism was a “thing” that Black women saw their liberation as inextricably linked to Black men and not separate from them. Black educators who entered the profession saw their purpose situated in the economical, educational, and social advancement of all Black people, this included those who were enslaved as well as those who would later be emancipated (Perkins, 1982; 1983). During the Reconstruction period, the United States saw astronomical gains in the Black community, as Black people began to take advantage of their new freedoms. It was also a time that experienced a great deal of racism, trauma, and terror.

Perkins (1982) emphasizes the persistence in Black people’s efforts to secure quality and safety as they defined and staffed their own schools. Oftentimes, the efforts to create schools for
Black children, by Black people, were in opposition to the schools initiated on their behalf by white people. In an account of these events, Perkins (1982) builds on this, by explaining that “the purposes and outcomes of education envisioned by whites frequently conflicted with those of Blacks” (p. 203). Additionally, although the 18th and 19th centuries saw scores of people from both conservative whites to Black people, advocate for the education of Black people, each of these groups were entering the conversation for various different reasons. While some wanted Black people to be assimilated into white Anglo-Saxon cultural norms and ideology, some white educators wanted “to ‘civilize’ them; to return them to Africa; to inculcate them with orderly work habits; to proselytize them; and, on occasion, to test, as an "experiment," of Black intellectual capabilities (Perkins, 1982, p. 203). Again, there was a continuation of how Black people were being exploited as objects that lacked agency. The design of schooling that these white teachers and organizations had for Black folx served as sites for apparent dehumanization to invisibilize them as if without agency. The schools were also designed to infantilize Black people while maintaining the status quo. While white people chose to teach formerly enslaved Africans for various different reasons, many taught to maintain the white dominant power structure. This meant that the education Black people would receive from them would reinforce racial capitalist patriarchal hierarchies to serve the ultimate interest of the white elite (Buchart, 2007, pp. 66-67).

According to Butchart (2007), there were three groups of people who taught in the early Black schools after the Civil War; Southern white educators; Northern white educators, and Black educators from both the North and South. While many of these white teachers from the south were focused on maintaining the status quo and racial, economical hierarchy of order, others were poor and were being given the opportunity to get paid hefty salaries. On the other
hand, most Northern white teachers embraced a pedagogy of saviorism as their motive to teach Black folk in the South (Butchart, 2007).

Butchart (2007) refers to the actions of these free Northern Black educators as “boundary crossing,” which is flawed and fails to attribute the foundation by which boundary crossing is constructed. Although not a monolith, yet unlike white dominant culture, there is a sense of community found in Black people. Black people who were formerly enslaved Africans and/or Free, did not view their role as “boundary crossing”--these were not real boundaries but rather an opportunity for cultural and community “uplift” (Perkins, 1981; 1982; Butchart, 2007). Although divided by artificial state boundaries, and status, in relationship to the hierarchies established by the State, Black people felt a communal responsibility to each other.

The Reconstruction years were a period where the nation was rebuilding itself. In its very short period, Reconstruction was tainted by the en masse white supremacist violence projected on Black people, their community, and their progress. Because of what Black educators represented, they were amongst the targets of the thousands of cases of assaults, beatings and killings that besmeared the history of Reconstruction (Butchart, 2007, p. 72).

Until the mid to late 1880s, Black teachers had a difficult time in securing teaching positions because most of the schools employed white teachers only (Collier-Thomas, 1982, p. 176), many having to push back against the white power structure to be able to teach in local public schools because they had been relegated to teaching in only the Black segregated private schools.

**Education Post Brown v. BOE--Desegregation/Integration**

Pre-Brown v. BOE, Siddle Walker (2000) shares that “The best characterization of the teachers is that they were preparing students to compete in the desegregated world that did not
yet exist” (p. 769). Not only were educators preparing Black children for an unknown future, but they also embodied an intentional formulaic pedagogy and praxis that centered: 1) aspiration; 2) advocacy; and 3) access (Siddle Walker, 2015, pp. 118-119). Building on Siddle Walker’s analysis, if these sensibilities were translated into the concepts found in Afrofuturism, aspirational pedagogy of these Black educators would be equivalent to the aspirations of the Black community in a utopian-type future characteristics; their affinity to advocacy would be Afrofuturism’s affinity to liberation and justice; and Black educators’ dedication to acquiring collective access to their full humanity would be the Afrofuturism’s equivalent to acquiring the necessary technologies to thrive. According to Siddle Walker and others, Black educators, then, often embraced, what can be referred to as “futuristic sensibilities”—ultimately drawing on the principles and values found in Afrofuturism which requires us to understand our past, while developing an aspirational approach to educating Black students for an unknown future.

Siddle Walker’s groundbreaking research on the education of Black people and Black educators reveals essential information about the under workings in the fight for education for Black people in the nation. This information offers a perspective, often missing from the Civil Rights Movement narratives as well as the textbooks taught by educators; centering Black educators as not only clandestine agents for change. But in many ways these Black educators were the engine to facilitate the change and advocacy for Black students, Black schools, and their communities (Siddle Walker, 2005).

Siddle Walker (2005) explicates, “the dominant portrait of NAACP activity generally omit references to Black educators as having any agency in seeking equality of opportunities for Black children” (p. 356). The solid history of Black educators as also organizer is a common theme that centered the lives and narratives of the stories of Black educators who sought to enter
into the classroom to educate Black students. They were the silent, yet leading backbone in the civil rights movement and desegregation and integration. There was a great deal of danger for Black educators who made the decision to teach Black students because they were under threat of retaliation from white supremacist terrorist groups as well as political officials, who were, in many instances one in the same.

In Bell’s assessment, those who protested the Supreme Court’s decision to end segregation the most were poor white people. He states that they, “feared loss of control over their public schools…” that was “intensified by the sense that they had been betrayed. They relied, as generations before them, the expectation that white elites would maintain lower class whites in a societal status superior to that designated for Blacks” (Bell, 1980, pp. 525-526). If we apply the interest convergence theory to the absence of Black educators in integrated schools, it then explains, not only the decrease, but the fact that Black educators have never recovered from the Brown decision.

After Brown v. the Topeka (KS) Board of Education (1954) Black educators faced the threat of losing their jobs as educators in the segregated Black schools. “The firings threatened the livelihoods of Black educators, the structure, values, and cultural norms of the Black community, and ultimately the social, emotional, and academic success of Black children” (Tillman, 2004, p. 281). Black educators were forced to leave Black schools involuntarily, some entered hostile work environments within the “integrated”/white schools, and they were not recognized as professional, an attribute they had relished in their segregated Black schools. These experiences represent just a fraction of all the ways in which there was an unselfing that unfolded for them (Tillman, 2004, p. 290). This “unselfing” also reflected the aspects and elements of “spirit murdering” (Williams, 1987), which can be explained as a process of
dehumanization, of which the effects of racism are just one of them. “Unselfing” is also the “psychological kind of interaction that occurs between people that can breed mistrust in any kind of relationship. It means that you either overtly or covertly take a person’s dignity. It can be done very, very subtly, but it can be done” (Tillman, 2004, p. 290).

Since Brown, the number of Black educators has decreased significantly throughout the nation. What is surprising is how rapidly Black teachers entered the teaching profession post-Emancipation (1863). Each time there is a conversation about having more Black teachers the conversation quickly shifts to an “All Lives Matter” of education conversation for increasing Black teachers. This is not to say non-Black teachers of color are not needed, we must acknowledge the reasons why each of these groups’ absence in education exist; each for very different individual reasons. Nonetheless, we must acknowledge that they are intimately connected to anti-blackness. In the south alone, Black teachers constituted 17 percent of the profession pre-Brown, however there has been a steady decline since the Brown ruling (Boozer, Krueger, & Wolkon, 1992; Patterson & Freeling, 2001; Bell, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Fultz, 2004; Madkins, 2011; Morris, 2014), and now Black teachers make up just six percent of the profession today.

With the painstaking calls to increase the number of Black educators in the classroom there still stands to remain that the growing barriers that exist in order to get into the classroom are not decreasing. From standardized assessments such as the Praxis, Praxis CORE, and edTPA, not only do they function to limit Black educators from entering the profession, but the costs associated with them are also additional layer to the barriers. Teacher preparation programs embody an overwhelming air of whiteness from the faculty, to the curriculum, content, and pedagogical practices taught to the aspiring educators, to the overwhelming whiteness in the
students represented in the program (Pine & Hillard, 1990; Matias, 2016; Matias, Montoya, & Nishi, 2016). And even though many teacher preparation programs are championing social justice frameworks, these programs are still producing a mostly all white teacher-cohorts (Sleeter, 2017).

   Just like the Anna Julia Coopers and the Septima P. Clarks of our society, many Black educators who center liberatory-based practices through their pedagogy, as well as within the principles and values they live by and organize, end up being pushed out of the profession completely. Acosta et. al. (2018) contends, “African American teachers who draw on African American principles and approaches for teaching—are among the most rapidly shrinking demographic of classroom teachers” (p. 341).

   During desegregation and “integration” Black educators lost their jobs for various different reasons such as: 1) being registered to vote; 2) merging of Black and white schools; all white education associations constructing a “voluntary segregation plan”; 3) banning teachers from joining civic organizations such as the NAACP; 4) having a partner who was a member of a civic organization such as the NAACP; and 5) organizing against desegregation and for integration (Franklin & Collier, 1999). Citing Siddle Walker (2012), they continue by reminding us that our nation and those who control our education and schooling, have worked diligently to silence the voices of Black educators, particularly the ones who are working tirelessly to push an educational equity agenda and who adopted an expansive child-centered perspective (Acosta, Foster, & Houchen, 2018, p. 341).

   In reviewing the literature, there are three themes that reflected the work and commitment of Black educators. I found that their work was undergirded by the following values and principles: 1) reciprocity or (inter)connectedness; 2) justice and advocacy; and 3) balance,
equity, and fairness. What is fascinating about this is the linkage it has to what Armah (2006) refers to as the Great African Values of: 1) reciprocity; 2) balance; and 3) justice. Worded slightly differently, yet carrying the same meaning, Owusu-Ansah & Mji (2013) also attest to the African values of: 1) wholeness; 2) community; and 3) harmony, which they describe as being uniquely situated in Indigenous African Knowledge Systems, culture and worldview. In ancient Egypt, these principles were embodied through the goddess, Ma’at, which included: 1) truth; 2) justice; 3) order; 4) reciprocity; 5) harmony; and 6) balance (Obenga, 1995; 2015). An in depth examination of these African values, as espoused by the scholars listed above, can clearly direct us to a genealogical linkage in the onto-axiological Black Educatorhood orientation that Siddle Walker and others describe. This Black Educatorhood orientation included a “racial uplift” for the collective Black Studenthood--one that was not segregated based on gendered or age-specific designs often found in white schools. It was a Black Educatorhood orientation that included parents and community as well as their young students with unbounded dreams of access to one’s full humanity (i.e. reciprocity, harmony and balance), advocacy (i.e. justice and truth), and aspirations of endless futurisms and possibilities.

The systematic sabotage of Black educators has ushered in the systematic breakdown of the entire education system and the teaching profession. There was prestige and honor associated with the profession, but as there was a coordinated effort to destroy Black educators there was a residual effect and impact that it had on all in public education. This is a truth we must reconcile with. In a “biting off our nose to spite our face” this is just one of the ways that we have unequivocally sabotaged ourselves, our children and the future. The precarity of Black Educatorhood is the nation and its public schools’ collective stagnation

**Manifestations of Oppression**
The unjust domination and control of and mistreatment of different marginalized groups of people take on various manifestations. In a society undergirded by white cis-gender heteropatriarchal able-bodied, Judeo-Christian norms and ideals, those whose bodies and ways of being deviate from the manufactured hierarchies of white, hetero-male, cis-gender, able-bodied, Judeo-Christian norms are deemed the “other.” From racism, to sexism, to ableism, to colonialism, to imperialism, to ageism, to queer and trans antagonism, to non-Christian religious persecution, nationalism, xenophobia, and discrimination, discrimination based on immigration status, and the treatment of various marginalized groups endure goes far beyond personal disagreements; these systems of domination and oppression are built into the very fabric, the algorithm, and motherboard of this nation. Evidence of this work can be found in the grassroots organizing work of Black Lives Matter (BLM)\(^8\) and the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL)\(^9\), youth-led immigration rights groups such as United We Dream\(^10\), and organizations such as Sins Invalid\(^11\) which is part of the (dis)ability justice movements that have deliberately taken on an intersectional analysis in their organizing work.

The two most prevalent systems of domination I will focus on are patriarchy and racism. This is not to minimize other forms of oppression, but to hone in on the umbrella oppressions that give way to and make it possible for others to exist. In many ways, both racism and patriarchy are the driving forces for why queer and trans-antagonism exists, and why ableism persists. As long as competition, and visions of inherent dominance function, so goes all forms of

\(^8\) [https://blacklivesmatter.com/](https://blacklivesmatter.com/)
\(^9\) [https://policy.m4bl.org/](https://policy.m4bl.org/)
\(^10\) [https://unitedwedream.org/](https://unitedwedream.org/)
\(^11\) [https://www.sinsinvalid.org/](https://www.sinsinvalid.org/)
oppression. Both operate on three different levels that build on and reinforce each other: 1) structural; 2) institutional; and 3) individual.

On the structural level, this includes the legitimization and normalization of systems of dominance which is supported by the law/legal system, historical, political and governmental, cultural, economic, educational, and psychological forces, “all working in concert” with each other (Davis, 2019, p. 32). On the institutional level, this includes the formal and informal practices, policies, and procedures within all institutions (both public and private sector) that produce outcomes that advantage and privilege whites while disadvantaging BIPoC (Davis, 2019, p. 33). The fuel that keeps all these systems in place and functioning like a well-oiled machine is the individual dimension of oppression. These are the individual messages, conscious and unconscious, that we have internalized as part of our socialization.

According to Harro’s Cycle of Socialization (1997), every individual, through their interactions in life, take in the implicit and explicit lessons that their family, caregivers and educators pass down to them about the norms, values, and standards to their society. These values, norms, and messages get reinforced through the conscious and unconscious practices from the people and institutions they interact with (education, religious institutions, media, the legal and criminal punishment system). These messages get enforced by the external rewards and punishments from society, depending on the socialization. As illustrated in the diagram, the results of the rewards or punishments lead to the equivalent of internalized oppression or internalized responses to the larger structural and institutional forms of oppression.
Figure 1: Harro’s Cycle of Socialization (1997)

For the purpose of this study, patriarchy is defined as:

a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. (hooks, 2010, p. 1)

Additionally, Hill (2009) draws attention to the real, pervasive, and material benefits of patriarchy as a system of gender domination because it is prevalent in “all eras, among all races, social institutions, and economic classes, and in virtually every known culture (Hill, 2009, p. 628).
Conversely, racism has been defined by racial justice organizers, educators, and scholars as race prejudice + legitimate power. Because it is written as an equation, it is worth noting that racism must include all parts of the equation in order to be considered racism. Both of these systems of domination and oppression operate structurally and are internalized within the individual. Some people believe that when we focus on the manifestations of internalized oppression and response, we dismiss how the institutional and systemic manifestations impact our lives. However, we cannot ignore that it is what we individually bring into the institutions that help shape, form, and fuel these institutions and systems. Systems do not operate in isolation.

Internalized oppression or internalized response, what Freire (2000) also refers to as “horizontal violence” or what Lorde (2007) calls “horizontal hostility,” cannot be examined without understanding the root and context for why oppressed groups of people may wound, hurt, and harm each other. Internalized oppression or response is a byproduct of colonialism, fueled by white supremacy (white dominance) and patriarchy (male-gendered dominance). It is a response to the horrors and violence of racism and patriarchy; projecting one’s aggression towards the oppressor is riskier. Examining internalized oppression or internalized response without an analysis of and an examination of the conditions of the larger system of power, white supremacy, racism, and patriarchy is not only negligent, but dangerous. Thus, we cannot ignore it because they are the byproducts of these larger systems; we must proceed to dismantle these systems of domination with a both/and framework and not an either/or approach. It would be an act of violence to blame marginalized groups for their abuse or to ignore the ways in which we have unconsciously internalized “the whip” and have not in fact tucked it away in the past (Hartman, 1997), but are instrumental in upholding these systems.
The upside to the cycle is that it does not end at the negative socializations that the systems of domination result in. As illustrated, the deliberate conscious raising, questioning, and interrupting of oppression leads to a cycle of change and liberation. Like all forms of oppression, developing a consciousness around patriarchy and racism is what can push us towards a more individual and collective liberatory landscape.

**Patriarchy**

The structure of patriarchy is affirmative action for men. Patriarchy is the system of society and governance in which men hold the power and women are excluded from it. And power does not give itself up (Folliard, 2019)

“patriarchy in its most basic, unmediated form promotes fear and hatred of females” (hooks, 2004, p. 108).

Unlike racism, patriarchy is not given as much traffic and tractions as its fraternal twin. From professional development in schools, to training in corporate offices, to the likes of Starbucks et. al, “conversations” about race, anti-racism, or what organizations and corporations refer to as “anti-racism” and “diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)” are crowding the social justice airways and social justice organizations. While there are many like the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100), Assata’s Daughters etc., that are challenging the anti-black, white cis-heteropatriarchal norms and are adopting a Radical Black Feminist orientation to their organizing, there are many organizations and people who are claiming to embrace an intersectional racial justice sensibility that are missing the mark on this front.

As mentioned early, like racism, patriarchy functions on three dimensions: 1) structural and legitimate; 2) institutional; and 3) individual. Structurally, we can locate the tentacles of
patriarchy in our legislation and laws where legislators will attempt to pass laws that control the decisions and agency of womxn. We can also locate it by who is allowed to serve in governmental positions, positions of leadership and management, within our family, and even school structures. Institutionally, this can still, in 2019, be located in the gender wage gap which also differs across race, reflecting and producing an advantage to men, and disadvantaging womxn. When examining it from an intersectional lens, Black and Brown womxn are doubly impacted. Even when we consider which occupations are paid the most, careers such as teaching and domestic work, often gendered for womxn, are disproportionately devalued (Leuze & Strauß, 2016). Both the structural and institutional are supported by individuals and how they reinforce the messages of who should lead, govern, and rule, and what should have when people question or buy into it.

What is devastating about this is that patriarchy, patriarchalism is often a key element to the internal conflicts and break down within organizations that are attempting to work towards a liberatory future. To define patriarchy, I offer this definition of it being a system of domination whereby people organize themselves, their communities, and families since ancient times, has existed as a structure within the United States and other societies for centuries (Hill, 2009). Patriarchy has existed as a structure for some societies where people organize themselves, their communities and families, since ancient times. hooks (2010) defines patriarchy as “a political-social system that insists that men are inherently dominant, and superior to everything and everyone who society has deemed weak, especially womxn. And, as hooks continues to elaborate, “through the use of violence (psychological, emotional, and often physical) [men--

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emphasize mine] are thereby entitled to rule and dominate over those who are weaker (hooks, 2010, p. 18).

With this information in mind, an analysis of much of society’s institutions also mirror patriarchal structures. hooks (2010) cites John Bradshaw by stating, “patriarchal rules still govern most of the world’s religions, school systems, and family systems” (p. 23). It is important to acknowledge we all have been socialized into a white cis-heteropatriarchal society and therefore cannot have escaped internalizing the rules, and messages around patriarchalism that Bradshaw references which shape society. The rules of patriarchy and our socialization into this system of domination usually comes from our family; we are mostly taught it by our own mothers, nurturers, caregivers, and other womxn in our lives--who are usually our first teachers. Again, these same messages get reinforced in our media, schools and religious institutions (hooks, 2010, p. 24).

hooks (2010) argues that given the number of households led by moms, patriarchy continues to flourish within these structures; men are not the sole or only perpetrators of patriarchy. As a system, it could not function and/or survive without the full (conscious and unconscious) participation of womxn. Highlighting the role of womxn in maintaining and upholding patriarchy, allows us to recognize patriarchy as a system that is fully enabled by all genders. Even though men experience more direct and indirect material benefits from it, in fact, patriarchy cannot function without the conscious and unconscious collaboration from womxn or people gendered as womxn, as co-conspirators in not only its maintenance, but its remodeling and upkeep (Lerner, 1986).

**Internalized Patriarchy**
The manifestations of patriarchy take on many forms. Just like all forms of oppression those with the power and those who are marginalized within that structure both internalize the ideals and values of the system of patriarchy. For men, it shows up as superiority and dominance; for womxn, and gender non-conforming, non-binary folx, it may show up as inferiority. Internalized patriarchy is a two sided coin; you cannot have one without the other. Superiority and inferiority feed and supply each other with the fuel to function and thrive. The most pernicious aspects of patriarchy are the internalizations of its various dimensions. While the overt violence of men is shocking and at least garners outrage to some degree, it is the persistent, more subtle, and everyday expressions of patriarchy that go unchecked, unnoticed, and normalized by all (Hill, 2009). Because the normalization of patriarchy, it is so well coded into our society’s motherboard, it will require an intentional shift in our collective consciousness. This coding and programming have been instilled in every individual within our society. The unconscious internalization of patriarchy work collaboratively with the more concrete overt aspects of patriarchy. This means we must address them simultaneously and understand this as a collective problem because we are all collectively impacted.

For internalized patriarchal inferiority, Lerner (1986) explains that womxn have for millennia been co-conspirators in their own subordinations and oppressions, “because they have been psychologically shaped so as to internalize the idea of their own inferiority” (Lerner, 1986, p. 218). If we want to make significant societal shifts in the more overt and violent depictions of patriarchy, we must also address the implicit, covert and more subtle patriarchal patterns that influence every structure, every system, and institution in our society (Hill, 2009). Part of the work that will come from this will be acknowledging the complicity of all genders as being
harmed by this system of patriarchy, even though it is those who have been socialized as men reap the material benefits.

**Internalized Racial Oppression**

People have mastered how to parrot words, phrases, ideas, concepts, and theories that answer questions we believe will garner rewards but lack the real understanding around them. They sit there in silence because they cannot fully articulate it. Even though race is not biological or grounded in any science, nor is it real; it is the effects of racism that real. As taught to me by the organizers from the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond (nd):

Race is a specious classification of human beings created by Europeans--later to become known as white--during the 17th-18th century using white as the model of humanity and height of human achievement for the purposes of establishing and maintaining social status and privilege and a legitimate relationship to power.

Understanding this definition of race, helps us understand racism—as a legitimate system of power and privilege based on this specious construct, we call race, and what Benjamin (2019b) refers to as being “one of our most powerful tools” (p. 36).

Racism, as stated and defined by David Wellman is “a system of advantage based on race” which Tatum (1997; 2003) elucidates is based on a “system involving cultural messages and institutional policies and practices as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals,” (p. 127). If racism is a system of advantages based on race for white people, it is also, by default, a system of disadvantages based on race for people of color. Tatum (1997; 2003), expands on this and expostulates, “when racial prejudice is combined with social power--access to social, cultural and economic resources and decision-making--leads to the institutionalization of racist policies and practices” (p. 127). This describes the concrete collaboration between individual racial
prejudice coupled with the institution and legitimate power of the state. As stated, and defined by Joy Degruy’s (2015), racism is:

the belief that people differ along biological and genetic lines and that one’s own group is superior to another group. These beliefs are coupled with and compounded by the power to negatively affect the lives and limit the options of those perceived to be inferior. (p. 15).

What these definitions of racism that both Tatum (1997; 2003) and DeGruy (2015) have in common is: 1) the speciousness of “race”; 2) its reliance on legitimate, legal, institutional, and social power; and 3) the complicity of the individual(s) in their actions and practices. Grasping these three aspects will be important for us moving forward to understand the intersections that make this phenomenon possible. In Figure #?? Below, Davis (2019) illustrates what she refers to as the dimensions of racism which also reflects DeGruy (2015) and Tatum’s (1997) definition of racism.
There are three forms of racism that shape our society; structural racism, institutional racism, and individual racism (Davis, 2019) while others have included cultural racism in their framework (Parham, 1999, p. 797; Williams, Lawrence, & Davis, 2019, p. 106). Just like patriarchy, racism is also internalized by people from both the marginalized and dominant groups. According to Bailey et al. (2011) racial oppression can only function as a system if it included a psychological embodied component that was internalized by the people. With this in place, there is no need to only have overt policies, and laws in place because the people who make up the society and system will enforce these ideals with laws; the people being oppressed will enforce it on themselves and those with the power will as well (Bailey et. al., 2011, p. 481).
We cannot fully understand racism without also understanding how it is internalized; how its logic and algorithms have been programmed into us.

The oppressed identifying with the oppressor and internalizing the superiority of the dominant class as well as their own inferiority, is not a new concept as Fanon (1963) and Freire (2000) and many scholars and activists before them all spoke to this phenomenon of internalized racial oppression and response. In Freire’s (2000) articulation, he explains the ways in which those of us who are oppressed take on the roles and business of their oppressor (p. 44). These roles are often self-appointed. Using a combination of Lipsky’s (1997) explanation of internalized oppression and response as being the “turning upon ourselves...our families”. Bailey et. al. (2011) define internalized racial oppression as being:

the process by which Black people internalize and accept the dominant White culture’s oppressive actions and beliefs toward Black people (e.g., negative stereotypes, discrimination, hatred, falsification of historical facts, racist doctrines, White supremacist ideology), while at the same time rejecting the African worldview and cultural motifs (p. 481)

Their definition only considers and examines internalized racial responses within the construct of inferiority from people of color and leaves out the superiority dimensions of it; white folx’s response. Anti-racist organizers like the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond, position internalized racial oppression and response as occupying two geographies; internalized superiority and internalized inferiority. One cannot exist without the other and is a dangerous feat when we leave superiority out of the definition. Again, by doing so, whiteness continues to operate as the great unexamined. Wynter (1979) also draws on our failure to examine the great unexamined nature of whiteness, because as she states, “whiteness is taken as a given rather than
a striking phenomenon calling for extensive research” (p. 150). Its complex levels of pathology socialize poor non-owning class whites to internalize a hegemony of power even when they have no financial economic material benefit and never will.

On the other hand, Cokley (2002) ask that we differentiate between internalized racism, which they define as the “internalization of negative stereotypes about one’s racial group” while, internalized racialism “entails identifying with any stereotype about one’s racial group, positive or negative, that is predicated on the belief that racial categories have innate and, therefore, immutable characteristics” (p. 477). What is not addressed in Cokley’s (2002) definition is that no matter whether the stereotypes are “positive” or “negative,” they all end up having negative impacts on collective experiences of all.

With this in mind, internalized racial oppression is defined as the multi-generational dehumanizing process of empowerment for those of the dominant class and race (i.e., white people), and a process of disempowerment for Black and other people of color, by which they internalize the dominant group’s conceptions and imaginations of who they all are, and live it out (PISAB, nd). When people internalized racial oppression, research has shown that these imaginations end up shaping not only personal practices in how they treat others, but they end up shaping policies from housing access, to education, to health care and options, to sentencing etc. (Williams, 2019). IRO is not just the internalization of whiteness and white superiority, it is also the internalization of anti-blackness, and the inherent ultimate inferiority of Blackness and all others, knowingly and unknowingly (Matlock et. al., 2017, p. 1).

Some scholars have also stated that, “Internalized racial oppression (IRO) is a process a person goes through, where they accept and believe negative stereotypes and messages about themselves and embrace the idea of being inferior (Matlock et. al., 2017; Bailey et al., 2011;
Jones, 2000). Again, this is a flawed definition because it leaves the hyper-sense of self that is internalized by the superiority of white/whiteness. The definition helps to reinforce Wynter’s (1979) argument that whiteness is so pervasive that it is able to avoid examination.

Not only does IRO impact our own sense of self, it also impacts our organizing work, our interpersonal relationships, and the impact of the institutions, as well as our health. In a recent study by the American Academy of Pediatrics, researchers found that, “The impacts of structural and personally mediated racism may result in internalized racism (internalizing racial stereotypes about one’s racial group)” (Trent et. al., 2019, p. 4).

**Internalized Racial Superiority (IRS)**

Internalized racial superiority or dominance, also referred to as whiteness or white culture, is the multi-generational dehumanizing process of empowerment by which the dominant group (white people) take in and live out the dominant group’s imaginations, fantasies, and conceptualization of their supposed dominance and superiority of the group (PISAB, nd). As part of a two-sided mirror, internalized oppression and response, by way of dominance and superiority is, “the incorporation and acceptance by individuals within a dominant group of prejudices against others” (Pheterson, 1986, p. 148). One’s superiority and dominance come at the expense of marginalizing the humanity of all “others”. By doing so, Pheterson (1986) reminds us that, “One’s own humanity is thus internally restricted and one’s qualities of empathy, trust, love, and openness to others and to life-enhancing work become rigid and repressed” (p. 148).

As this system of whiteness and white supremacy continues to morphs and take on various forms, the tools of whiteness, as identified by Picower (2009) take on at least three forms: 1) emotional tools; 2) ideological tools; and 3) performative tools, as technologies to
resist change and maintain the current order of power and domination (p. 205). However, because whiteness has moved about within our society as an unexamined phenomenon (Wynter, 1979), as “invisible,” and “as the unseen or the unmarked” (Ahmed, 2007), it goes under the radar without detection and recognition.

Internalized Racial Inferiority (IRI)

DeGruy (2005) contends that, “One of the most insidious and pervasive symptoms of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) is a multigenerational condition of trauma resulting for those whose families experienced slavery and the now residuals of slavery by way of oppression and institutional racism (p. 105). As a result, PTSS is Black people’s internalization and adoption of the slave master’s value system that white and all things associated with whiteness are superior and that black, and all things associated with blackness are inferior” (2005, p. 116).

For people of color, interrogating and examining internalized racial oppression is taboo for some of us. Not only do some not want to interrogate it, they do not want to discuss it in public; what some refer to as “airing our dirty laundry”. The fact of the matter is, we must wrestle through these together in order to heal from the pain and trauma of it all. This “dirty little secret” ends up festering within us. Pyke (2010) believes that not only do we have a collective ignorance of the ways in which internalized racial oppression, by way of inferiority, shows up in our lives, but this ignorance was no accident, but was a result of “a taboo on a topic dubbed a “dirty little secret” (Pyke, 2010, p. 552). As cited in Pyke (2010), Stuart Hall (1986) defined internalized racism as “the ‘subjection’ of the victims of racism to the mystifications of the very racist ideology which imprison and define them” (p. 552). He, like Wynter (1979) before him, believed it was not only pervasive, but the least studied manifestation of racism. Some of this can be attributed to the shame associated with it, because it bears our ugly scars and wounds. It
shows us as being complici
t in acts we would not willingly concede to if not for the
circumstances. We have mastered our internalization so well and so much so that white people
need not be present for us to impose harsh discipline and policing of our bodies and children. In
fact, in our freedom, the whip did not get abolished or abandoned; it has been internalized within
us (Hartman, 1997, p. 140). This is the dilemma we are left with in Freedom and state sanctioned
“Emancipation”. And even within “progressive” organizational spaces, manifestations of
internalized racial oppression present themselves as cameos disguised under anti-racist,
decolonial rhetoric and pedagogies.

Rehumanizing/Re-inventing the Human

As we process what racism and patriarchy has done to us, there is a need for us to explore
how we can be rehumanized in this process. Before we can discuss rehumanization, we must
concerns about the ways in which the figure of the human is tied to epistemological histories that
presently value a genre of the human that reifies Western bourgeois tenets; the human is
therefore wrought with physiological and narrative matters that systematically excise the world’s
most marginalized” (p. 9).

The history of the United States is one of violence, colonization, and the objectification
of Indigenous land, people and African people. According to Wynter (2003), to be human was a
classification reserved for only Western white people; to be Native American was other, while to
be Black meant to be the “ultimate referent...racially inferior Human other” (p. 266) because of
their proximity to chattel and property. Black people have occupied a perpetual location of
cyborg; at the liminality of human and a tool of capital and production. Wynter (2003), “the
struggle of our new millennium will be one between the ongoing imperative of securing the well-
being of our present ethnoclass (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself. And that of securing the well-being and therefore the full cognitive and behavioral autonomy of the human species itself/ourselves/” (p. 260). Jackson (2013) builds upon this sharp analysis and situates “man” as not a replacement for or “synonymous to ‘the human’, but rather as a technology of slavery and colonialism” (p. 670).

Ultimately, our struggle is “the struggle against this overrepresentation” (p. 262). It will be our duty to unsettle the construct that gives way to the overrepresentation in order to restore our collective humanity.

The concept of human has taken on many iterations that crossed Western theological theoretical ideologies and pseudo-scientific hegemonic discoveries within coloniality, then codified and systematized throughout the Americas, and Caribbean. Under this imaginary construction of human, “Indians” were positioned as “the savage, irrational other,” while Black people “represented as its most extreme form and as the ostensible missing link between rational human and irrational animals...constructed as the ultimate referent of the “racially inferior” Human Other” (Wynter, 2003, p. 266).

In Wynter’s (2003) depiction of Fanons’s description of his experiences in the French Martinique colonial schooling system was “designed to preserve the status quo” with the “Antillean Negro” being socialized to not only be anti-black but to internalize anti-blackness as well. This was all supported and reinforced with deliberate prohibition of any Black counter voice or narrative. The deliberate institutionalizing of the silencing and blocking of the (Black) countervoice “is itself defining of the way in which being human, in the terms of our present ethnoclass mode of sociogeny, dictates that self, other, and world should be represented and know…” (p. 268). In this, we are called to “unsettle” the “coloniality of power” in order to
redescribe, redefine, reconstruct, and reimagine “the human, Man, and its overrepresentation (p. 268). All modes of “human” would be measured up against the West’s conceptualization of human; all “Others” would be lacking in full form of what it means to be human with the continuum of “new categories of humanness. (i.e. mestizi, and mulattos) to which their human/subhuman value difference gave rise.

What racism and patriarchy and all other forms of oppression and dominance have done is dehumanized us all. Whether one is from the dominant group or not; there is a process of dehumanization that takes hold. Freire (2000) explicates this dilemma:

“Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though not in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human…” dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is not a given destroy but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed" (p. 44).

Freire (2000) then implores and warns those who have been oppressed to reject the impulse to become the oppressors of the oppressors. By doing so, the oppressed being is able to restore their humanity as well as the humanity of the oppressor. He states, “This, then is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well” (p. 44). Blinded by their sense of entitlement, the oppressor’s inability to see beyond their entitlements make it difficult for them to realize they are missing a piece of themselves. The material benefits, in their mind, far outweigh their spiritual impotence and void. Contrary to Freire, I would argue that it is not the responsibility of the oppressed to liberate the oppressors. However, our
proximity to the margins and efforts to rehumanize ourselves, by default, ends up pushing the oppressors closer to their humanity.

Because those of us who have been dehumanized, marginalized, colonized, exploited, underserved, and oppressed, our “gaze from the bottom” provides us a view and perspective that engendered us to be able to reimagine a way to be human; to rehumanize ourselves. Echoing Sylvia Wynter, McKittrick (2015) emphasizes, “being human is a praxis of humanness that does not dwell on the unfittest and the downtrodden and situate the most marginalized within the incarcerated colonial categorization of oppression; being human as praxis is…”the realization of the human” (p. 3). This conceptualization of human as praxis--a verb--a doing word; embracing sound theory, with dialectics, reflection, and action.

Rehumanization is about making all of humanity whole again. It is about restoring, regenerating, and reinventing the human as verb, that includes mind, body, and spirit. It will require us to not only acknowledge, but to see the humanity of all people. This will include being able to see not only the body/flesh of the person, but the spirit within each one. In the excerpt below, cited from Delpit & White-Bradley (2003), Ayi Kwei Armah explains this process:

If I’m not spiritually blind, I see your spirit. I speak to it if I want to invite you to do something with me. If your spirit agrees it moves your body and your body acts. That’s inspiration. But if I’m blind to your spirit I see only your body. Then if I want you to do something for me, I force or trick your body into doing it even against your spirit’s direction. That’s manipulation. Manipulation steals a person’s body from his spirit, cuts the body off from its own spirit’s direction. The healer is a lifelong enemy of all manipulation. The healer’s method is inspiration. (pp. 80-81) ----(as cited in Delpit & White-Bradley, 2003)
Seeing only the body allows us to objectify, manipulate, control, and coerce another person. Although Armah explains not being able to see one’s spirit as being “spiritually blind”. It, in fact, equates to much more than an aversion to one’s spirit; this too is perpetual “spirit murdering” (Williams, 1987). A perpetuality of spirit murder that was created by white folx by what Wynter (1979) explains as:

“The plantation order which made it illegal for a slave to learn to read and became educated, which exhausted the black with relentless work, then produced empirical evidence of the Negro’s “lack of intellectual faculties”. The Negro then becomes the SYMBOLIC OBJECT OF THIS LACK WHICH IS DESIGNATED AS THE LACK OF THE HUMAN” (p. 152).

This is the perpetual spirit murder that Black folx have inherited from their ancestors well before them—a perpetual murder created in the white imagination that manifests in various formations and instances.

When there is active “spirit murdering” taking place in classrooms, schools, and other parts of society, every interaction made will be one of manipulation, control, and coercion. The aspects of public education for Black folx within the United States and throughout the diaspora is situated in a theory and pseudo-science that positions Black folx as inferior and unworthy of quality education, especially absent manipulation, violence, and abuse. Hence, the reason we have police in schools.

As liberation is akin to childbirth; painful and long (Freire, 2000); rehumanization will be as well. The reinventing of the human as verb and praxis that incorporate a reclaiming, (re)memberance, (re)building of the three in one; one’s spirit, one’s body, and one’s mind. Adding onto Armah’s conceptualization of how we articulate the very calculus of the human,
Dei (2002) contends, “African spirituality stresses mind, body, soul interactions. Such spirituality is about values, beliefs and ideas of integrity, dignity that shape individual consciousness into a collective and unified existence.” Which Armah explains that the individual develops a spirituality not in isolation from the world, their community, and/or their society, but “through the engagement of society, culture and nature interrelations” (p. 341). Benjamin (2019a) conjures up the Afrofuturistic sensibilities in her analysis and ask that we:

“activate a radio imagination that listens for and signals other ways of being human” that embraces a “Black feminist approach to posthumanism and all of its technoscientific promises that is not about including the oppressed in the field of (Western liberal) humanism or about casting humanism writ large, but about abolishing one particular genre that, by definition, dominates and devours all others” (p. 10)

This is the cusp of an awakening of what it will mean for us to engage in this process of making ourselves anew. Armah (nd) encourages us to regain knowledge of ourselves, our histories, and what Sharpe (2016) encourages us to be in the business of “wakefulness”—a consciousness and engagement in the unfinished business of emancipation (p.4). This will require us to design for rehumanization; to cultivate healing values that will help us rehumanize--remake ourselves, and in essence the entire universe (Armah, Our Awakening, nd).

This work will be meticulous work requiring what Armah (nd) explains we should: 1) end our addictions to that which keeps us sleep; 2) “careful preparation and study aimed at analyzing and seeing through the false values directed against us; and 3) identify regenerative values and center them in our everyday discourse, ways of being, and within our institutions.
This nation, its schools, its education system, and all other institutions, is at a crossroads. This crossroads is situated at the axes of historical violence resulting in the precariousness of Black Educatorhood, Black Studenthood, conceptions of human and regaining our humanity, as well as the collective stagnation of the nation. Our understanding of history pre-Maafa, during slavery, Reconstruction, and pre/post-Brown, as well as the role of that labor plays in the experiences of Black folx will help design a more perfect future. What CRT and Black Feminisms does it help provide clarity for understanding Black Educatorhood today, while also holding space for what a portal for new being could be framed within and between.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Take your dreams seriously. Your daydreams during meetings, the messages you gather from your night dreams. Ideas come together in nonlinear ways, and dreams are a crucial space for seeing the intersections where magic can happen. Look at what’s happening now as an iteration, as a cycle of experimentation. Learn the lessons and let that learning shift your next steps.


Overview

My daydreams, my nightdreams, my wonderings, and gazes at the wonder of nature as manifested in the ways our trees swayed within the rhythm of the wind, and the anointing of young children, became what this research study currently is. In this study, I aim to understand the experiences of Black educators who are organizing and advocating for racial and social justice within their schools and/or districts. I am particularly interested in this affinity of educators as a former classroom teacher who also advocated for more racially and socially just schools within and outside the structure of unions and racial justice organizations. With that in mind, I studied Black educators from three different groups in New Jersey, through one-on-one interviews, focus groups and informal conversations, observations, and document analysis methods.

brown’s quote that introduces this chapter, captures the essence of the what and how my research study unfolds. With that in mind, this chapter describes and outlines my de/colonial Black Feminisms constructivist grounded theory approach, which weaves in stitches of
autoethnography threaded throughout. I will also take us through my research design and methods, including my stated positionality, site and participant selection, data collection, and data analysis to develop an interpretive understanding of the participants’ experiences. Even though it is specifically an African-diasporic onto-axiology, I am calling it “de/colonial” here; my approach specifically makes visible African-diasporic onto-axiology because it centers my continental and diasporic African ancestral ways of knowing and being which also provides space and room for other ways. In this work, I intentionally engage and cross multiple research boundaries, borders, and methods while embracing my ancestral indigenous and intersectional sensibilities. Also important is my discussion of what I did to protect the participants’ anonymity as well as what I emotionally, physically, and psychologically experienced while engaging in the research. Finally, this chapter concludes with the study’s limitations.

**Research Questions**

Using constructivist grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 1995), that included one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and document analysis to research the study's six participants, the questions grounding the research are: 1) What collective/individual narratives emerge as six Black educators advocate and attempt to organize for racial and social justice with their organizing communities, schools and/or districts; 2) What are their individual/collective experiences in schools; 3) What are the individual, group, and systemic barriers/principles that hinder/elevate progress?

**Research Study Design**

The research design and lens that I employ for the dissertation is a combination of lenses that I have gathered along the way by my own scholarly research, as well as my cultural ways of being. As I skimmed through many other dissertations, I was taken aback that mine did not seem
to present a more clean-cut linear design, but encapsulated various leanings, lenses, and onto-axiological epistemologies. Nevertheless, the study’s design reflects who I am in a very intimate and connected way. This includes the multiple ways in which I attempt to de/colonize the research, by also adding Black Feminisms as an instructive lens for understanding the experiences of the educators.

**Drawing on De/Colonial Onto-Episteme Orientations**

Science and research, as defined through the westernized academy and all of its proteges, iterations, and replicas throughout the Global South and Global North, with all of its multiple successes and breakthroughs, are sterile and often dehumanizing concepts, framing what society deems as valuable through artificially constructed hierarchies of power, privilege, and hegemony. The positivist framing of “science” and knowledge construction in research has led to the creation of a plethora of methods intentionally designed to counter western positivist notions of epistemology, science, etc. However, I posit that African axiological onto-epistemology does not exist nor was it articulated for the purpose of countering western positivist theories because it existed well before the western academy. However, Black/African diasporic peoples’ insistence on the use of African axiological onto-epistemology or any other form of indigenous knowledge systems will inherently serve as a counter by default yet not oppositionally. It is an alternative way to being without standing in opposition to westernized epistemology. As researchers, it will only serve us well to continue to center our ways of knowing (epistemology), being (ontology), and values (axiology) to maintain its presence in the academic discourses, not for its co-optations, or consumption but for de/colonization and collective healing. Our insistence on this aims to rehumanize and heal not only those of us whose ancestors endured colonialism,

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13 Define Global South (formerly referred to as “Third-world” or “Developing Nations”) and Global North (formerly referred to as “Developed Nations” or “First World Countries”)
attempted genocide, enslavement, and other forms of western violence, but heal and restore the land and earth while de/colonizing all the institutions infected by the violence of Euro-Western colonial imperialist systems and its residual effects. It, by default, can lead to the healing of a western world that has erroneously and superficial imagined themselves as superior. There cannot be any wellness in western folx who view their existence through a false and fictive lens that leads to delusions of grandeur with actual and physical effects.

The centering of Western Knowledge Systems (WKS) or Eurocentric perspectives as more “legitimate” more “rational,” and more “reasonable” (Chawane, 2016; Chilisa, 2010) has resulted in the marginalization of Indigenous Knowledges of people-groups who have been the subjects of colonization, enslavement, and imperialism, resulting in real tangible consequences and problems that end up impacting our earth and overall well-being (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008). For those of us who do not naturally fit into the western academy and its methods for creating and producing knowledge, we must search within and re-center the axiological onto-epistemological ways of being into our research discourses. Consequently, Afrocentrists, as stated in Mkabela (2005), “argue for pluralism in philosophical views without hierarchy. A fundamental aim of Afrocentricity is that all cultural centers must be respected” (p. 180). This is where I enter into the research.

I am advocating for what Armah (2006) refers to as the ‘Greatest African Values” whose principles are: (a) justice; (b) balance; and (c) reciprocity-- unlike the principles of profit and advantage which our western world is currently organized around (pp. 202-205). In a video-recorded lecture, Armah (nd) expresses that Black/African and African Diasporic people need to “identify the regenerative values and put them at the center of our conversations, behavior, and our institutions” in order to undo the violence, harm, and epistemicide endured (Our Awakening,
nd). This is me identifying these regenerative values and performing and centering my people’s way of being.

Although I cannot claim that all aspects of this research study fully and completely embody an African axiological onto-epistemological ethnosophical orientation, there are aspects of it threaded throughout. This will most likely be seen through the lens I use to analyze the data, as well as in the methods I choose to apply to capture the voices of my participants.

**Drawing on Black Feminisms**

Black Feminisms have gifted the world with new and fresh ways to examine the world, and the social ills that limit us from our full and complete human selves. When the Combahee River Collective (CRC) (1974/7) released their statement in the 1970s, it came at a time when Black/African diasporic womxn, and in their words, “Third World Women” were grappling with the meaning of their experiences as Black or Third World womxn in a nation and nations with a history of violence against our very existence. Our positions as Black and womxn is/was masculinized in the white imagination. Rooted in the historicism of slavery, there was a blending of Black gender that was playing out that paved the way for all the many ways Black womxn’s bodies were imagined (James, 2013, pp. 125-126). The womxn in the CRC referred to this phenomenon as “interlocking oppressions,” while others have called it “double jeopardy” (Collins, 2000) and “intersectionality” (Crenshaw, 1990). Black womxn’s proximity to interlocking oppressions and angles to possible points of inquiry makes for a unique and critical lens of inquiry and analysis of our experiences as marginalized beings. It is a position that cannot be spoken to unless one sits at that vantage point.

There is a mosaic--tapestry of forms of Black feminisms (Evans Winter, 2019; Carruthers, 2016), however there is at least one uniting principle they all hold; understanding the
interlocking oppressions that frame the experiences of lives in this world, and therefore the importance of centering the voices of Black womxn, our narratives, our ways of being, knowing, interpreting, and analyzing the world. This also means it is vital for us to tell these stories.

Black womxn like my grandmother, would tell you that they are not feminists, and not in the sense that they do not believe in the values that frame it, but because they do not believe in the values that frame it—the white women values that frame it—the white women values that strategically and intentionally left Black womxn and other womxn of color like my grandmother out of the discourse.

Evans Winters (2019) presents two concepts that situates her Black feminist framing when conducting qualitative research. These two concepts of “Daughtering” and “Mothering” or “Mother-speak” call for us to bring our full human selves into the research field. Specifically speaking, Evans-Winters describes “daughtering” as methodology as: 1) A worldview and way of being and navigating the social world that shapes your state of mind; 2) Teaches us how to love those who may have harmed us, and loathe those who may have harmed those we have loved; 3) Compels us to respect and seek to understand how the “extra-ordinary, the magical, the wonderful, and even the strange come out of the ordinary and familiar” (Thiongo, 2008, p. 758); 4) Demands that you think for yourself, and speak up for yourself and other people’s daughters; 5) It informs our methodologies, inquiry and analysis; 6) It does not require the use of Academic self vs. cultural self, “… a “mother-speak” as, “…an intuition or internal voice--derived from socialization, formal learning, and biological instinct,” (2019, p. 137).

Aligning the mother spirit with the ethnographic gaze (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 103), is essentially how this study will be approached. Embracing all my sensibilities, and senses to
engage in the research and analysis guided me. My de/colonial Black Feminist lens will help shape the Constructivist Grounded Theory approach for the dissertation.

**Drawing on Grounded Theory**

Glaser and Strauss (1967) initially developed the grounded theory approach as a counter to the extreme positivism that framed most of the social science research (Suddaby, 2006). The theory developed out of their research work studying death and illness. In their development of the methodology, they sought to accomplish three goals: a) to offer the rationale for a theory that would be grounded and generated, developed and interpreted from the data collected, b) to explain the reasoning for grounded theory and the specifics associated with the methodology, and c) to legitimize qualitative research amongst sociologists during a time when it was becoming increasingly devalued because it was not believed to be “capable of verification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 275). Grounded theory is both a method and a theory.

Grounded theory unsettled the positivist arguments that suggested that qualitative research practices were an aside to the more “robust” and more “scientific” quantitative practices, placing both in an oppositional and binary position. Positioning the different methods as binaries, misses the point of their existence as two necessary tools in research to help researchers answer questions we have about our society, science and human existence. Grounded theory is best suited for researchers looking to study “…individual processes, interpersonal relations and the reciprocal effects between individual and larger social processes…” (Charmaz, 1995). Charmaz (1995) continues to add some examples of these individual processes, interpersonal relations, and individual and larger social processes such as “motivation, personal experiences, emotions, identity, attraction, prejudice, and interpersonal cooperation and conflict” (p. 29).
Grounded theory is much like other forms of qualitative methodologies. One of the key features of grounded theory is that, with systematic data collection and analysis, it aims to develop a theory from the evolving data that the researcher is continuously interacting with (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The cyclical and iterative nature of grounded theory means that the researcher is collecting multiple forms of data up until they have reached a place of saturation and use multiple and constant comparisons to build validity (Kolb, 2012). In many ways, grounded theory is a methodology for studying processes as well as in constant process (Charmaz, 2009), which explains its cyclical attributes.

What sets grounded theory apart from other qualitative methods include its approach that requires the researchers to: a) simultaneously engage in the data collection and analysis phases of the research; b) locating and creating codes and categories developed from the data and not from “preconceived hypotheses;” c) developing middle-range theories to explain behaviors and processes; d) using memoing and analytic notes to help explain categories and build on analysis; e) theoretical sampling—which is the process used for theory construction; and f) delaying the literature review” (Charmaz, 1995, p. 28). Even though grounded theory is widely used, and the steps may seem simple, there is still a lack of clarity with the method’s processes because of the number of ambiguous studies associated with the method. Because the method is non-linear, the researcher must be patient with the process and flexible with the time needed to gather data.

**Autoethnographic Spirit**

There is a spirit of autoethnography and storytelling that hoovers around the heart of this dissertation. It is a spirit that is enhancing kɛ le atsui—“the heart of” and the heart of this work. This spirit of autoethnography that I enter into this dissertation is grounded in the sentiments that hold our

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14 kɛ le atsui—in the literal translation in the Ga language for “the heart of”
personhood—the personal—as being inextricably linked to the history, power, and politics that impact our lives. As defined by Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) “Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (p. 273), and an autobiographical genre of writing and research that makes room for a multi-layered stream of consciousness, linking the individual experiences to the larger cultural experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 733).

Who be best to tell my stories—our *noir* stories? Autoethnography, as a method, is both product and process (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 273), that challenges many conventions and norms of research protocols about what is traditionally considered as “professional” and “objective,” and who gets to tell these stories. It is from this place where I enter. By adopting an autoethnographic hue, it has allowed me to insert myself, my voice, and ways of being into the research which challenges what Holt (2003) reminds us about the “silent authorship” that sanitizes the researcher’s voice from inclusion and entry into the process, product, and presentation of the research findings (Holt, 2003, p. 2). As scholars like Ellis and Bochner (2006) contends, autoethnography helps the researcher interrupt these conventional methods and norms that insist on and “foster hierarchy and division” (p. 436), that is grounded in the dichotomous sensibilities of white patriarchal dominant culture.

In the tenor of Denzin (2006), “I seek a writing form that enacts a methodology of the heart, a form that listens to the heart, knowing that ‘stories are the truths that won’t stand still’” (171). In writing from the heart, we learn how to love, to forgive, to heal, and to move forward” (p. 334). We make visible our love, desires, longings, ruminations, contradictions, confusions,
clarity, and reflections to draw the readers into our lives, our problems, our hopes, that they may peer into our narratives--feel deeply, and be moved to action (Ellis & Bochner, 2006).

**Positionality**

The exchange between the observer and observed is a dialectical interaction whereby the observer is continuously in a mutual exchange with the participants and the data. There are several humanizing methodologies researchers could embrace to enter their research and understand the world. One of these methods is not more superior to any other. Any scholar who would frame or position any one methodology in that manner would be engaging in a methodological superiority and epistemicide. However, what constructivist grounded theory with an African-diasporic centered de/colonial Black Feminist lens and framework does is make room for multiple ways of being, thinking and understanding their world. It recognizes power, history, and the ways it manifests in micro and macro means within our lived individual and collective experiences.

Therefore, grounding this dissertation in an African-diasporic centered de/colonial Black Feminist praxis and lens means that although conventional ethnographic thought might tell us we should write our stories in the past--avoiding the “ethnographic present,” I reach into my ancestral cultural-self and often move in and out of writing in the present in an effort to speak directly to the readers--past, present, and future readers. It is also recognizing that, in my father’s native language, Ga, there are some verbs that always stay in the present tense--but rather it is the individual--the pronoun--moving in place and time. It *be* a time traveler of sorts. For example, *maba* (*I will come*), *miba* (*I came*), *miiba* (*I am coming*)--*ba*, meaning “to come” while, in just those three examples, I move in place--time traveling *to come*. 
As I am writing and narrating our--Black educators’ stories into this written time capsule, I want to also acknowledge the experiences my body traveled through to make this happen. I was not warned of this prior to the start of this project, during the project, or at any point for that matter. Here I am, a Black womxn, former K-12 classroom teacher researching the experiences of Black educators organizing and advocating for racial justice in their schools, district, and/or community--an experience I am so deeply and intimately connected with. As I parsed through the interview data, (re)membered the positioning of my participants’ body language, each sweat drop that formed, greeted and labored against their foreheads, and bore witness to the humming and silence of their breath, we connected deeply. As the actual tool of research, I was taking this in--(re)experiencing those moments with my participants and data. Each “Mhmm” I uttered, was not only spoken to affirm them, or mimic what we were taught in our early years as “Signs of a Good Listener”. No. These “Mhmmms” were a resonance of the rhythmic tone that translated into, “I see you,” “I feel you,” “I know what you are feeling”.

It would serve those of you doing this kind of heart-research work, to understand the trauma our own bodies will experience. There were times I could not sleep--times when all I wanted to do was sleep--times when I would experience a sudden rush of emotions, then paralysis--then only want to sleep--shortness of breath that would lead to a huge lump in my throat, or the turning of my stomach as if I was on a rollercoaster, and even sometimes actual real tears. This was my body communicating to me as I (re)traumatized myself through the listening and relistening, the reading and re-reading of the data. Our bodies know what is unnatural, harmful, and dehumanizing and as a result, responds.

My account of this process will be instructive and educative for those who are coming behind me. For those doing this kind of heart-work, this kind of trauma and embodied reaction
may or may not happen to you. If it does not, great! If this does happen, recognizing it will be helpful in completing the task. Digging deeper into understanding: How do I attempt to make sense of and process what is happening to my body, and emotional and psychological well-being? What are the signs my body is communicating? What can I do to process these emotions, feelings, and often physical pain? Holding these questions may/will be effective moving forward.

**Participant Selection**

The participants chosen for the research were selected because of their involvement and participation with different educational organizing spaces as Black educators. There were three factors that mattered most with my site selection: (a) it was an organization or group that included educators who worked in public schools; (b) that the group or organization was intentionally organizing around racial and social justice in education, (c) and had a multi-ethnoracial membership body that also included Black educators as part of their membership.

**Context**

HOPE was a collective of in-service and pre-service educators, unionists, parents, and education advocates who had been meeting since May 2015 until May 2018. The group formed to help members of HOPE discuss educational issues and assist parent groups to make plans for how they would push back against the overemphasis on high-stakes standardized tests. Part of their work also included educating families about “opt-out”; a movement of parents refusing the high stakes standardized tests for their children so that their schools would not be judged harshly for poor performance as measured by these tests. Because its members come from all over the state, HOPE often met centrally in Trenton, and regionally in the northern, central, and southern parts of the state.
In early 2017, at the persistence from one of the parent members, HOPE made a collective decision to restructure how they addressed issues in public education. Up until that point, HOPE had become a space for members to engage in dialogue over complex issues in education. As part of the restructuring, members decided to shift from a dialogue-only group to one that addresses a problem within public education. The group, using dialogue and consensus, decided creating a Critical PAR project around a central problem within public education was their next stage in HOPE’s evolution.

Unfortunately, the decision to transform HOPE’s purpose never happened. This decision also came at the heels of the lead staff member moving from his position into a different role that would pull him away from HOPE. However, the beauty of HOPE’s design and what it created was the relational connection that people had to other organizing spaces throughout the state. This meant it was not difficult to locate sub-sites that existed within the structure of HOPE. As mentioned, many HOPE members were actively organizing in their own local association/unions, or groups they formed or had become part of. Because many of them had already agreed to participate in the research as a member of HOPE, it was not difficult to locate new sites and additional participants.

Characteristic of qualitative research, I used a nonprobabilistic sampling strategy known as purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015)--more specifically, I applied two sampling approaches referred to as convenience sampling and the “snowball,” “chain,” or “network” sampling method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because of my proximity to BrED Freedom School and HOPE, the convenience sampling approach was applied in order to recruit participants from BrED Freedom School and Lenape Town Education Association (LTEA), while I had to use the network sampling method for members of EFFORT. I was not as familiar with the members of EFFORT
and needed someone who was closer to the members than I was to connect me. As long as the potential participant fit the criteria of being: a) in a group or organization that included educators who worked in public schools; b) that the group or organization was intentionally organizing around racial and social justice in education; and c) had a multi-ethnoracial membership body that also included Black educators, then they fit the criteria. My decision to focus on Black educators is situated in my own personal experience as a Black womxn who is a former public school educator, who also organizes within multi-ethnoracial spaces for racial and social justice education. Additionally, we know from research that Black educators are being pushed out of education and the classroom (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015), for various different reasons, while at the same time, teachers of color are actively being recruited (Dillard, 1994; Flores et. al, 2007; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Gist, Bianco, & Lynn, 2019)

Site Selection

In order to conduct this research study, I selected three educational organizing communities and spaces. One of these organizing spaces, EFFORT, was located in a mid-size suburban community in the northern part of New Jersey. I refer to this community as Evergreen Township. Evergreen is about 24 square miles and has a population of a little more than 70,000 people. With a median household income of approximately $100,000, and median home values of about $286,000, there are about 6.5 percent of the population who lives below the federal poverty line. Of the more 70,000 people, 70 percent are white, seven percent are Latinx/Hispanic, six percent at Black, 13 percent Asian, and three percent document being two or more races. Fifty-six percent of the residents have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher.

The next site was a group within an organization in the northern part of New Jersey. This town is referred to as Lenape Town. In Lenape Town, there was the Lenape Town Education
Association Community Conversations. This group was located in a town of about 36,000 people on about 10.5 square miles of land. With median household incomes at about $67,000, 12 percent of the residents in Lenape Town live below the poverty line. The residents of Lenape Town have median home values at $160,000. Of these residents, 34 percent of them are white, 32 percent are Latinx/Hispanic, 25 percent are Black, 7 percent are Asian, and two percent documented being two or more races. The census reports that just 20 percent of the residents have achieved a bachelor’s degree or higher.

The third organization was the BrED Freedom School. This organization is located in the combined East Denwood-Bridgeville communities in the southern part of New Jersey. The two communities are separate townships but function as one school district; East Denwood having a population of approximately 16,500 people across 2.8 square miles with 59 percent of residents being white, 26 percent Black, seven percent are Latinx/Hispanic, five percent Asian, and 4 percent two or more races. Of the nearly 17,000 residents, approximately 11 percent of the residents fall below the poverty line. In contrast, the median household income is about $121,000 and median home values are at $550,000; 69 percent have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher.

On the other side of border is Bridgeville--on 3.9 square miles of land has a population of approximately 25,000 residents. Fifty-two percent of the residents in Bridgeville are white, 34 percent are Black, eight percent are Latinx/Hispanic, three percent Asian, one percent listed as “other,” and three percent two or more races. In Bridgeville, approximately five percent of the residents live below the poverty line, while the median household income is about $126,000 and median home values at approximately $480,000. Of the approximately 25,000 residents, 63 percent have attained a bachelor’s degree or higher. Like many similar communities around the nation, both of these towns take great pride that their communities are multi-ethnoracial and
socio-economically mixed. When the research started, BrED Freedom School had already been formed for approximately two years.

All three of these sites were chosen because of the work that members of these organizations do and their commitment to organizing around racial and social justice in education and their schools.

**Site Access**

Gaining access to these sites (BrED Freedom School, EFFORT, and Lenape Town Education Association--Community Conversations) did not pose a problem. Because of my close relationship with all three organizations, the participants and members were open to assisting me with the research. As an active participant of the HOPE group, I had already developed a sustained relationship with all the attendees. All attendees were made aware of the dissertation study and asked if they would like to be participants. Two of the Black members of BrED Freedom School were asked and agreed. All Black members of EFFORT were presented with the opportunity; three out of six responded and agreed. Because the participants from the Lenape Town Education Association had already agreed to participate because of their involvement with HOPE, they agreed to continue with the research. Therefore, their participation went uninterrupted. The Lenape Town participant (Faith) was initially the only Black person who attended the racial and social justice meetings she had organized for her community and was the only consistent Black member, which meant, there were no other committed Black members to invite into the study.

**Participants**

The participants for this study were recruited using a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling (Creswell, 2013a; 2013b). Even though I was no longer studying the
phenomena of HOPE, all of the participants were either members of HOPE or connected to someone in HOPE. Because the design of HOPE rested on bringing people together from all different areas of the state--all being people who were already organizing in their own communities--this afforded me an opportunity to maintain the integrity of my research plan while looking at the experiences of these educators in their local organizing.

Instead of looking at members from various different racial, ethnic, socio-economics etc., backgrounds who shared a common group or organization and a common group experience, I narrowed my focus to examine the experiences of Black educators who worked in four very distinct communities and three organizations - *Evergreen, and Lenape Town in North Jersey;* and the East Denwood--Bridgeville school district, and South Denwood in South Jersey - and were organizing or attempting to organize within multi-ethnoracial groups that shared an affinity to working towards racial and social justice in their districts and/or community.

The first participant, Faith is an 8th grade social studies teacher of 16 years teaching, is the first Black president of her local community association, and a member of the Lenape Town Education Association Community Conversations. At the time of the initial interview, Faith was 39 years old. Eloquence, who is the second participant, is a high school Chemistry teacher who has been teaching for seven years and is a member of BrED Freedom School. At the time of the initial interview, Eloquence was 33 years old. Participant three, Phil is a high school English teacher and has been teaching for 25 years. He is a founding member of BrED Freedom School. At the time of the initial interview, Phil was 49 years old. The fourth participant, Lauryn is a middle school technology teacher for 15 years and is a member of EFFORT. At the time of the initial interview, Lauryn was 44 years old. Maria, the fifth participant is a learning disabilities teacher consultant on her school’s child study team. She has been in education for 25 years and is
a member of EFFORT. At the time of the interview, Maria was 53 years old. The sixth participant, Cookie is a school psychologist who has been in education for six years and is a member of EFFORT. At the time of the initial interview, Cookie was 48 years old.

Black educators in New Jersey make up seven percent of the education profession, which is also reflective of National statistics on the teaching profession. (Boser, 2014). Since Brown vs. Board of Education, our nation has seen a persistent drop in the number of Black teachers who enter the profession as well as those who stay in the profession. This problem has called for organizations such as the Journey for Justice Alliance (J4J) to propel their “Stop the Attack on Black Teachers” campaign16, and Black Lives Matter At School Week of Action, to add “Hire more Black teachers” as part of platform demands17. With this in mind, it would come as no surprise that my pool of participants would be limited to hone in on the voices of Black educators who have been marginalized. This did not prove to be a problem. Two of the original participants from the initial research plan agreed to continue their participation in the study to explore their experiences within their own organizing spaces.

The study lasted approximately 10-months. During this time, the participants carried on with their regular activities as usual.

**BrED (Bridgeville/East Denwood) Freedom School Participants--ELOQUENCE AND PHIL.** For the purpose of this study, the participants in BrED Freedom School will be referred to as BrED Freedom School participants or by their pseudonyms. BrED Freedom School

16 The Journey for Justice Alliance is an alliance of Black-led parent organizations that are organizing around six organizational platforms. One of their platforms addresses the perpetual decline in Black educators, which they refer to as an attack. [https://j4jalliance.com/projects/](https://j4jalliance.com/projects/)
17 Black Lives Matter At School is a national coalition organizing for racial justice in education. As part of their organizing, people are encouraged to participate in the annual week of action during the first week of February each year. The movement demands are: 1) End “zero tolerance” discipline, and implement restorative justice; 2) Hire more black teachers; 3) Mandate black history and ethnic studies in K-12 curriculum; and 4) Fund counselors not cops. [https://blacklivesmatteratschool.com/about/](https://blacklivesmatteratschool.com/about/)
is made up of six active dues paying members. BrED Freedom School is a multi-ethnoracial organization of members. There is one Black womxn, two Black men (both research participants), one white womxn, and two white men--all of whom are current teachers.

BrED Freedom School was started in 2016 after an incident involving Black youth from the two towns who were targeted and abused by the police after heading home from the 4th of July fireworks show in the town. At the time when the organization was first started, it consisted of three Black womxn, two Black men, one Asian/Filipinx (who is no longer associated with the organization), and three white men (of whom one is no longer associated with the organization). Out of the nine members, two of the Black womxn were parents in the Bridgeville/East Denwood School District; the other Black womxn is a former educator and alumnus of the district. Of the two Black men, one was an educator in the district while the other was an alumnus of East Denwood Bridgeville School District and an educator in South Denwood. The three remaining members were white men--all in education. Two were educators in East Denwood Bridgeville School District and one was a union organizer--who is no longer associated with the organization.

**EFFORT Participants--MARIA, COOKIE, and LAURYN.** The members of Equality For the Future of Our Readiness Tomorrow (EFFORT) are educators and staff within the *Evergreen Public School District. They were brought together as a group because their union president, a white man in his mid 40s, had been approached by Black members about issues of racism within the district. I first met the new president during the summer of 2017, after being introduced to him by Allen, a full-time union staff worker who was also a white man in his mid to late 40s. In my first meeting with the president, he brought with him Lauryn, a mixed Black womxn educator who is African American and Korean in her mid-40s. EFFORT became a space
open to a multi-ethnoracial group of educators and staff from the Evergreen School District, although most of the people who attended were Black.

After having spent several months with the group, and after having the initial research site, HOPE fall apart, I asked the Black members of EFFORT if they would be interested in joining my research study. There were three people who responded to my request to become part of the research study.

**Lenape Town Education Association Community Conversations--FAITH.** The Lenape Town Education Association Community Conversations is a small sub-group of the Lenape Town Education Association. The lead organizer and member, Faith was one of the original participants who was involved with HOPE and wanted to continue with the research. Faith has a small group of members who are helping and supporting this work.

**Recruitment Plan**

I individually asked potential study participants if they would be interested in the dissertation study. This was done to get a general sense of who may be interested in participating in the study. Once approximately five people expressed an interest in volunteering, I disseminated a formal invitation via email to interested participants only. All participants were asked to complete an IRB consent form before moving forward with the research.

**Table #1 Participant Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Group/Organization/ Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Lenape Town Education Association Community Conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eloquence</td>
<td>Black/Nigerian American</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>BrED Freedom School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>BrED Freedom School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauryn</td>
<td>Black/African American and Korean</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>EFFORT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

In this section of the paper, I will discuss the kind of data collected, the methods I initially planned to use for data collection, and how my initial plans changed during the progression of the research. Because of the qualitative nature of the study, the approaches I chose to use included interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis. This qualitative leaning is also characteristic of qualitative inquiry with a tradition of Black Feminist and African/African diasporic epistemologies, axiologies, and ontologies. I would be misleading my readers if I did not acknowledge that my landing upon this understanding came long ago and naturally.

It is also important to note my role within the study as a participant observer. This contextual research study used an interpretive qualitative approach to data collection design. The qualitative data was collected in the form of participants’ interviews, focus groups, observations, and documents. In my proposal, I indicated I would also include journal writings from the participants. This would have been necessary for the study as the participants were actually planning to complete a Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) project that was proposed. However, the only journal that was kept was the journal I maintained to jot down notes and memos during the research process. The participants did not maintain a journal because the CPAR project was no longer a central part of the study.

In what started as a research study to understand the ecological threads that brought HOPE participants together around joint action, all fell apart. However, the beauty of HOPE was
that members are active organizers in different locations around the state, which meant I would still have access to participants.

The plan was to conduct three cycles of data collection. However, I found that the data from the first two cycles of data collection were sufficient and did not require a third cycle of data collection. I conducted at least two rounds of interviews for four out of the six participants, and one focus group with all the participants together. For participants Maria and Cookie, because of their close working relationship, I was able to capture an informal focus group conversation between the two of them.

**Interviews.** Like many qualitative approaches, the interviews for this study aimed to capture the voices and stories of the people connected to the research. The purpose of the interviews is to develop an understanding of the lived experiences and the meanings people make from their experiences (Seidman, 2006). The interviews were scheduled between November 2017 and September 2018. They were intended to help me discover what experiences the participants had in schools, and impact the organizing spaces had on the participants’ as well as how they navigated through conflict together in these spaces.

I conducted two 60-90 minute individual semi-structured interviews with each of the study’s participants. In the case of a few of the participants, a third interview was conducted to follow up on unanswered questions and clarifications. The first two interviews consisted of a total of **eight** open ended questions with additional probing questions to build on their responses. The third interview was structured around questions constructed and designed based on the participants’ responses to the first two interviews.

Additionally, informal follow-up conversations were conducted with all the participants to review the transcripts and codes with the participants. The follow-up conversations did not
feature any formal structured question protocol; the participants were simply asked for their feedback or any additions they would like to add. Although Glaser and Strauss (1967) would say member checks is not an approach they would endorse, it is characteristic of research methodologies that carry a participatory de/colonial and/or feminist lens.

The interview protocol took on a semi-structured approach with a protocol that guided the interview, but left room for questions in the moment (Watt, 2007). I recorded the participants’ responses using a digital audio recorder and transcribed them using a combination of Temi, a computer-based transcription tool, and human technology.

**Focus Groups.** I conducted one 90 minute focus group with participants during the research to facilitate collective reflection, and to uncover what, if any, collective experiences they may have had in their respective organizing spaces and experiences (Kitzinger, 1994; 1995; Wilkinson, 1998; 1999; Finch and Lewis, 2003; Creswell, 2012). The focus group interview included a total of five open-ended questions to help facilitate rich dialogue. The participants opened up by sharing who they were and where they were from. Although I would have preferred to have had an in-person focus group, that was not practical because of the distance in where the participants all lived. Therefore, Zoom, a video conferencing platform was used to conduct and record the focus group.

The second focus group was an informal conversation that developed spontaneously because of the relationship two of the participants had with each other. This is not uncommon for practices found in people from Africa or the African Diaspora and other indigenous knowledge systems from different Indigenous groups all over the world (Chilisa, 2011; Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013). The questions for this informal conversation were not
planned. In fact, the participants posed questions to each other. This particular conversation was conducted in person and recorded by digital audio recorder.

**Observations.** During individual and focus group interviews, I recorded and took field notes of the participants, the observations included what I could observe their body language, facial expressions, appearance, and what they wore. Observational data, as a qualitative research method, allows the researcher to gather firsthand information at the moment (Creswell, 2012b). The behavior, body language, gestures, bodily tone, facial expressions, clothing, and other non-verbal indications of the study’s subjects were documented immediately following the meetings, interviews, and focus groups (Polkinghorne, 2005). Initially, it felt awkward and distracting to take notes while the participants were sharing. Consequently, I opted to jot down a few notes after leaving the interview space.

**Documents.** Document analysis is often used in conjunction with other approaches to help build a deeper epistemological and ontological knowledge around a phenomenon (Kolb, 2012; Bowen, 2009). According to Bowen (2009), document analysis requires researchers to examine data for interpretation in order to draw out meanings, understandings, and build empirical knowledge (p. 27). Some types of documents used for qualitative research practices range from memos, journals, essays, meeting minutes and agendas, letters, emails, brochures, etc. These documents are used as “social facts” that are documentation of a community or an individual’s interaction with the real world.

As part of the data collected, I used the different groups’ flyers, meeting agendas, sine emails, and/or notes as data points for the triangulation of the document data with the focus groups, interviews and observational data.
The documents were used to explore how the educators were advocating on behalf of themselves as well as Black and Brown students in their care.

**Reflexive Journal.** As part of my methodology, I used journaling and memoing during the interviews, and focus group. These memos were documented immediately after the interviews, focus groups, and as I listened to the audio recordings of the interviews and focus groups. I had a total number of 130 pages of notes, 54 posits, and five doodled images to help me process my ideas and analyze what was emerging from the data. Because constructivist grounded theory dictates that the researcher explore the literature after data collection, and as part of the analysis process, I frequently memoed while reading the literature in order to tie the literature to the findings from the research study and make sense of my findings.

I also journaled dreams that I had after immersing myself in the data, particularly if these dreams addressed specific aspects and themes of the research. It is mostly through my dreams that directed the focus on the theme of rehumanization as it manifested in the form of a moth in my dreams.

**Data Analysis**

This chapter began by situating the de/colonial Black Feminist lens and approaches I would employ while conducting the research. When conducting qualitative research, the analysis of the data begins even as the researcher is transcribing interviews and through the memoing and writing of field notes (Charmaz, 1996). By doing this, I became more familiar with my participants, their stories, and their data through a de/colonial Black Feminist lens.

Using a de/colonial (Chilisa, 2010; Bhattacharya, 2009; 2015; 2016; Boveda & Bhattacharya, 2019) constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 1995; Creswell, 2012, p. 84; Bhattacharya, 2017), I went through all the data (interview and focus group transcripts,
observations, and documents) to locate codes, concepts, categories, and themes in the participant responses. As stated in Creswell (2012) constructivist grounded theory, as advocated for by Charmaz “includes emphasizing diverse local worlds, multiple realities, and the complexities of particular worlds, views, and actions” (p. 87). Although the nature of the approach makes room for multiple views, I remain intentional about the lenses I brought to the research--the researcher as the research tool and instrument. This analytical approach is particularly useful because it aligns with the participatory, and collaborative sensibilities that I ascribe to.

Upon charting out their codes, I hung up all the chart papers and examined each participant’s codes and conducted a cross comparison between the codes, looking for common threads. All codes from all participants were charted out into my notebook therefore creating a codebook--making sure not to duplicate codes. The questions I used to help create the categories and themes were: What are the data communicating? What seems to be the common message across the participants? As I examined the data, I identified codes and categories that I conceived from the data. Upon piecing together implicit meanings about categories that were identified, I used this new information to make meaning and develop a theory (Creswell, 2013).

These questions helped me direct what I wanted to focus on. It was clear from the data that the common threads were the following: a) identity (individual, group, and community); b) barriers (individual, group and systemic/institutional); c) impact (individual, group, and systemic/institutional); and d) rehumanization (individual, group, and systemic/institutional).

To help me, I went through the interview data first to get a sense of the overall messages that were expressed. This step, Charmaz (2006) refers to as the initial coding phase. Here is where the researcher takes the interview data and by naming and labeling every word, phrase, or line, moves the data from concrete statements to analytic interpretations that help capture the
researcher’s analysis (Charmaz, 2006, p. 45). Using my list of initial codes, I then took those key ideas and codes and charted them out by participants on large chart paper. This allowed me to visualize across participants what recurring themes, ideas, concepts, were showing up across participants. Charting out the codes based on participants allowed me to see all the initial codes across participants, but also revealed which codes were appearing most frequently for each participant.

The next phase in this process is known as “theoretical” or “focus coding”. Here is where I identified what I perceived as key ideas, concepts, and codes based on their frequency of appearance across participants. Upon reviewing the codes across participants, I looked for common threads between the participants. This is where I took an orange marker to circle common and similar concepts across participants. Taking these common concepts and themes across participants and brainstorming what messages the codes were being communicating, I was able to narrow these concepts and themes down and chunk them with common concepts. Out of that brainstorming, two categories were clear to me; the identities of the participants, and the barriers that the participants were experiencing.

The third category was inspired by a dream I had after reading Evans Winters’ book Black Feminisms in Qualitative Research (2019) which speaks to the ways in which qualitative research methods can be built around Black Feminist sensibilities and a concept she describes as “mothering” and “mother speak” Mother speak is our intuition, our internal voice--that voice we have been socialized into, and our biological instincts which frame our ways of knowing, being, and even how we protect (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 71). This dream including three very simple elements: 1) a moth flying around in the abyss; 2) a full moon; and 3) the word mothering, but
written out as moth-ering. In the morning, immediately following the dream, I documented what was dreamt, and looked up the symbolism of the moth, and moon.

There is a regenerative essence to both moth and the moon. The moth, similar to its more aesthetically attractive cousin, the butterfly represents the cyclical and regenerative aspects to life. Beginning life as an egg, larva or caterpillar stage, then pupa, and finally the adult. And unlike its cousin, the moth is nocturnal; taking flight beneath its mother light, the moon. The moon, representing our light, intuition, our instincts, and our ability to give life and newness. As the Black educators, and all people for that matter, continue to find new and more righteous ways of being in the world, while also making ourselves whole again, and liberating ourselves from dehumanization, it is we are left with parsing out the ways in which we can all collectively rehumanize ourselves. This all led me to the major category of rehumanization.

After the initial and theoretical coding phases, I shared the transcripts and my initial codes from the individual interviews with my participants. During this session, we reviewed the transcripts and they were asked for their insight and input, and what was showing up for them. One of the participants asked if anyone discussed impact of their personal experiences in their interviews. This is how I co-identified the fourth category of impact.

**Memoing and Reflexive Writing**

The practice of memoing is crucial to all styles of the grounded theory process. It proves to be instrumental as the researcher is working through the data and locating codes, concepts, categories and constructing themes from the data. My memoing processes were mostly non-linear and incremental. After each interview, I would jot down a few notes. Some of them were more detailed, others were more general and short or in the form of questions, short phrases, and directions to explore more ideas. This was mainly done to get my initial thoughts out and on
paper. At times the memos would be written on post-its, sheets of paper to chart out ideas, drawn-out as diagrams—whatever would help me get the ideas out of my head and onto the paper. As I was also working through the data, I would use memoing to process my initial analyses, musings, and thoughts. Charmaz (2006) emphasizes the importance of memoing because it is a useful tool for the early analysis of the data and codes (p. 72). The act of memoing during the research process is dialectical in the sense that the research is in constant and growing dialogue with the data which helps the researcher enter in the cycle of continuously refining their analysis of the data.

This process helped me get as many initial ideas that came to mind even if it meant that the ideas were later abandoned or absorbed into newer more evolved ideas, codes, concepts, categories, or themes.

**Focus Groups and Interviews**

As part of the data analysis plan for the focus groups and interviews, I began by reading and re-reading all of the transcripts and meeting notes and agenda. Using constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), I documented all notes in the form of annotations, doodles, and memos to create codes and located patterns in the tensions between group members, and their institutions, and how they identified. Once I completed reading of the transcripts and established the initial codes, I created a chart paper for each participant with their names placed on them. Then I listed all the codes that I identified and annotated on their transcripts.

Upon completion of the codebook, I entered the codes into Dedoose, a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) computer software tool. All files were uploaded to the main dashboard for each participant using their pseudonym. Once uploaded into Dedoose, inserted all the codes and
placed the data for each participant into media/documents section where I could search for references and all coded texts when needed.

**Documents**

Like the focus group and interview data, I read and reread all the documents (flyers, meeting minutes, and/or agenda) for clarity and understanding. Using memoing, I will look at all the notes to locate the codes, themes, and constructs from the documents.

**Protection of Participants**

**Confidentiality**

For this study, I kept all the written texts from the participants confidential in a secure location. All identifiers such as the participants’ names, sex, gender expression, teaching location and/or school name were removed from the written texts and documents. In the case of the participant’s preference, I used pseudonyms of their choosing. The chosen pseudonyms were used throughout the study for data analysis and writing. By doing this, I ensured that I would be the only person who was aware of the participants’ identities. All participants were assured that all information collected would not be shared.

**Risks and Benefits**

This project has minimal risks. There is a possibility that the participants may get emotional about recall of their own experiences growing up, discussing social issues such as racial, educational, and labor justice. These risks will be minimized by checking-in with the participants and referring them services to help support any emotional or mental health. The benefits of the project for participants is that their contribution will be educative and help us to build on the body of transformative and expansive activity learning theories, and to understand
the learning process, what happens within these informal learning environments and contact zones.

**Trustworthiness and Dependability**

To help build the trustworthiness of the study, I used triangulation methods and systematic reflections via memoing (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Triangulation is the use of multiple investigators, data sources, and methods to confirm the emerging findings from the principal investigator” (Merriam, 1995). Using triangulation methods can lead to more dependability, consistency, as well as internal validity.

As another approach to building trustworthiness, I used reflexive journal writing (Ortlipp, 2008; Berger, 2015; Orange, 2016). This particular tool was used to clarify my role within the study and as well as the positionalities that have shaped my interpretations and approaches to the study (Merriam, 1998). Reflexive journal allowed me to document reflections, ideas, biases, and understanding as I progressed and processed through the research stages. This practice ultimately makes the learnings and understanding more transparent and open for review, and critique.

Study participants were also able to cross check the interview transcripts, and documents analyses that were constructed. Known as member checking, this offered the participants an opportunity to “judge the accuracy and credibility of the account and results,” (Creswell, 2013a, p. 252.). Not only is this a participatory approach to engaging the participants in the research, but this is a way to establish credibility and provide alternative language (Creswell, 2013a) and “critical observations or interpretations” (Stake, 1995).

To ensure dependability, I used qualitative research approaches such as intercoder reliability and agreement strategies, creating detailed field notes, quality tape recording and note taking and memo protocols. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that “reliability” is
problematic due to its positivist framing and principles. Human beings and their learning environments are not static institutions; they are always changing and dynamic. Instead, researchers suggest we shift toward a language of “dependability” or “consistency” (Lincoln & Guba & Pilotta 1985; Lincoln & Guba, 1989; Merriam, 1995).

**Researcher Positionality**

Our herstories/histories--our ontological, axiological, and epistemological geographies are not neutral, nor can we separate them out from what makes us who we are. We cannot disappear our *mamastories* and *mama mama’s stories* whose DNA sequences latch onto the host like a suckling infant hug their future existence with the hopes of surviving what Hartman (2007) refers to as the afterlife or the afterlives of slavery (Hartman, 2016, p. 166). We always survive each afterlife. It should go without saying that our experiences, horr-stories and herstories, perceptions, and ways of knowing frame how we exist, live and interpret the world we live in, yet it must be stated (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010; Evans-Winters, 2019). These geographies inform who we are, our thoughts, opinions, analyses, and how we navigate, interpret and interact in a world of evolving complexities.

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18 Saidiya Hartman refers to the afterlife of slavery as being the situatedness and peculiar state and ways in which Black folx bodies (2007; 2016) and, wombs are used (2016, p. 166) in what she calls the afterlife. She states (2007), “Black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery” (p. 6).
In proceeding with the data collection, I took on the role that landed on the continuum of participant observer, with full membership (Bhattacharya, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) in one of the groups (BrED Freedom School), to passive participant in another (EFFORT), and the last group (LTEA Community Conversations). I entered the research site as an observer, often fluctuating and moving in and out of these roles. This allowed me to conduct the study as an insider who not only observed and recorded information within the site, but also allowed me to participate in the activities (Creswell, 2013a; 2013b). Because I am an actual member of the BrED Freedom School group, my role also functioned as a complete member (Angrosino, 2007). Complete membership allowed me to be an active and engaged member of the research site. Researchers who are in complete membership are also “often advocates for the positions adopted by the group,” (Angrosino, p. 56, 2007).

Unfortunately, there are also some limitations to being an observer as participant when researching a study site. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) warns us about some of those limitations that accompany this role such as: a) the research participants’ depth of information revealed to the researcher; and b) the promise of confidentiality (p. 144).

According to Schensul et. al. (1999), participant observation is a process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the research setting (as stated in Angrosino, 2007). The role as participant observer should not be viewed as a research method, but as an approach to collecting and gathering data. My role as the primary researcher may have positively and negatively impacted the dissertation. As someone who had close relationships with each group, my varied and complex positions, relationships within the different groups made me an ideal researcher to understanding the known and unknown intricacies and activity systems that live in BrED Freedom School, EFFORT, and
Lenape Town Education Association. At the same time, my close proximity to the issues and participants may limit an angle of view in their organizing and experiences.

Most importantly, as a Black womxn who is the second daughter of an African American mother–descendant of enslaved Africans– and a border-crossing father of Ghanaian descent, I hold a unique perspective of one of the multiple versions of what it means to be Black and womxn in this nation. Growing up on the borders of poverty with my mom and grandmother in Newark, New Jersey, while experiencing middle-class comforts with the presence of my father in Maplewood, I now live as an underemployed working class Black womxn with two children and a Black male partner.

My positionality is too complex to sum up into one sentence. But here I am, a Black womxn who also worked within a labor union--a structure whose values, principles, and practices uplift white male patriarchy, although being a mostly female profession. As an exiled-expatriate public school K-12 language arts educator, I am aware of the explicit and implicit challenges that come with all of those roles, as well as how my first-hand experience--my close proximity to the intersecting positionalities of being Black, womxn, former K-12 public school classroom educator who identifies as working class. These positionalities placed me at the nexus of many, if not most of the problems that made me best suited to explore the questions related to the ways Black educators experience schooling and schools, and the informal environments they create to “swerve-surf” and survive these institutions.

Unlike a positivist framework, I am abundantly clear that, as the researcher, I am also the research instrument. As the instrument, I bring with me a long and deep history of experiences that not only speak to my here and now, but that also transcends my memory--my mama’s memory--my Grandmama’s memory--my Great Grandmama’s memory. Our DNA remembers
even when we do not think it does. It helps to frame our lenses and analyses when parsing through the data. I have heard it once stated that we were all old souls walking around in new bodies. I am a multiplicity of old familial souls occupying this new body--this *body noir*--this *noirbody*--who brings with her multiple truths and multiple realities.

**Limitations of Study**

Qualitative research just *is*. It helps the inquirer --the researcher-- to dive deep and develop an understanding of the problems being explored. However, because we are holding multiple truths and realities, we cannot forget that these stories are just one of those multiple truths and realities as told and interpreted by the researcher, me.
The years 2012 through 2017 and beyond saw the growth in several Black and Indigenous-led grassroots organizations around the nation such as the Dream Defenders, Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100), Standing Rock Water Protectors #NoDAPL, Assata’s Daughters, and the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), in response to the murders of Black, Indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC) and the perpetual violence directed at Black trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people. These organizations are a diasporic dominoes game in action. Pieces are stacked across the diaspora on their make-shift tables of unstable plywood; a sudden fist brings the tiny ivory black-dotted wooden rectangular pieces to a synchronized yet steady fall. These organizations become the seeds planted into the collective conscience of Black folx throughout the diaspora. Collectively, they create a diasporic reverberation, inspiring others to demand organizations, work environments, and communities to tear down damaging structures of the “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks, 2002) and to create new futuristic possibilities. This is their story.

This was the case for organizations like Evergreen’s Equality For the Future of Our Readiness Tomorrow (EFFORT) with members Cookie, Marie and Lauryn; Bridgeville-East Denwood Freedom School (BrED Freedom School) and their organizers, Eloquence and Phil; and Faith, the organizer for the Lenape Town Community Conversations. This chapter will explore who these educators and organizers are and a brief description of the communities in which they work.
Additionally, Table #2 below is a disproportionality index score calculated for each district, further contexts for the organizations. This was calculated by taking the total percentage of each racial group teacher percentage divided by that racial group’s student percentage. For example, for Lenape Town, white teachers made up 80% of the teachers represented. White students in that same district made up 10% of the students represented. Therefore, that is:

![Figure 3: Disproportionality Index Score Calculation](image)

A disproportionality score more than the number one informs us that the group we are examining is disproportionally represented. Likewise, a score less than one means that the group is disproportionally underrepresented within the organization. Using Lenape Town as an example, white teachers in this district are eight times disproportionally overrepresented while Black, Asian, Latinx educators are underrepresented in their district. Black educators are not proportionately represented in any of the districts. This too, is the precarity of Black Educatorhood in U.S. public schools.

### Table #2: District/Organization community, educator and student demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>white</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Latinx</th>
<th>Native American</th>
<th>2+ Races</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lenape</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educators</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disproportionality Index</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>.1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evergreen</strong></td>
<td>Educators</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>.1%</td>
<td>.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disproportionality Index</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bridgeville (Br) and East Denwood (ED)</strong></td>
<td>Community (Br)</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community (ED)</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educators</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>.2%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>.1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disproportionality Index</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South Denwood</strong></td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educators</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>.1%</td>
<td>.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>.6%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>.1%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>.1%</td>
<td>.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disproportionality Index</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the next several pages, we will meet the study’s participants. What will be shared here is just a snapshot of who the participants are, their roles in their school or district, and their precarity as Black educators. I share the stories Faith, Cookie, Phil, Maria, Lauryn, and conclude with Eloquence. Each of their narratives presented here is just a snapshot into the lives of the participants, what they do, and the precarity of their as Black educators.

**Faith**

Sista-girl.

Mama.
Daughter.

Friend.

Teacher. These words do not properly articulate the being that is Faith. There is a generosity in spirit that exudes from her—it is a being that encompasses all of the best qualities of the above roles embodied into one. Her quiet yet infectious and gentle personality, loved by many who have the pleasure of calling her friend, mother, daughter, auntie, cousin, and sister make for great company! Yup, that is Faith.

A Black female educator of African American descent, Faith stands at about 5 feet and 1 inch. She is a mom of one daughter, Naila. Sixteen years her senior, their mother and daughter relationship enjoys the qualities of friendship, guidance, and even travel-buddy. At the time of Faith’s interviews, she was a 39-year old, 16-year veteran social studies teacher of seventh and eighth grades in Lenape Town. This mid-size urban district serves approximately 4,000 students who Faith affectionately refers to as “my babies.” These are the babies she advocates for as a classroom teacher and within her role as the president of her majority-white local teachers’ union, where the needs of the community and students are often viewed as separate from the union and teachers.

By all accounts, this community, *Lenape Town, New Jersey is multi-ethnoracially diverse. With a population of a little over 35,000 people, the racial make of the community is approximately 43 percent white, 26 percent Black, seven percent Asian, 31 percent Latinx, .5 percent Indigenous, and a little over 3 percent of those who identify as two or more races (US Census Bureau, 2010). However the schools in Lenape Town do not reflect the demographics of the people who live there. According to the New Jersey State Department of Education, in the 2017-2018 school year, the Lenape Town School District served a little more than 10 percent
white, approximately 48 percent Latinx, 29 percent Black, 11 percent Asian, and a little more than 1 percent who identified with being two or more races (There were no students who identified with being Native/Indigenous; a truth the nation must reconcile with. That is important to acknowledge, particularly in a town whose name represents and reflects the people who were historically in deep relationship with the land in which this community is currently situated).

Having grown up in a town that is most known for its historical impact in being a stop along the Underground Railroad, it is no wonder that Faith would return as an adult, steeped in a great sense of pride for her community, her people, and the future generation. This community is Black. It was Black when it was first incorporated. And it is still Black today: from the historic Baptist and African Methodist Episcopal (AME) churches, to the barbecue joints positioned in what seem like someone’s house, to the way the neighbors came through on a sunny fall Sunday afternoon to pick up macaroni salad. Apparently, Faith is the community macaroni salad designee, as she chuckles and gently and humbly says, “...I guess ‘cause they like mine!” We both laugh. We both laughed a lot. Faith’s humor and wittiness kept our sessions intimate.

Freedom is the name of this town. Situated in *North Jersey*, this town is about 2 miles wide and long. It is that town where everybody knows everybody and generations of families stay, raise their children, leave, and return because there is an ancestral calling that summons you to return.

Faith moved to Freedom from Cumberbatch City when she was in 6th grade. That would put her at around 12 years old in the year 1990--which was a hefty transition for her--and in recalling her memories, she let out a deep sigh that more than hinted at her dissatisfaction when her family moved. Faith’s dad made the move with intentionality. He chose Freedom because he wanted their family to “be in an African American community.” At the time, Faith says she did
not appreciate the decision her dad made, she can now appreciate more as an adult, so much so
she raised her daughter there.

Faith lived in Cumberbatch City until she was 12; now she lives in Freedom, not Lenape
Town where her school is located, but she still feels like she is part of the community. She
explains, “So the families I know-- because like my mom knew, my dad--you know? So, or--just
people that I kinda grew up and knew. So, I've had friends' kids and I just--I do feel like I am a
part of their community. You know what I mean?” Many families leave Cumberbatch City,
where Faith grew up, and move to Lenape Town as “step up” from Cumberbatch. And because
these communities where Faith lives, work, and grew up are in close proximity to each other, it is
not uncommon for her to have taught the children of friends or family because, in her words, “a
lot of people when they make a little bit more money, they move to Lenape Town--like as far as
African Americans.”

When Faith started the Community Conversations, a space dedicated for community
members to engage in discourse around the critical issues facing their schools and community,
she was hoping to raise awareness around the exodus of students, particularly Black and Brown
students from the community. She was frustrated with negative and deficit beliefs about the
community. Faith laments below:

But unfortunately, the perception is that Black and Brown [students] do not
perform well. That Black and Brown are not as motivated. That they are not as
successful. So when people say this--and a lot of the people who say this are
Black and Brown--I'm tryna figure out why they think our district is bad. Why
they wouldn't want to send their kids here. Because I see our kids could compete
with anybody in the state if they were given an opportunity. So, that kinda crushes
me. But some of our own kids think that their school is bad. I think, like
internalized, indoctrinated to believe that certain things are good and other things
are bad. Because if I say, Evergreen or Broadtown or some of the other wealthier
surrounding districts. My Black and Brown kids would say, "That's a good
school..."although they have never set foot in their schools. They've never looked
at their curriculums. They've never...They don't have friends that go
there...(chuckles). But somehow. they have the idea that it's a good school. So I
don't know if I do it one person at a time. But...It's disheartening.

As Faith is working on the deficit perceptions that students have of their community, she is faced
with the same deficit mindsets from community members and district leadership. Dealing with
decreasing enrollment numbers, according to Faith, the superintendent has reportedly stated he
wants to make the high school “desirable again” and believes that this can be achieved by: 1)
increasing and improving athletics and trade courses; and 2) removing challenging students from
the school by placing them into an alternative school. In the excerpt below, she sheds light on the
dilemma:

No one wants to speak about the racial component of it--of the--I meant to put out
here--like the white flight. When I--I've gone to board meetings and there's been
parents who complain that, "What is the truant officer doing about all these kids
who come here from Cumberbatch?" (Pause) "...who are here illegally?" "Are we
getting them out of here?" (Pause) Mhmhmnm. Because they feel like they don't
pay taxes here but then they use an address and send their kids to our school.
Mhmm. Because it has to be the Cumberbatch kids who are making our numbers
what they are. And they must be coming from Cumberbatch and fighting. And, so
that's the under---you know? So that's the background of that question. So the PC way of saying is, "What are we doing to get these kids out of here?" "...that are here--from Cumberbatch?" I've had teachers say that. Mhmm. "I mean, what do we do? These kids come to us from Cumberbatch." and uhhh, what does that mean? So, we have to deal with those perceptions. (Sigh)

Faith believes that the decreasing numbers is a reflection of the white flight from the community because of the fear of the “other”; fear of the influx of Black and Brown students coming in from Cumberbatch City and other neighboring large cities. She questions:

How do we focus on the students who enter our schools regardless of their backgrounds? And honor and educate all those who enter our classrooms? Let them know that we don't have to strive to be (a wealthier neighboring town) anything else than what we are because we are enough? Our babies are enough.

Still, in 2017, 2018, and 2019, this is the precarity of Black Educatorhood. It means defending the humanity of all students, especially Black Studenthood and creating space so that these conversations can happen.

****

Cookie

“I think people underestimate me and that's how I generally kind of function in the world. I'm quiet. Just because I'm quiet doesn't mean that I'm not listening. Doesn't mean I'm not paying attention.”

Like a sudden burst of extraordinary flavor hidden, fused, and tucked subtly beneath your ordinary mundane [insert your favorite name brand] vanilla ice cream, Cookie is a leap of flavor. A petite Black woman--small in physical stature and size with an enormous force of intellect,
generosity, and insight--she is calculated and purposeful. Purposeful in deeds, words, and the company she keeps. I was grateful to bear witness to her presence. It was an honor. It is with this honor that I attempt to capture and articulate a glimpse of what Cookie shared with me. I welcome you to join me in receiving Cookie.

****

Cookie wore her generosity and intellect like she wore her short brown natural hair, with sophistication, neatly tapered along the edges and where it intersects at the nape of her neck; it too tells a story. The story of a Black woman born to the parents of Trinidadian immigrants who raised her in their Black neighborhood in Queens, New York. In this Black community, Cookie’s family made a home where their family was the only immigrant family. Cookie experiences a morphology of American Blackness unique to her childhood community, but it is a familiar tune characteristic of cultural border-crossers like her. Cookie tells us, “My experience is very much a mixture of both. So in my Black neighborhood where I grew up, I was the only [immigrant] family, I was the only person whose parents weren’t like Black American. So I experienced feeling Caribbean in some spaces and then feeling very American in other--in other spaces,” which is a quality that many cultural chameleons share; their ability to blend into multiple cultures, flowing, like a wave, seamlessly in and out of the cultural milieu of their parents and families, and in between the spaces on the playground, in school, and in the workplace. They are cultural code-switchers. Their presence asymmetrically coalesces with the diversity of their birth home and ancestral land. It is a spiritual movement that gathers treasures along the way, taking with them what they can to recreate, savor, and honor. Cookie is a culture code-switcher in almost ever since of the word. The fluency across space, place and time makes her multilingual out of necessity and survival.
At the time of the interviews, Cookie lived in Evergreen; your typical government manufactured white segregated middle-class suburban community. Like Barbie’s Dream House, with homes that have perfectly carved out exteriors, seemingly designed in the workshop of whiteness yet whose internally cancerous cells latch onto life’s motherboard. If suburbs were actually manufactured in factories like Barbie’s mansions, Evergreen would be the gold standard.

According to the 2017 US Census, Evergreen is a community that is approximately 70 percent white, 13 percent Asian, seven percent Latinx, six percent Black, and about three percent who identify as being two or more races. Of the people in the community, less than seven percent of the residents live in poverty, with 95 percent of the residents having a high school diploma or higher, and 56 percent with a Bachelor's degree or higher. The median home value in Evergreen is approximately $300,000 with median household incomes at $100,000. The decision to move to Evergreen was a difficult one for both Cookie and her husband. Having been raised in the multi-ethnoracial enclave of Queens, moving into a fabricate enclave traditionally and historically designed to keep people like their families out of reach, was a matter of access and opportunity.

After moving to Evergreen and choosing the community for its schools and home resale power, as the parents of a young Black boy, they make the decision to send their son to a private progressive school—a school whose pedagogical practices and ideologies match those of Cookie and her husband. As a school psychologist with a doctoral degree, Cookie understands the consequential long-term impact schools can have on children in traditional public schools; to be Black and a child in these same schools can be exponentially more violent. In Evergreen alone, even though Black students make up approximately nine percent of the student population between both of its high schools, these Black students make up approximately 24 percent of
students who receive out-of-school suspensions, and about 45 percent of students who are referred to law enforcement or arrested (OCR Data, 2013). This makes Black students almost three times more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension and five times more likely to be referred to police or arrested.

Education was a second career for Cookie. After spending some time in the insurance field, Cookie choose school psychology because it would allow her to become a psychologist without having to acquire a doctoral degree. Even though her plan was never to get a doctorate degree, she continues schooling at the advice of another Black school psychologist who she met in her undergraduate program. Speaking about this Black school psychologist, Cookie states, “[S]he became, I would say like a mentor for me, kind of convinced me that if I was going to do school psychology I might as well do the doctorate program…”

As a Black school psychologist for the past six years, Cookie has been faced with the dilemma of her role with the school:

It's been challenging in some ways. Um, it's been challenging in some ways. As a school psychologist who happens to be a Black woman, um, and using tools that have been used negatively against Black children, it--it, it causes me to be, I think more cautious. Maria and I were having this conversation the other day. So my primary responsibility is to administer IQ tests. [laughs] That's my--and when I say my primary responsibility, I'm the only person in that building who can do that-- that is certified by the state to do that. Maria's had training in it, but when it comes to New Jersey State, I'm the only person that can do that [in her school].

Um, so it-- it causes me to think really seriously about the test, um, who I'm testing? What the results mean? Who's going to view the results? How the student
thinks about the results? How the parents think about the results? How staff members think about the results? So, you know, my comment to Maria the other day was because she struggles with students that she's dealt with who have not been—who've been mis-identified using IQ tests. So, I look at it as I've got training on this tool that can be weaponized and I need to be really—not certain, but I need to be careful. I need to be reflective. I need to be careful about how I use it. Um, so I don't always have a choice as to when I use it. Sometimes that's dictated by what the question is that we're trying to answer in terms of why the student was referred to us and why they're having academic difficulties. I have some choice in the type of measure that I—that I use. But I need to be very reflective about that. And, you know, Maria made the comment that she doesn't think that a lot of people are when they use them and you know, my thought is, well I remember the training that I received. We talked a lot about the history of this and we basically kind of learned how to use the assessments and then we did a lot of readings about why we shouldn't use the assessments.

So I'm--I remember leaving that particular class or the class on cognitive assessment thinking "we'll do you-- should I use this or should not use it?" So I use it. I mean I have to use it in my job description, but I am-- I'm very careful about when I use it, and how I use it, and how I talk about the results. So, yeah it's challenging. Yeah, challenging. Yeah, challenging. I even try to pay attention to the-- to the language, the words that I use. I will rarely use IQ when I'm even talking about the results. Um, I typically will talk about kind of strengths and weaknesses. How a student is able to think and reason and it does give us
information about how a student would be expected to perform academically in a school setting in the United States. That's primarily why the tests were originally designed. Were they always used that way? No. Um, is there--can there be bias in it? Yes. Particularly if you have not been educated in our country, one. And two, depending on the-- what's the word I'm going to use? Mainstream culture. I would say if you, if you're a family that, or you're a student who has not been kind of thoroughly immersed in mainstream culture, it can be biased towards individuals in that way--and I'm [hypothetically] biased against individuals who-- who haven't been. So I try not to talk about IQ--or that it is stable or that the test that I'm administering gives you a complete picture of the person. Like there are some aspects of intelligence that the tests do not assess.

You know? Because schools aren't the-- 'cause it's not important to schools. [laughs] They kind of want to know how you do school, how well you do school. And right now these are the tests that have the best predictive validity in terms of that, but again, it's not, you know, and I have to remind my colleagues, it's not a one to one correspondence. So just because a score is low doesn't mean: 1) that student's achievement is going to be as low as that score; and sometimes that score is--that score is low for--for different reasons. Um, so challenging, I would say, is probably the best way to describe how it's been. But I think--I don't think it's just in Evergreen, it will be challenging for me in any school setting working as a school psychologist, it will be challenging for me because of those reasons.
When the tools of your profession have historically been weaponized against Black Studenthood, navigating this dilemma becomes the precarity of Black Educatorhood. And this is Cookie’s challenge.

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Phil

Born in South Denwood to two loving parents, Phil is the oldest between he and his brother. At a solid 5 feet 7 inches, Phil is a thin Black man of 49 years but with a youthful appearance of any 30-year-old. There is an air of radicalness, a grabbing by the rootness, that he exudes in every encounter. It is not overwhelming. It just is. With a deep and long history of grassroots organizing most centered around political prisoners from the Black power movement, you can tell Phil eats, breathes, drinks, and lives this work. At visit to his classroom immediately communicates a love for his people and abolitionist work:

I mean, I-- I hmm. I think before I became an educator, I was an activist. I was fortunate enough to, um, to have met and developed some really strong and impactful relationships with some elders who were activists during the civil rights era and who were activists during the Black power era. I was really fortunate enough to have, you know, two, three, four years of I what I would call training, um, and in doing this kind of work. And so as a teacher, I think it's in my DNA to be about social justice.

To be an activist, organizer, and educator means that there is a wealth of knowledge and skill that Phil brings with him into the classroom and his relationship with his students and colleagues.

As a child, Phil had the experience of being educated by all Black teachers, who Phil describes as “overwhelmingly Black women,” “nurturing,” and who provided the support that
gave him a “phenomenal foundation...for some of my later learning.” It was not just what his teachers taught him, but there was an interconnectedness that the teachers had with their students that Phil ends up describing. They became part of his family and mother’s friend circle--and at 49, his 3rd and 5th grade teachers are still friends with his mother today. That’s special.

Engaging the students beyond the classroom, making playful bets on Monday night football game, his teachers would naturally enter into their lives--developing bonds with them and their families. Phil recounts this experience and what it meant for him:

She would engage us-- just like on who our favorite football teams were. And then like every week, like Monday night football, she would probably lose her job for this now. But we would wager --like she would bet a quarter on the game. And I remember staying up at night, watching the game. And then either going to bed like, "Aww man, I gotta give Ms. Joyce a quarter tomorrow. Or Ms. Joyce owes me a quarter." But non-academic--but she built relationships with us that honestly, last to this day. My mom and my third grade teacher, my mom and my fifth grade teacher, are still friends. They still talk.

This was Phil’s schooling experience from kindergarten through middle school, until his mother made the decision to send both he and his brother to the predominantly white, all boys prep school nearby. It was her hope, according to Phil, that he and his brother would have access to better opportunities and a better chance to attend college.

As a teacher, Phil enters the profession beginning at the school he graduated from, Canterbury Prep. His experience at Canterbury lasted 10 years; the pedagogical and ideological mismatch between both Phil and the school makes it unbearable for him to stay. They part ways but not without impacting the Black, white, and other students of color that he had the pleasure
of teaching. However, Phil now teaches in East Denwood-Bridgeville community—a community that prides itself on being “progressive” because of the multi-ethnoracial population. Unfortunately, once you dig a little deeper, you begin to see how deeply problematic the community actually is and that it is not as perfect as many in the community imagine. Phil describes this further in the excerpt below:

> So the best thing about when I first came to public school was, I mean, I don't know if it's at every public school, but there's never a dull moment at Jackson High School. There is never a dull moment! The school district that I work in—East Denwood-Bridgeville is technically, diverse. And so, racially and ethnically, socioeconomically, gender—so all of the, you know, quote/unquote "diversity" that one can find, right, exists in East Denwood Bridgeville. That still doesn't preclude the fact that white supremacy is still alive and present in the school district. So over time, I've kind of picked up here where I left off at Canterbury Prep. I still teach language arts, but I'm a moderator for the Black Student Union here at Jackson High School. I'm also an advisor for the PAC scholars program.

As an educator who is not only committed to the growth of students, Phil is equally invested in the development and support of Black educators. The district has about 15 percent Black educators but 29 percent of the student population is Black. With these numbers, Phil has found that not only do Black students have difficulty in their schools, but the Black educators are faced with the dilemma of being unsupported and targeted by district administration. It is because of this that he wants to work on dedicating his energies in that area. He explicates below:
Yeah, I guess-- yeah, when I finished--I graduated--I finished undergrad in 1991 and when I think back to what education was like when I started all those many years ago and where we are now from a--from the perspective as a Black male educator, I guess that's my biggest concern. Is-- and not just for Black males, but for just Black educators in general, like, are we--are we becoming expendable? You know, to what degree does the profession truly value us? And, and I guess that's--am I in whatever time I have left as an educator-- I think that's kinda where I would like to spend my time or spend my energy. Like really trying to support the younger teachers of color, specifically Black teachers. Trying to support them in this struggle of really being valued for their multiple areas--areas of-- of labor.

The question Phil raises is one that we must hold and consider. Is the nation telling Black educators, through it actions and lack of actions, that in fact, we are ultimately expendable? That, too is the precarity of Black Educatorhood.

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Maria

Growing up, echoes of James Brown’s gift to Black folx and the Black power movement, “I’m Black and I’m proud” reverberated through the internal spaces that occupies Maria’s heart and childhood memories. These were the chants that she (re)membered in order to piece together the experiences that informed her, Maria’s life, forever. They were the resting places to pacify her in moments of need--places she could internally (re)visit when needed, particularly in the face of the quotidian, sometimes subtle attacks on her humanity and dignity.

Born and raised in Cumberbatch City to two loving parents, Maria was the 6th and youngest child of their union. Third generation Cumberbatchian, from kindergarten until 3rd grade, she attended the school that was historically where the district authorities sent all the
Black children in the city; the same school her grandfather attended when it was explicitly designated for Blacks only. Her school experiences, at that age, were “very positive” with a lot of “up with the people,” “I’m Black and I’m proud;” this foundation would be necessary for her survival. For 4th and 5th grade, Maria’s experiences with school were “pretty mixed,” with one friend who was Korean and another who was white. Maria jokingly recalls that time, “I just remember going to school thinking, ‘These are,’ -- I couldn't figure out what the difference was--‘these kids are different.' And my conclusion was because they had their ears pierced!” We laugh hysterically.

But it was middle school that had a lasting impact on her life. A multi-ethnoracially mixed school, Maria’s friends represented many groups of people. She recalls her friends were Black, white, and Latinx, therefore reflecting the overall cultural richness of the community and at the same time cancerous wounds deep within. It was her middle school experiences that shaped her image of the possibilities that could co-exist between Black and white people. It was her middle school experience that tainted the innocence of that 4th and 5th grade child she once was. Maria explains:

So my one friend--she was my friend from fourth grade through eighth grade--and we were on our eighth grade trip; Great Adventure. We were on the Sky Ride. Great Adventure had not been opened that long [laughs]. That's how old I am! And we're in the sky ride. One girl Wendy, who was Puerto Rican and she was like, "Oh, look at that guy! He's so cute!" And then my friend who was white said, "What are you talking about? He's a nigger?"

And I just remember just going, "Oh, my God!" It's just totally threw me because we had been friends for a long time [laughs]. And I was like, "Wow!" And it
totally threw me and I was like, "wow!" I didn't say anything. And I said nothing because I couldn't. I just said nothing. I just remember going, it's not a word I heard a lot of. The first time I heard of the word was when I moved to East Cumberbatch because it was--where I grew up [in Cumberbatch City] was predominantly Black. So I didn't hear the word. We didn't say, it's not like they say it now. It wasn't said. My dad tried to-- my family--we just didn't know. I had never really heard the word until I was like 10. I was walking up the street from this new home and the kids started calling us, that word. I didn't know so I asked my mom what the word is. And so she, you know? So, I knew it was a negative word. By then I was 13 and I was just so thrown. Then you're on that-- I'm on a skyrise. I can't get off. Ya’ can’t walk away [laughs]. And so…

It was interesting because Wendy, who was, you know, she was Puerto Rican and then my friend--what's her name?--my friend Megan, I just... I was in total-- I was just like, “like, what does that mean?” Like, what does that and how do you see me all these years? I guess, so that totally-- that informed my life for a long time actually...So I had a-- that was a shadow belief that Black and white people can't really be friends because you can't really trust them. So I believed that for years [laughs]. Because you think someone's your friend and you know, they can't--they just think you're a "nigger," so...

These Megans grow up and become older white women, possibly our teachers, our nurses or doctors, our social workers, and engineers, who BIPoC grow up having to share with communities, schools, churches, hospitals, and other work environments. Sometimes they are
able to mask their disdain for BIPoC and on other occasions the presence of BIPoC, particularly Black women, triggers an exorcise of their deepest darkest imaginations of the worst kind.

Maria started her career as a kindergarten teacher in the community she grew up in, later working to become a learning disabilities teacher-consultant after witnessing the skill and grace of the white male learning consultant in her school.

Like Cookie, Maria and her husband worked tirelessly to find communities where they could raise their children, allowing them to attend a school that seemingly helped them gain access to higher education and other opportunities, collective generational dilemma of blackness in this country. Having worked in many of the surrounding communities, Maria attempts to make a work-home in Evergreen, but this proves to be draped in racial violence and terror. She remains haunted by a hate crime from June of 2011, when Maria was forced out on leave after a colleague graffitied ‘KKK’ in her office. This too is the precarity of Black Educatorhood.

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Lauryn

“At least right now at this point you might not have the raft, but at least you know you're holding onto the life preserver,” ~ Lauryn

[As I walk in Lauryn’s home, their dog, Major tries to let loose-- scurrying around wildly, there is a lot of back and forth with her 12-year-old daughter. Wrestling with Major, she holds him down to keep him away from me]

Lauryn: [laughs] This is my house. Welcome to my house, Okaikor. [laughs]

It's never dull here. You want sweet tea-- water?

Roast pork? [inaudible]

Okaikor: I'm tryna lose weight. I started this Isagenix.
Lauryn: Oh, there's some brussel sprouts over there [chuckles]. Oh, these are like sweetened, sweet. There's cranberries in them--Cranberry Raisins.

Hearing all the noise, a small older round Korean woman of about 70 years old--rocking a short salt and pepper hairstyle, dressed in a large nightgown, peeps out from around the corner just beyond the kitchen. Lauryn introduces us. I wave. She nods, tucking herself back behind the wall. She is Lauryn’s mom.

Meet Lauryn, y’all!

There is an eclectic grace that brings together the pungent flavors of kimchi and simmering southern soul food. The kind of eclectic chaos that emerges from the elements on military bases, secret glances, and intimate encounters. Lauryn is that. One of two children between her African American Black father and Korean mom, love met each other in the aftermath of war and U.S. militarism to birth a boy and a girl. There is an oxymoronic thickness to mingling love, war, U.S., and militarism in one breath; it speaks to our audacity to articulate our humanity within the chaos of dehumanization, exploitation, and violence. Lauryn has a lively family. She is a mother of three girls and their pit bull, Major, divorced from her marriage, also to a Black man who served in the army. They are live, free, and full of an envious closeness, an intimacy of three generations--grandmother, mother and three daughters--that hovers over the air of the room.

A light-skinned freckled Black woman, tatted up from shoulder, chest to toe, Lauryn has a presence. Standing at about 5 feet 9 inches tall, she is grand and literal. Rocking a short Halle Berry-like hairdo, loose curls the lie atop her head, tapering shorter and shorter as they approach her neck. There is a distracted wittiness to her. A sorta no nonsense--zero tolerance attitude but
full of warmth, dedication, and hope. On any given month or season, Lauryn adds flavor to her hair; hot pink one month, bright purple the other, and royal blue the next. It is a rebellious colorfulness that seeps into every space she enters. Raised on military bases, Lauryn lived in the myth of the “we don’t see color” color evasiveness—we-all-get-along, there-is-no-racism horizontal spatial milieu of the military.

A second career for Lauryn, she entered the teaching profession after being downsized from her position in “corporate America.” Left with three children to raise, she makes the decision to explore teaching as a way to pay her bills as the mother of three young children to raise on her own. With a husband in and out, deployed on military missions for the wealthy she is left alone. These scenes get played out over and over again—with the wealthy exploiting the desperation and needs of those who are poor and struggling to make sense of their lives, to pick up broken pieces to assemble again --partners, parents, siblings, etc. are forced to leave loved ones in the name of a fictitious democracy, only to return damaged and hardened by war, loss, and violence. It would turn out that she could survive in the profession while also working late night shifts at a part-time retail job, to support her girls and their softball games, and to find hope even betwixt the racial violence in the Evergreen School District.

Lauren began her teaching career in Kingsborough, later moving on to Evergreen, where she was one of two Black educators in her school. She struggled. Lauryn attacked each day ducking and weaving the persistent aggressions of racism from colleagues, students, and parents. Openly referred to as a quota hire by her principal, it was a point of contention she internally struggled with each time she walked into the building. So when Lauryn was asked to spearhead a local union-supported racial justice group within the district, she hesitantly begins to frame the
structure for which the group EFFORT will function. It would become a place where educators of color could find refuge. In the excerpt below, Lauryn describes why she chose to take it on:

Lauryn: It gave me more-- honestly, it gives you more of a-- it gave me more of like the drive of-- I can't-- you can't-- I can't leave this craziness for my kids by themselves! Like we have to start it now. Like there’s a more urgency or motivational piece to it-- like an intrinsic motivational piece. Yeah, I think it gives you-- it's an urgency we [the district union members of color] had as well. Just because you-- you're not alone, but you look at it as in you're placed alone on purpose.

Okaikor: I don't understand.

Lauryn: So there is 10 of us in the district. You're purposely at different schools, in different settings, and you're never meant to cross paths because you can't organize to be together. Does that make sense?

Okaikor: So they're in separate schools and..?

Lauryn: But literally as a-- as a district, there's never an opportunity for your district to come together so that everybody gets to see somebody else. So literally you have, you've gone 12--12, 20-- 12 years-- 22 years and you realize there are more people in the district that looked like you and think more like you.

Okaikor: And so the motivation for having a space for y'all to be together is for what reason?

Lauryn: A community

It was the building of community that motivated Lauryn to attempt to bring the local union members together. It was the feeling of jadedness and isolation that motivated her to work
towards building the community, despite the many challenges that existed. Lauryn explains below what EFFORT could bring to the district community of employees of color:

The lack of isolation like you have-- you're no longer feeling like you're by yourself and you're struggling. And like almost like you're no longer feeling like you're treading water. Like you have-- at least right now at this point you might not have the raft, but at least you know, you're holding onto the life preserver. Like you're not staying afloat by yourself. And that's--I mean that's the best analogy I can give you.

The tragedy of this analogy is that when the individual is isolated and alone, they were treading water, however once a community of other educators of color are around, there is a sense of having a life preserver. One will always need this preserver to survive the currents. But how do we remove the individual from the threat of danger completely so that they do not need the life preserver? Unfortunately, even with the life preserver, there is no guarantee one will make the voyage back to shore. Treading water, barely making and surviving the currents, one can only hope and pray for a miracle.

And as Lauryn is keeping her head above water, the struggles Black students face have also been a point of her weariness. Bearing witness to the quotidian assaults on the dignity of Black children, internalizing the incessant assaults on their own dignity is the state of Black Educatorhood. In Lauryn’s own words, she shares:

So I have two kids in school. One is white and he's more affluent and one is Black and we're really not sure where he stands? Like economically-- I'm not-- I don't know where he stands. So they were both going into like a crisis mode. They catered to the white kid more so than they catered to the Black kid and I didn't
understand. I'm like, no, that's not right. And you know then I spoke up and people were like, "Oh, we didn't mean to do that intentionally." I don't care whether you meant to do that intentionally or not that's what you're doing. And then they tried to justify what they were doing. And then they were mad at me because I wouldn't back down. And then it turned into like, you remember the white, like you think about the white privilege and white fragility-- and I'm but that's---- whether the color--no matter the color of that child, that child was asking you for help. Period. Why all of a sudden did you reach out and pull all these people in for the white kid, but the Black kid you said, "Okay, just sit right here for a minute." The urgency wasn't there and like, that really broke my heart. Actually, that pissed me off.

From a broken heart to outright anger, there is a deep pain in witnessing the perpetual symbolic Black death of the Black child. To bear witness to it repeatedly within schools, classrooms, in the streets, on the television, it is exhausting.

Working overtime, mostly alone, the knowledge, skills, and the boldness with which Lauryn attacks every challenge, as well as her overall dedication to a just society, are what propels her. A divorced single mom of three, juggling the pressures that encapsulates all of what it means to be called “mom,” as well as her experience with being one of “the onlys,” coupled with her need to make ends meet(at the part-time retail store) and advocate for her humanity and the humanity of other BIPoC within the union; this too is the precarity of Black Educatorhood.

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Elo
Eloquence walks into the office space for our first interview. I notice his presence immediately and remember what I looked and felt like at this 4 o’clock hour when I was a classroom teacher. There is a look of exhaustion on his face, sweat dripping down his temples, and he releases a slight sigh. I feel that deeply. At about 6 feet 1 inch, his body nearly takes up the door frame, but not quite because Eloquence walks in at just 6 feet, with the one inch symbolically shrunken by the emotional and physical exhaustion that overtook his being; he is slouched. I am slumped at the desk, listening to old-school Hip-Life music; I receive him and we begin.

Okaikor: Yeah. You look so tired and worn.

Eloquence: [laughs] It’s the truth. It’s the truth. It’s the truth.

Um, well I try to remain in a place of gratitude cuz it’s a lot of cool opportunities.

Just gotta go through the storm of it all.

There is a soft tenderness in Eloquence’s voice, being, and spirit. The deeply rich baritone timbre of his voice also communicates a femininity in spirit. It was like a mellow whisper, thoughtful and purposeful with each sound, each syllable, each word. I held onto each sound or I might risk missing it. His gratitude, in spite of his exhaustion and weariness, speaks to the very essence that is Eloquence.

At just four months young, Eloquence was brought to the United States with his Igbo Nigerian parents to settle in New Jersey. Like many other immigrants before them, Eloquence’s family takes the journey, largely drawn to the appeals of the myths of America’s democracy, dreams that are more realistically nightmares cradled and surrounded around steel bars disguised as white picket fences, creating internal and external prisons for all who dare or venture to enter.
Accompanied by his mother, the likely anchor of their family, to join his father—a father who took the passage well before his new wife and child to experience university life—they make a home. His dad attended the New Jersey Institute of Technology as a science and math major. Elo would also attempt to follow the guidance and path of his traditional Nigerian family members; the insistence on math, science and engineering careers as much more lucrative and prestigious paths. He almost did.

The oldest from the union between his mother and father, Elo fondly recalls memories living in their family’s two bedroom apartment in Newark, New Jersey, with his two other brothers and his sister. Humble beginnings, elevated by an ambitious mother with what Eloquence affectionately refers to as a hustler’s heart. I can imagine the heart of a mother whose journey and aspirations within a new land being laced with an imaginary of success, prosperity, and community, only to be relegated to the white imagination of what Black life should be.

Home to many new Americans, Elo’s family settles in Newark, in a section most known for its United Nations-like housing tenements. Neighbors hail from nations all over continental Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Caribbean islands. It is a place where many new Americans can reside and create community with at least a few other families and residents from their homeland. But for many, it is never a permanent stay; it is a temporary stopping ground until they can save up enough to move on, to move up, and to move out.

Raised in a family—an extended Nigerian family—and a community that emphasized the importance of education, Eloquence always did well in school. Being new to the country, his family sheltered Elo and his siblings from the elements of a community affected by racism, poverty, dispossession, and crime in the community. In the subsidized tenements, characteristic
of this city of bricks, and the unfamiliarity of their new country, Elo and his siblings were not allowed the freedom to play outside with other children.

Concepts of freedom and choice were not present; they were not totally absent either. Freedom is trapped between our dreams that in each growing moment one could get slightly closer to reaching it--there is a potentiality and not an impossibility that our dreams keep us creating towards. Elo’s parents created moments of freedom even within the violence and the myth of the “American Dream." Freedom was limited to the hallways of the tenement where you could locate Elo and his siblings confined to the brick and mortar, playing childhood games. Freedom and choice, they did not exist and yet they existed--carved within the confines of a brick structure--within the confines of the Brick-city’s structure.

New migrants to an unfamiliar land, Elo’s parents’ cared for their children the best they knew how. It may appear that it took the form of a protective shield--guarding their children from violent elements perceived and real, outside the walls of their tenement apartment--so, their progeny would not succumb to those violent elements. They build a community, an extra layer of protection to ensure their children could navigate. Eloquence, in his own words, explains:

I guess the first community that I knew would technically be like, uh, you know, outside my family, would be like the Nigerian community that was just always around. Whether it's aunts, uncles, cousins and all of the extended family, they were always present --for whether it was church events or birthday parties, Christenings, etc., every family event, I kinda sorta saw those first few faces. And they were all nurturing--all nurturing. You know? School first. However, the Newark community that I was within, I was very much shielded from. We weren't going to go outside and play ever in Newark. Maybe the hallway of the building,
but not really like outside as kids. And my parents were too busy to kind of engage the community at that time, trying to raise us.

So I didn't quite engage the community that I was in, you know, first, second and third grade, much outside of school. And then moving to *Bridgeville, that was an opportunity to actually quote unquote go outside and play. So, um, got to know some of my neighbors, and you know, friends from school was pretty much just good times, making jokes and playing basketball.

Although there was sheltering from the community, Newark would become a place Elo would continue to engage with and within, with loving adoration.

When Eloquence started college, his intent was to major in pharmacy. But he soon found that pharmacy was not an area where he could live his liberatory values, so he pursued teaching. He began his career in a charter school teaching English language arts. The hyper emphasis on standardized testing, lack of creativity, and all the joys that Elo was hoping to get out of teaching was lost. He explains this journey below:

I would say a key point in describing my professional life is to elaborate a bit on my college experience where I began as a pharmacy major. And, you know, leaving high school, I didn't have a clue what I wanted to do with myself. I had no real understanding of the world or myself in it. And so I just went with what my Nigerian parents said would be the most lucrative field which was pharmacy. That's the only reason why I did it. And um, you know, though I think I excelled at it academically, it was clear like after doing an internship that, you know, this isn't for me. And I was having this curiosity about the world that I could actually nurture because I could read on my own. I could pick up-- at that time, it was just
the New York Times and read books on my own. And as I started to discover more about the world, I started to get engaged.

And so, uh, I remember going to an event at the *State University Law School. I attended *State University--and learning a bit about some of the education struggles---the *Urban Parents Collaborative. And I was like, "Whoa! Here's a way to kind of bridge my theories, my ideas about the world in a practice," and that was through education-- through teaching. So I decided to become a teacher. And that has evolved over time because, I have a major in-- I majored in English literature with a minor in chemistry. And then I went to grad school for secondary education with a concentration on teaching high school English. And um, yeah. But I-- I'm now, I'm currently a chemistry teacher. So I moved away from teaching English-- although I still read on my own. I still write on my own, you know, poetry, blogs, etc. But teaching English to me was just not it--it wasn't what I would have liked it to be. I think there was two things. It was a heavy focus on testing at the time.

I was at a charter school. And it was such a heavy focus on testing and frankly my job was test prep--my job was test prep. Now I --know I was around some other amazing English teachers who could still find their way in the midst of the test prep landmines and such. And I look up to them to this day. I think they were amazing teachers. But it-- for me it was, it was too bothersome for me and I don't think I just had the capacity and skill set to maneuver it the way that they could.
And so I decided, you know what, I have this background of 30 credits in chemistry; like, let me see what it would be like to teach that. And this is where we meet Eloquence. A high school chemistry teacher in South Denwood, a small mostly Black working class community, where his struggles as a classroom teacher are not overwhelmed by standardized testing, but other factors such as over-policing and disciplining of students. A district with almost ten thousand students, of which over 90 percent are Black and eight percent Latinx, is able to boast a majority of educators of color, with at least 64% of the educators being Black, and another seven percent being Latinx. What does one do when the Black educator who is committed to loving Black Childhood and Black Studenthood must become an agent within the carceral state of schooling? It is no wonder Eloquence is exhausted, both physically and emotionally. This too, is the precarity of Black Educatorhood.
Background

In prehistoric times, a people fearing that they had irritated their gods would seek to make amends by sacrificing a lamb, a goat, or sometimes a young virgin. Somehow, the shedding of innocent blood effected a renewed connection between the people and their gods. A similar though seldom recognized phenomenon has occurred throughout American racial history. To settle potentially costly differences between two opposing groups of whites, a compromise is effected that depends on the involuntary sacrifice of black rights or interests. Even less recognized, these compromises (actually silent covenants) not only harm blacks but also disadvantage large groups of whites, including those who support the arrangements.

Derrick A. Bell (2005, p. 51)

With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?

Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy
As I prepare y’all for what was uncovered, and shed light on the integration experiences of the Black educators in this study, not only as adult Black educators--which I refer to Black educatorhood--but also compounded with their experiences as young unsuspecting Black children integrating “defacto” and/or “de jure” segregated schools. I am building the participants’ narratives against the backdrop of one of my older cousin’s narrative, who is still impacted from the trauma her body was subjected to as an 11-year-old child chosen to integrate her school in Tupelo, Mississippi. I draw on the similarities of experiences cousin Faenita, or Faye as we call her, had as a young Black child chosen to integrate her rural school in Tupelo, Mississippi.

Each of the participants describe their experiences in terms of how their parents responded or did not respond. This is not an indictment on these Black parents doing the best they could with what they were taught, internalized, and/or given; this is an indictment of this land, this government, this inferno we call the United States of America and the past and present system of segregation. I am sharing this story first, with permission, and second, with a tremendous amount of respect, honor, and gratitude for my great aunt, and cousin.

**Black Studenthood. Integrated Schools.**

Bell’s imagery that precedes this section helps us frame and visualize the gravity of how our nation imagined the role of the young children used to desegregate the nation’s schools and the grossly tragic barrel of our logic. The image of the virgin--dressed in their finest-- sacrificed to a god as a way to atone for one’s sins is the picture that needs to remain in our collective conscious. Often performed as an act of repentance in an effort to make oneself whole again,
people believed they needed to offer sacrifices in the form of animals and sometimes human beings. The procession, The Long Walk to Death--is the image I am capturing here.

Depending on their age, the young unsuspecting children, our virgins, were escorted (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Grant & Sleeter, 1986) to a place of no return. Mostly young children socialized as girls, but also those we have been socialized as boys--get cleaned, powdered down, and dolled up in their freshly starched--creased Sunday’s best for the onlookers to take that tragic walk--an offering. The younger they are, the more unsuspecting. We hold their hands. Tell them everything is going to be okay. Be still my child. Even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, do not fear. The altar awaits. We will be better for it. Our god will be pleased with us. We will restore what was broken--our relationship to god--our relationship to our humanity. We will be whole again. Like sinful souls unable to rest, who rely on barbaric methods of atonement to rest their souls, reconcile their sins, soothe their dissonance, they escort young Black girls to the altar with State-sanctioned guards to ensure they feel a sense of false security, unsuspecting their demise and perpetual death. One by one, dressed in white, their innocence is shielded for the time being. Unable to fully comprehend the gravity of their fate, they walk into the carceral brick-structured temples.

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My Grandmama’s last living sister, Nancy Sharpe Fields, Aunt Nancy to us, passed away last year, 2018. She was 87? years old. It was right before I started planning my next trip to Minnesota to visit her after six years; the trip never happened. Actually, I was able to see her fixed in time--a particular time zone that has no geographic or physical location, because now, she occupies a realm--an infinite time zone. It is a curious thing what morticians are able to do--fix us in time. Nonetheless, funerals are always, to me, full of life, in the wake (Sharpe, 2016) of
stories untold, unfettered, and unearthed. Funerals are peculiar time zones. The time traveling, the (re)surfacing of unhealed emotions, stories that healed emotions--opened old wounds--and revived riffs. I bore witness to these stories retold, and (re)membered (Dilliard, 2016) them, and got permission to capture some of them on audio recorder. Faye’s story was not audio recorded but rather captured in my memory--how could I forget this 62 year old womxn sharing a part of her narrative I had not heard. It was a chilling narrative that stayed with me, recorded in my human memory drive and later corroborated and authenticated with Faye for accuracy.

I want us to time travel to your 5th grade year--What do you remember about that time? Take a moment to (re)member, (re)collect those memories, the emotions those memories conjure up for you. Fifth grade is possibly one of those transition years for many young children. For me, that was 1989/1990; for cousin Faye, that was the years 1966/1967. For those of us who attended elementary schools that ended at the 5th grade level, the wonder and excitement surrounding the next level 6th grade, can manifest as bursts of joy, in anticipation of the “so-called” freedom the teachers and other adults boasted about while also encompassing anxiety and the hormonal acrobats our tween-ish sweat glands exuded. When I reminisce back to that time, I recall it being my pre-awkward phase. We were not quite ready for puberty, but showing small signs of the next developmental stage attempting to make its debut in parts of our bodies we could not imagine.

Never mind that I just described a developmental stage that harnesses fear, confusion, and a heightened sense of anticipation for many of us, fifth grade is the end of an era and an entry point into middle school. Combine that with the uncertainty of being used in an integration and desegregation experiment/plot/scam/scheme, never set up for success, but beholding so much hope for the potential of being included in a society that never had intentions on including
us from the get’. But you don’t know that. Your mama and daddy don’t know that. Your parents just want what is “best” and are doing the best with what they are given. This was an opportunity to be included. Seeing upfront, the immediate residents of the system of slavery, even living witness in our family and to be finally included, this was an opportunity to be seen.

Sitting at the kitchen table, we were at that one central place in the lives of many families--the place where financial decisions get made, life choices get decided, homework gets wrestled through, food gets shared and consumed in fellowship and communion with other loved ones and not so loved ones, and where the futuristic gamblings our parents made on our lives get dealt. We gamble a lot. We gambled with the hopes that we would travel in time to a future much nearer to freedom. We are a hopeful lot. Freedom is a time zone.

**Faye’s Story**

This backstory belongs to my cousin, Faye--and with her blessing I am sharing and gifting it to y’all. This is a sacred story, one that stirred up an 11 year old’s emotions triggered by the isolation that integration presented her. Honor this story. I do not tell this story as pain porn, but share to offer a counter and alternative narrative traditionally shared when we engage in discourse about integration in this nation. Those of us who occupy melanated bodies and the “other” under the white gaze must share our stories--the imaginative, the beautiful, the ugly, the complicated, the fantastic.

My cousin Faenita “Faye” Dilworth is the baby daughter of my great aunt, Margery--raised in rural Mississippi--Tupelo, Mississippi to be exact-- at the height of the school desegregation/integration movement and civil rights era. And just like Linda Brown (9) Ruby Bridges (6), Tessie Provost Williams, Leona Tate, Gail Etienne, Lucile Bluford, Judine Bishop Johnson, the Anderson sisters (Carol, Joan, and Merle), Elizabeth Eckford etc, and the host of
other Black children, particularly girls, who were sacrificed as their bodies--placed at the altar of a hollow god of United States democracy, to rescue, restore, and renew a racially ailed system--as if Black girls are actual magic and not real human beings-- Faye was also used to integrate her schools in Tupelo. At 11 years old, she was charged to carry the heavy load--a load that many of us would never voluntarily take up willingly. The lead-induced load of being “the only one” or “firsts”. A quantified existence--singular number that, in the collective American imagination, would actually and factually equate integration. Integration! Let us hold that word for a while. It will be integral to us fully understanding the scope of what these young children, mostly Black girls were being asked to do.

Faye recounts her integration story for me at our aunt’s funeral last summer--there is a wealth of narratives shared, mad shade being thrown, and hella tea spilt. That’s what happens at funerals. Sometimes that tea is so hot yet subtle in flavor and flows so conspicuously, that we forget what we shared and with whom we shared it. But Faye had hella tea, most of which I will keep within our family, but most relevant to this study was her experience integrating a school in 1967. As we briefly traveled in time together, if I listened closely, I could detect the southern twang that coated her tongue as she uttered each word. That subtle southern Mississippi twang hidden under the pain that was conjured up as she retold her story; she spoke:

I remember it so clearly. My parents sitting down together to make the decision to allow me to participate in this experiment--and it was an experiment--to integrate the schools. I mean, my parents didn’t know what to expect. They could not anticipate what I would go through. How could they?

We know from the research, news and media reports from that time and from the recent interviews of “the firsts” their experiences were full of terror. The worst of the white school
officials’, students’, and parents’ humanity showed its face as they incited violence against the girls once there (Devlin, 2018). How could her parents know? They were “the firsts” in her town and were trying to secure access to better resources, although enforced by the federal government.

Were there signs that white folx would not accept the presence of Black and Brown faces in their midst? But you see, with Faye, they thought, it would be different. The light-skinned Dilworth daughter--the baby daughter--specifically chosen because of her shade of Blackness with softer texture of curls for a crown. Her proximity to whiteness would certainly make her more palatable to the white gaze. Because we are time travellers, and have experienced other places in time by way of our travelling ancestors, known and unknown spirits through the particles of cells that take shape beneath and within our deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA)--occupying that peculiar time zone --we have seen this scene more times than we can count:

They [my parents] thought [white folx] would be more accepting of me if I were the one to integrate. But I just remember being alone. I don’t remember anyone else. There may have been --there may have been others [Black students]; I just remember being alone. I had no one there to support me.

The isolation Faye felt is a common thread other “firsts” experienced (Grant, 1984), as well as the participants of this dissertation. Devlin (2018) states, “It was the isolation and ostracism that firsts remember as the most eerie, unnatural, and overtime, harmful aspect of their desegregation experience” (Chapter 7, section 4, para. 1). When asked, they unequivocally expressed that isolation was more harmful than the open and physical violence they experienced. What these children experienced is a variation of what Williams (1995) refers to as “spirit murdering” and
what I liken to a spiritual lynching in the white imaginary. They did not physically murder or lynch them, but they used the full extend of their institutional powers to lynch their spirits.

That Faye’s parents would assume she would be more accepted is not uncommon and foreign to many of us with melanated hues. Within a racial caste system that placed white at the height of humanity, civilization, intelligence and beauty, the issues of colorism within our families and communities are often on full display. Within a system that places “white” at the height of humanity, and human achievement, Taylor (2005) explains that colorism ends up, “embedding the misconception that lighter-complexioned Blacks were more "acceptable" because they resembled Whites,” (p. 127). For poor Black people trying to make sense of colorism’s role in this system and navigate it as strategically as possible, also observing that many of the elite Black people were not only more educated, or financially and economically secure and successful but were often times also lighter in complexion (Butchart, 1996).

Faye does not believe anyone could predict the violence that would come from removing a child from her nurturing environment to the all white “integrated” school.

Up to that point, I only had Black friends, Black teachers. I loved my Black school. My mother was extremely understanding; she just did not know what to expect. I was taken out of my Black world and placed in a white school.

Ladson Billings’ (2004) affirms this sentiment. There was no way that the parents of these children, the lawyers fighting these cases, and activists and organizers could, “anticipate the depth of white fear and resentment toward the decision and the limitations such a decision would have in a racist context” (p. 5). At 11 years of age, Faye bore a weight beyond her years. And we know from history, children as young as six years old, as well as high school students, were chosen for these experiments, only to endure abuse from school teachers, administrators,
officals, parents, and other students (Bridges, 1999; Eckford, Stanley, & Stanley, 2018; Devlin, 2018).

In a 2017 study conducted by Georgetown Law School, they found that when compared to white girls of the same age, participants believed Black girls needed less nurturing, less protection, to be supported less, to be comforted less, were more independent, know more about adult topics, and know more about sex (Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez, 2017). This phenomenon described here is how the adultification of Black girls enters the logics of our being. Blake et al. (2017) defines adultification as “both a socialization process, fostering opportunities for risk and resilience, and a social stereotype that shares the ways in which Black children are perceived and subsequently treated as adults (Burton, 2007). Additionally, under the white gaze and within the white logic, Black girls are within “a constant state of defeminization that is contrasted to the image of innocent and domesticated white woman or white girl,” (Young & Hines, 2018).

Several researchers have explored the ways in which society has captured an adultification of Black girls within their imagination (Morris, 2019; Hines & Wilmot, 2018; Epstein, Blake & Gonzalez, 2017). With roots in slavery, portrayals of Black girls and women from being Jezebel and over sexualized, to the a Sapphire --evil, mean spirited, hard-hearted, that organizers, civil rights activists, and lawyers would think young Black girls could bear that sort of violence and abuse, and walk away unscathed, “resilient” are just one of the many ways misogynoir takes hold and is normalized within our collective imagination.

The adultification of Black children, particularly Black girls, like many stereotypes and tropes, is what leads to deep seated and often untreated trauma and harm. Left with no other choice, Faye shares how she had to be her own defender in the face of white institutional terror:
I remember this one educator. He was the principal, Mr. Ramsey, and he was going to hit me for something he said I’d done. I don’t even remember what it was--I remember the dress I was wearing so vividly. I was in tears and said, “I’m not gonna let you hit me!” I took a stand for myself in a place where I had absolutely no support. You see there was no phones back then. My parents didn’t have a phone for him to call them. So the principal forced me to sit in Ms. McDuffy, the piano teacher’s room.

It was out of necessity that my cousin, in resistance, stood her ground and refused the unjust punishment and physical assault onto her body. She was already plucked from the comfort of her Black community and placed into an inferno of hostility she was left to fend for herself. In that moment she felt control of her body--a defiant kind of control--an absolute refusal of sorts. Because the collective national imaginary framed and protected by white logic, has imagined Black girls as less deserving, more susceptible to negative behaviors, their punishments tend to be harsher ranging from removal from the classroom, out of school suspension, in school suspension, and corporal punishment, where legal, for comparable behaviors of their white counterparts (Morris, 2019).

In an article by Melinda Anderson (2018), historian Rachel Devlin reports that the Black children chosen for these experiments and used as tools for integration, were mostly Black girls because they knew how to stand up for themselves and were not just being accommodating. Devlin states:

“But I want to be clear. This was not just about being accommodating—they knew how to stand their ground. Girls were good at combining different forms of bravery; they could be both stubborn and tough, but also project social openness.
They had that sense of self-possession that was extremely useful in these situations,” (Devlin as stated in Anderson, 2018).

What if it went beyond showing “bravery” and was just a refusal to have their humanity incessantly assaulted? What if their participation in the integration/desegregation movement was their natural and healthy response to dehumanization?

In her retelling of these stories, Devlin problematically extols the girls for their resilience:

Devlin: Tessie Prevost-Williams and Leona Tate integrated T.J. Semmes Elementary School in New Orleans, in third grade. Along with Gail Etienne, the three of them received the worst violence that I recorded in the book. Because they were so young and so little, people would punch them, trip them, spit in their food. They said they could hardly go to the bathroom because that was a very dangerous space. It was a war inside the school. Tessie, Leona, and Gail all said it was a living hell.

I think the resilience that these young women had is hard to imagine. One would think that it would have been a crippling experience, but they sensed from a very early age the weight and enormity of what they were doing. They came to understand the notion of sacrifice for social justice. The stamina that it took to survive was fed and reinforced by the magnitude of what they were accomplishing (Devlin as stated in Anderson, 2018).

Again, feeding off the tropes of the strong Black womxn denied these Black children their childhood. In the case of Faye, and other children in her position, these events and incidences
have emotionally and psychologically been impacted. We would be shortsighted to believe that the “firsts” were not impacted by the actions of the other adults and students they encountered in the schools. The belief that Black girls could endure incessant assaults on their humanity, and then turn out “just fine” is not only a narration of our dehumanization but fantastical. That would be us not only again feeding into the fanciful myths that support the adultification of young Black girls, but drawing on the allusions of the magical negro that are conjured up from the images of “Black Girl Magic”—a phrase that has captured popular culture within Black folx.

Writer and culture critic Jamil Smith (2016) defines the “magical Negro” as:

“the term “magical Negro” has a lengthy cultural history, particularly in American popular culture, and typically appears in stories purely to aid white protagonists. She or he is imbued with powers that are either physically or sociologically supernatural, superseding racial obstacles in a single bound with some folksy golf advice, a home-cooked meal, or a healing touch” (Smith, 2016, p. 10).

Positioning Black children, mostly Black girls, as tools for racial renewal, healing, restoration, and repair—as if their presence could magically repair the harm inflicted since the founding of the nation.

It is only now that we are unearthing what “the firsts” experienced. According to Devlin (2018), some of “the firsts,” who were also boys, ended up dropping out of school, fell physically sick, or even developed chronic illnesses. What is beautiful about the design of humans, is our bodies speak to us. Our bodies will respond to dehumanization and what legal scholar Patricia Williams (1987) refers to as spirit-murdering: “a crime, and offense so painful and assaultive” against the humanity of Black folx, assaults that are so normalized and built into
the very structures and culture of a society so much so that proving the offense becomes
difficult (p. 129). The imagery of the miner’s canary has been conjured up by many scholars to
portray the ways in which marginalized people natural instincts will respond to the danger and
harm in sight. Our natural instincts--natural impulses provide warning signs prompt us to do
something about the danger in sight.

What does it say about a society that leans on young unassuming and unsuspecting Black
girls to carry us over into “The Promised Land” to a “Jericho” of sorts that turns out to be a
purgatory to save a system so grounded and fixated on fictive narratives of their humanity. There
is something sadistic about a society that normalizes Black girl pain, Black girl torture, Black
girl sacrifice to a godless, and specious democracy.

This is not an indictment on Aunt Marjorie or any other parent, or Faye, or any of the
young girls; this is an unabashed indictment of the United States of America’s democracy and
our continued system of segregation. This system of segregation, contends Lawrence (1980), was
never about separation, but relegating Black folx as inferior and so far to margin that they are not
able to participate and thrive in society (pp. 52-53).

**Restore, Renew, and Repair**

We cannot fully understand the scope of this dilemma without fully understanding the
language and words we are using, to not only name things, but to articulate how we are also
using the bodies of Black children in sacrifice of those things and ideas. Developing our
understanding of the language used and articulation will also help us to continue to build a better
conception by defining integration as experienced by Black children, particularly Black girls, and
Black educators, and articulating its etymological and historical meaning. In this section, I distill
the definition of the word integration, its etymology, and how it manifested in the lives of Black
children during the civil rights era, as well as post-Brown in the lives of my six participants as children and as adults as educators in schools.

What exactly were the Black educators, civil rights era organizers, activists, and lawyers attempting to accomplish with desegregation and integration? Faye, in sync with many other integration accounts, explains that although she loved her Black school, it just lacked the resources that the white schools had access to. Outdated, hand-me-down textbooks and other resources from the white schools is what her school was supplied. What exactly do we mean by “integration”? Was “integration” the right word to accurately captures what was manifesting in the lived experiences of Black children? How did this word get applied to their movement? And did “integration,” in the way it was rolled out, live up to its definition--its true historical and etymological definition, because words mean things, you know?

In 2019, national dialogues of integration are re-entering into the public discourse. In February of 2018 a group of lawyers along with civil rights groups, such as the NAACP, the United Methodist Church of Greater New Jersey, and the Latino Action Network in New Jersey filed a lawsuit against the state for failing to integrate its public schools after the Brown v. Topeka Board of Education ruling in 1954; NJ is the fourth state to have such a suit brought to the courts (Clark, 2018; Cohen, 2019). But what exactly do we mean when we use the word integration and what exactly does this word mean when it is put into action?

According to the Etymology Dictionary and Dictionary, *integration* and *integral*, *integrate* and *integration* are all connected and has its roots in the Latin word *integratus*, which is the past participle of *integrare*--meaning “to make whole”. This, ultimately coming from the word *integer* meaning “whole and complete” and often associated with mathematics. When we think of its relationship and word association to math, it denotes: “whole numbers” and also “to
Put together parts or elements and combine them into a whole”. These dictionary definitions lay out somewhat of an evolution of the word but what stands out are the phrases: “to render something whole,” “make whole,” “untainted, upright,” “untouched”.

If something is integral, also with roots in the words integer, and integrate, we are saying it is “necessary to the completeness of the whole”. While in other contexts, the etymology is traced back to meaning an "act of bringing together the parts of a whole," from French intégration and directly from Late Latin integrationem (nominative integratio) as an act of "renewal, restoration," also "renew, begin again". The Latin root word, integrare--denotes, “make whole” and also “renew, begin again”. When traced back, the origin of the word integrate, the Online Etymology Dictionary Late Latin integrationem (nominative integratio) "renewal, restoration," noun of action from past participle stem of Latin integrare. The words that are standing out the most for me in these definitions are: complete, from integer “whole” and part of a whole. Interested in and intrigued by the etymology of “renew,” and “restoration,” I find:

restoration (n.) late 14c., "a means of healing or restoring health; renewing of something lost," from Old French restoration (Modern French restauration) and directly from Late Latin restorationem (nominative restoratio), noun of action from past participle stem of Latin restaurare (see restore).

Mid-15c. as "the repairing of a building;" c. 1500 as "a restoring to a former state." With a capital R-, in reference to the reestablishment of the English monarchy under Charles II in 1660, from 1718. As a period in English theater, attested from 1898. In French history, it refers to 1814. An earlier word in this sense was restauration (late 14c.), from French.
restore (v.)

c. 1300, "to give back," also, "to build up again, repair," from Old French restorer, from Latin restaurare "repair, rebuild, renew," from re- "back, again" (see re-) + -staurare, as in instaurare "to set up, establish; renew, restore," from PIE *stau-ro-, from root *sta- "to stand, make or be firm." Related: Restored; restoring.

restore. repair. rebuild. renew.

Although all roots of the words integrate, integer, restore, renew, repair etc. are inextricably intertwined and connected, the words and phrases I will be focusing on here are “renew/renewal, restoration, begin again” to distill their root meanings and connotations.

Considering that, 13th century connotations of the word “restore” leads us to another layer of the word, meaning “to give back” and “to build up again, repair; renew”. Late 14th century definitions of the word “restoration” connotes “a means of healing or restoring health; renewing of something lost”. To build on this analysis and excavate deeper meanings, mid-15th century etymological connotations allude to restoration meaning “the repairing of a building” as “a restoring to a former state”. What these definitions and connotations provide us with is a deeper and more profound symbolic understanding of words we loosely use to describe an era and period, and even action that was attempted by this nation to appease the internal and external opposition.

If we are to hold these meanings at the fore, we are left with rich and powerful expressions and articulations to help us deconstruct a deeper analysis of two points: 1) the role of integration in the National imagination, and 2) the aspirational role of integration, if we are really about that life.
At this point in our nation’s history, it is clear that we have not only lost our way, but have never been on a path towards restoration, and or healing. As mentioned before, the United States is a nation built on the genocidal racial capitalist project of slavery, human and land extractions, attempted genocide, land dispossession, exploitation; the factors and atrocities could go on and on. Consequently, we are at a moral crossroads.

Our nation claimed they were attempting “integration”—which we now have established as actually a “making whole and complete,” a “restoration”—a process of “healing,” yet walked Black children, mostly Black girls, into an infected host. How can we actually integrate, “make complete” and move toward “restoration” of a system when in fact we never made an effort to rebuild it through institutional and systemic supports? There was no quarantine. No systemic antibiotics to neutralize the antibodies of racism and heteropatriarchy. We took fresh and nearly ripened fruits of our wombs and “integrated” them into a barrel of unhealed hosts. If we used the analogy that proceeded this chapter, we took young virgins and sacrificed them to appease an idol god, never having admitting fault, never having repented, and never having to change behavior, practices, and attitudes. With a new generation cycling into our unhealed society with each passing moment, we neglect getting it right.

Anti-black Violence of Black Studenthood

And then my dad said, ‘This is the world; you have to learn to adjust.’ So, I did.~

Faith

Drawing on the literature, the definition of anti-blackness that is grounding this analysis is pulled from the seminal work of Sylvia Wynter on Man, Human, and understanding how Black people are conceptualized as the “ultimate referent of the “racially inferior” Human Other" (Wynter, 2003, p. 266). Therefore, our existence is also grounded in this irreconcilable dismal
relationship to the articulation of humanness. We must also develop a fluency is understanding the ways in which this articulation is perpetually engaged in a dialectics with state sanctioned policies resulting in an effect of Black death within every institution. Dumas (2016) argues that:

deeply and inextricably embedded within racialized policy discourses is not merely a general and generalizable concern about disproportionality or inequality, but also, fundamentally and quite specifically, a concern with the bodies of Black people, the signification of (their) blackness, and the threat posed by the Black to the educational well-being of other students (p. 12)

And other educators. And for that matter, other parents and other community members.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that New Jersey has the 4th most segregated schools in the nation with approximately half of the Black and Latinx students attending what the researchers Orfield et al (2007, 2010; Orfield, Ee, & Coughlan, 2017) refer to as apartheid schools. Even after all the pomp and circumstance during Brown v. BOE, all the lawsuits, and all the Presidential orders, integration never really happened. And like Faye, many of my participants found themselves trapped in schools that were un receptive to their presence. Faith, having attended all Black and Latinx schools from Kindergarten through 5th grade and an all-Black middle school with all Black educators and staff, makes the transition in 9th grade to the predominately white Stepford Heights High School. From her all Black middle school, Faith and her other classmates from her all Black Brighthaven school, get dispersed throughout the high school; their community gets dismantled in an effort to “integrate” the large predominately white segregated community. Like Faye, and so many other Black children, post-Brown, Faith gets plucked from her haven. In Faith’s own words, she describes the experience as a “cultural shock”: 
So interesting. So, I went to middle school---all Black. And then we went to Stepford Heights High School where I was the only Black kid in all my classes. Because we only had two 8th grade classes in Brighthaven--that's how small it is. So, once you get in the big high school you are so dispersed. It was a culture shock. ‘Cause I came from Cumberbatch--Black--Latino; Brighthaven: all Black. Not even, not even Latino really here. Ummm, and then all white (chuckles). So it was like, "What's happening?!" hahaha. So, it was a struggle. I wanted to leave. I begged to leave. (Chuckles). And then my dad said, "This is the world." "...and you have to learn how to adjust and." So I did.

This sort of “grin and bear it,” “this is the world” are messages we as children get, beginning at such a young age. Although our parents do the best they can to teach us how to survive an oppressive system, we do not learn how to disrupt but rather become complacent with the status quo. At what point do we teach our children to trust their instinct when they are faced with violence and abuse?

Like most families with economic resources and choices, when Cookie and her husband made the decision to move to New Jersey. The complex variables that factored into their decision before purchasing a house is documented here is Cookie’s conversation with me:

Um, so we kind of struggled with moving here and moving to the suburbs and knowing that the suburbs was predominantly white because neither one of us grew up in that type of neighborhood. You know? So it was like, oh, this is going to be different and raising a child here--different from our experiences. And then when he was, when he finished third grade, we then made the decision that he wasn't, he was no longer going to be attending schools here in Evergreen. We
placed him in a private school, Broadtown Friends, which is up the road in Broadtown, which is a --even more different from here.

This struggle that Cookie is alluding to is because she and her partner both recognized the inherently anti-blackness of the white middle class suburbia that they would be potentially moving into. There is also the struggle for Black parents to find the right learning environment that will potentially see the humanity in their children. It is a dance of often the lesser of two evils, but always a question of access to resources. Do I place my child in the local public schools that are often anti-black, anti-child/hood AND adultist? Or do I place my child in a school that is anti-black, pro-child/hood, and working on interrogating their adultism?

The means by which Cookie and her partner had to identify a learning environment that would nurture their son, not only academically, but social emotionally are not options afforded many Black people without the means. As a psychologist by trade, and a mother, Cookie explains:

Cookie: We placed him in a private school, Broadtown Friends, which is up the road in Broadtown, which is a-- even more different from here [Evergreen Public Schools]. So it's, it's still predominantly white. But the folks there, the families are wealthy, some wealthy, some rich, some middle class. And then some working class, ‘cause they will pull students from some families from some students from Cumberbatch City area through a scholarship program. So that is very different from Evergreen on the North side where we live.

Okaikor: The school or the community?

Cookie: The community. And I would say the school. And you know, in that sense the school--because the school being that it's a private school, the
community is made up of the families that choose to send their children there as opposed to necessarily the families that live in the area.

We decided we wanted to find a school that was focused on--that looked at children developmentally and their kind of social and emotional needs as opposed to just academics. And that, you know, I think at the time when our son started school, there was that shift in public education where teachers didn't have as much autonomy and there's more, more focus on the test scores. And when he started he started kindergarten in the neighborhood school. We saw that there really kind of just focused on, on the academics and the test and not kind of where our kid is. Nor is there a, I'd say like a consistent philosophy that the district has when it comes to thinking about children socially--socially and emotionally. The district tends to be very reactive as opposed to proactive and that doesn't always--it's not always helpful. So yeah, we decided when he was finished with, with third grade, he applied to Broadtown Friends and fortunately was accepted. You know? And with that comes association with people of means. And that can be positive and, and negative. So far it's been probably just like a mixture of both. You know, he's made some-- he's made some good friendships and I think it's allowed him to develop into kind of who he is as a person without as many restrictions and expectations and limitations that might be placed on him if he were still in public school here. Um, and you know, I think that's just kind of who he is.

Although not explicitly stated, Cookie and her partner worked to create a space where they could protect their son from the anti-childhood sensibilities of the traditional public school but placing
him in a school that understood child/hood and child development. It is also worth noting that the school has intentionally manufactured diversity for its students.

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Integrated schools are often hailed and lifted up in the public discourse as these multi-ethnoracial havens. However under whose gaze are these schools “utopias”? Once we peel back the onion layers, remove the mask, and draw the curtains, it is clear how shapeshifting racism is. With Black students, compared to their white counterparts in integrated school, suffering the most suspensions (Arcia, 2006; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Blake et. al., 2011; Finn & Servoss, 2014; Annamma et. al., 2019), the highest mis-identified and mis-labeled for special education (Blanchett, 2006; Skiba et. al., 2008; Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013), the highest tracked away from courses schools and districts consider more rigorous and higher level (Ford & King, 2014; Ford, 2014; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006), Black students are perpetually denied access to opportunities. It is as if school officials have figured out a way to still deny opportunities to Black students in spite of the Federal mandates, lawsuits, and legal rulings. Racism is adaptable when there are no structures put in place to attack it from the root.

The anti-blackness in America has levels and layers in order to maintain its overall structure with its extreme forms directed at African Americans. Being of direct African descent can provide some superficial, yet often tangible privileges. In 2018 Nigerian-Americans were recognized as being the most successful ethic group in the United States (Fosco, 2018). It is not uncommon to find Black African and Caribbean students used as tools for anti-Blackness against African Americans, particularly in schools. During the Civil Rights Era, the 1960s and 1970s, it was the Asian American population who were labeled “model minorities” and “model students” by white people as a way to criticize Black and Latinx folx (Spring, 2001). I argue that other
people of color and ethnic groups such as Nigerians and Black Carribeans are being used in
today’s day as the new “model minorities” just as their predecessors, Asian Americans were used
during the 60s and 70s (Spring, 2001, p. 62). Massey et. al. (2006), found that Black immigrants are: 1) overrepresented in elite and or private selective institutions, 2) Black immigrants are more likely to have more educated parents, 3) more likely to attend private and/or integrated schools and live in integrated schools, and 4) have significantly less exposure to violence than the children of native Blacks (pp. 267-268). This research is significant in understanding Eloquence and his siblings’ experiences in school. In his account, Eloquence expresses he had it relatively “easier” in school. In his own words, he tells us that he was seen as a “good” student. Eloquence continues here:

I remember my schooling experience-- I remember coming to Brickstone Elementary and like knowing what they were teaching already--like knowing the material and um, you know, being regarded as like a good student. And that, you know, especially in math and science because my dad was a--he was a math teacher slash engineering major, so-- in college. So he always put a premium on the math and science classes. In middle school, I was-- I could feel like I maintained that, as well as in high school-- being one of the only African American students in some of the honors classes I was in. I remember vividly leaving-- I remember being in an honors history class and you know, kind of looking around realizing you know, "I'm not comfortable in here" Like, you know? Wasn't getting the best experience--my grade was kinda slipping. And I remember requesting to level down actually to the college prep-- not sure what they call it. Level three is what I called it.
Despite Eloquence’s initial academic ease with being in honors level courses, his awareness and sense that he was not being fully educated, served or getting what he needed prompted him to sign himself out of the class and into the lower level class, where he found his other Black friends. Eloquence shares that moment he realized something was not right:

Yeah, I just kind of was like, "I'm ready to get out of this class. It's not making sense" And um, yeah, had a great time in that class. Actually met my prom date later that year--this was junior year--in that class--something that would not have happened had I remained in the all white honors class. Um, that's the experience I just always remember.

Eloquence’s realization that his classes were segregated and that he could only come in contact with other Black students at lunch time, was not a moment of any critical consciousness beyond his desire to be in community with friends and people who he found acceptance in. In his conversation with me, he exclaims, “Wow! This is where everyone is?”

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Going from being in an all-Black public school with all Black educators, who were mostly Black women, to a private Catholic school where Phil was surrounded by mostly white students and faculty and staff--notably taught by all white male teachers.

Canterbury Prep was very different than my public school, k through eight experience. Um, so I had--Whereas, again, in South Denwood, I had predominantly teachers of color--Black women. At Canterbury Prep, I had all white male teachers except for one. My Spanish teacher, Ms. Gonzalez, was a woman. Everyone else was male. Everyone else was white.
This experience of being one of the chosen few to yearly and conditionally “integrate” an all-boys Catholic high school, in an effort to manufacture the diversity for the white children who hailed from the racially segregated enclaves of white suburbia, meant that not only would Phil be taught by all white male teachers, but that he would be educated into white culture. With a strong Catholic all boys school tradition, this environment meant that he would be fully emerged in a culture that stalwartly defends and embraces the myths designed to uphold cis-white male Judeo Christian patriarchy.

When I talk about my experience at Canterbury Prep, I think what I took from it, was maybe-- I think I learned how to study. But what I think I was lacking was in content. Most of the content was the canon say in English literature. And so it was your, you know, your Steinbeck and, you know, your so-- the dead white males. So we read all of the classics. And in, history, similarly it was, you know, what I like to call the master narrative of the American myth of meritocracy and, you know, the American myth of rugged individualism. And all of those things. And so, it's interesting because, I use those same concepts when I'm teaching students today about racism, you know, and patriarchy, and the American myths. So like his -story-- when we talk about history, as much as sometimes we want to like, throw those books out the window, I think as educators we can sometimes use-- maybe not use the master's tools to burn down the house, but like, we can use the master's tools to kind of educate some of our students to--to wake up.

Phil describes how he educates for awareness and ignites a fire under his students. The pedagogical disconnect that Phil has with the school and curriculum prompts him to counter the
“master narratives.” Using the “master’s tools,” Phil does believe they can be beneficial to waking students up to their experiences in school.

Fire is a cleansing, purifying, and renewing element. As the goldsmith prepares to refine the nugget, it is the holding to the fire that takes the current state of the nugget and dramatically transforms it. In that process, the fire as it interacts with the air, in a heated discourse, it extracts the impurities. Impurities! Phil invokes Lorde’s quote as it relates to the kind of pedagogy he offers students. It is the critical education/educating of the students that will help them develop a critical grounding and understanding of the complex world we live in. And yes, Audre Lorde’s reference needs to be explored further. Although we cannot use the master’s tools to burn the master’s house, what is left unsaid in her statement is that the goal is to ultimately burn down the master’s house. In the process of the “burning,” and holding to the fire, there is a refining, purifying, renewing—present continuous tense, that is occurring in that very process. Drawing on the foundational meanings of the words “integrate,” and “integration,” we are reminded of the ways in which “renew” speaks to it. Lorde’s reference, like the gold nuggets placed to the fire, calls for a renewing, refining, and symbolic and metaphoric purifying of a system before we can reach a place of healing.

Echoed in Armah (2018), “They pretend that somehow, in some magical way, the academic system designed for African enslavement can be retooled into an instrument for African liberation. It cannot” (p. 14).

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The myth of racially mixed people being the solution to racism, or not experiencing racism is found throughout society, from the media to the military. Often priding itself as not being a racist institution, the military is also complicit. This myth is created all while adopting a
“color-blind” approach (Ray, 2018), ignoring how ranks and positions have historically been racially segregated, the health disparities that exist for Black veterans in comparison to white veterans, the lack of transparency in the ways in which service people are treated, promoted, lower paid occupations often going to poor Black and Brown service people, and higher ranked positions going to white service people, mostly white etc. Because we know that the health disparities exist between different races of people within the military, we know that there are still health disparities within the ranks as well (MacLean & Edwards, 2010; Sheehan, et. al., 2015).

The image of the military utopia is a well-constructed myth. However, according to Lauryn, she shares that these were her experiences:

Um, I grew up--I'm a military brat. So I grew up outside of Fort Walter and we're all mixed. Like we were all biracial. Like it didn't seem like racism was a big issue, which is kind of strange because we were like right on the verge of Dixieville. Which we all knew just stay away from there. Dixieville, it was back then, was known for like Klu Klux Klan and white supremacists. Yeah. So we just knew not to go there. Stay on this side. So, I mean honestly I didn't hit racism or anything crazy until freshman year of college at Whitman.

It is not uncommon for people to identify racism as being the extreme KKK, neo-nazis, Torchbearers, etc. and not notice the legitimate and state sanctioned systems and institutions that work in concert with each other to limit the opportunities and outcomes of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and some melanated Asian people. As, in her own words, “a military brat,” the racial integration of her early years education experience, and the multiethnoracial families that were like hers were, on the surface, normalized on the military bases she grew up on.
Lauryn went from that facile environment of the military, to a college environment where she was openly ostracized and isolated and became a spectacle to many of the white students in her predominantly white college campus and subjected to a more readily recognizable version of anti-blackness. She explains an incident below:

I had a-- I guess it was my peer. We were, um, we were both RAs. And we're sitting in the meeting he kept petting me. Blond hair, blue eyes. And I just completely went, Blacked out! "Fuck you petting me for? What are you doing?"

And he was like, I never saw a light skinned Black person before. He's like-- like, like he would sniff --pet and sniff. Like-- you are really skeeving me. He was like the only people he saw because-- because he's from well up north-- only Black people he saw he said we're servants or like they were in that type of position. He said he'd never seen--especially nobody that was supposed to be his equal. I had-- I had uh, people moved off my floor when they realized I was Black. Yeah, it was Whitman College-- it was different. I was like, "Whaaaat?!" That was like 91, 92.

Yeah. And then what happened was, my little brother, who's darker than I am-- and they were moving me in the same time the kids were moving in. And they were like, "Is that your." I said, "You know? Yeah. That's my boyfriend. That's my brother" She pulled her child that minute from my floor.

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There are times when the experiences Black children have in integrated schools means they will encounter some of this violence from their peers, the students they sit in class with, eat lunch with, and play with on the playground. Children are socialized within and by all our
institutions. White supremacy is consistently reinforced at every layer within our society and our children are skilled at portraying what we have explicitly and implicitly taught them; they in turn share and expose their playmates and classmates. Maria’s experience lifts that up even though her parents attempted to shelter her from those experiences:

I was just telling someone the other day that um in, so my one friend, she was my friend from fourth grade through eighth grade and we were on our eighth grade trip--Great Adventure--we were on the Sky Ride. Great Adventure had not been opened that long [laughs]

That's how old I am! And we're in the sky ride. And, one girl Juanita, who was Puerto Rican and she was like, "Oh, look at that guy! He's so cute!" And then my friend who was white said, "What are you talking about? He's a nigger?!"

And I just remember just going, "Oh, my God!" It's just totally threw me because we had been friends for a long time [laughs]. And I was like, "Wow!" And it totally threw me and I was like, "Wow!" I didn't say anything. And I said nothing because I couldn't. I just said nothing. And I just remember going-- it's not a word I heard a lot of--- the first time I heard of the word was when I moved to, East Cumberbatch because it was--where I grew up was predominantly Black. So I didn't hear the word. We didn't say, it's not like they say it now.

It wasn't said. My Dad tried to-- my family--we just didn't know. I had never really heard the word. until I was like 10 and I was walking up the street from this new home and the kids started calling us, that word. I didn't know so I asked my mom what the word is. And so she, you know, so I knew it was a negative word.
Um, by then I was 13 and I was just so thrown and then you're on that I'm on a sky, rise at, can't get off and walk away [laughs].

It was interesting because Juanita, who was, you know, she was Puerto Rican and then my friend--what's her name?--my friend Meg. I just, I was in total. I was just like, like what does that mean? Like, what does that and how do you see me all these years? I guess so that totally, that informed my life for a long time actually. And there's an Oprah story connected to that. If ever you want to hear that story [laughs].

We know from history that many of the challenges Black children faced in these integrated schools came from other students--people who should have been their peers--their equals--inflicting violence and harm onto them. It was a never ending cycle of violence experienced from peers as well as the adults who they were taught by, with very little relief.

In her 50s, Maria is still impacted by this event that happened to her when she was 13 years old. It sullied her belief in being able to have authentic relationships with white people. Maria explains below:

Yeah. So I had written Oprah and I said um, Oprah had this... She was doing this series lifestyle makeover. And that was a part of it--to join a life makeover group, which was mixed, a mixed group of people--racially mixed. And so, I was also--my first part was communicating with people online--and this is way back in the day--so this was like more email communication. And um, it was a lot of healing involved and it, they, they really helped me. And so I sent this email to Oprah saying, I thought I really thought that-- that Black and white people could never really be friends, but now I know they can. And so they picked my email and
called me to be on the show and blah blah blah blah. And at the last minute they chose to go with the Pumpkin Lady, but they still flew me out and my whole group went to the show and all that stuff. So I had a-- that was a shadow belief that Black and white people can't really be friends because you can't really trust them. They really not. So I believe that for, um, for years [laughs]

Yeah, I'm sure it came from there [the experience with her white friend]. Yeah, because you think someone's, your friend and you know, they can't--they just think you're a "nigger," so…

Shadow beliefs are “unconscious beliefs that influence our entire lives, tells us what we can and cannot do and drives our behaviors” (Dictionary, n.d.). Shadow beliefs lurk in our subconscious gardens. They, like seeds are planted on fertile ground for growth and nurturing that inform our life choices and reflect the reasons behind our actions and decisions we make. Cognitive neuroscientists say people only consciously operate off of five percent of our cognitive functioning day to day. This means, the vast majority of the decisions we make, actions we take, emotions that fill us, habits we engage in, and other behaviors, rest on 95 percent of our brain activity that goes beyond our conscious awareness (Bargh & Morsella, 2008; Bargh, 2014). From the age of 12 and well into her adulthood, Maria lived her life--engaged life within the framework of what she calls a “shadow belief” that Black people and white people could not be friends. This shadow belief cannot be examined without examine what it was a response to.

Meg, in her ignorance and socialization, openly utters the n-word, drawing on a collective belief constructed on the myth of the Black--the ultimate other, that the collective white imagination has conjured up and reinforced through policies, and practices. Hook (2004) explains, “The ‘Negro myth’ is not ahistorical, universal, or natural; rather, it has a precise
political function, Fanon claims, and that is to act as a repository – a figure in whom whites symbolise all their lower emotions and baser inclinations” (p. 125).

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We started this section by examining the experiences of these Black educators when they were children in school built behind the backdrop of my cousin Faye’s integration experience. As young children we were able to bear witness, via the sharing of their stories as well as historical accounts of other children who were used to integrate. Our transition is now taking us to what experiences they have had as adults who entered schools no longer as children but adults.

**Anti-black Violence of Black Educatorhood**

Anti-black violence for educators within a system of inherent anti-blackness, make us not only complicit and gatekeepers within the system, but also the prey--and victims all at the same time. Most of these instances go unchecked and addressed because if its insidiousness. However there are times where the actions are so explicit and horrendous, that those are the only times we act upon it. Out of the six participants, Maria was the only one who reported explicit acts of racial terror at work. In this account, she walks us through a hate crime she experienced:

So June 6th or 7th or 8th, June 7th I think. Um, I walked into my classroom--actually I walked into my office which was a classroom and on the wall someone had written KKK on the wall and um, and uh, you know, police were called and you know, people were notified and I was going to quit education because I took it as a sign, get out, like, you know, when you see KKK, it's me, it's always get out, we don't want you here. To me, it connotes violence and all that kind of stuff. So to me it was like um, "get out". And I just felt like after, at that point, probably
25 years or so in education, I just felt like it was time to get out. And I was going to leave...

Still haunted by the hate crime by her colleague, Maria’s retelling of this story does resurface hurt that she attempts to mask and disguise behind chuckles, but the pauses, tense body posture, the strumming of her nails on the table, betray her. She tells me that she has had years of therapy to be able to tell this story without being triggered. I fear she has been triggered. She continues her conversation explaining how she returned to work:

And, and, and I spoke to the superintendent so I decided to stay. Um, probably wasn't the smartest move to do. So. Um, that summer I barely worked. And then when September came I went back to work and then things got crazy. Um [pause], yeah. I don't know. We always thought --the belief was that a teacher did it. I was in denial. I didn't think a teacher-- I-- I knew a teacher did it, but I just couldn't wrap my brain around it. And then by November-- this happened June-- by November, it was clear to me that a teacher did it and that someone was capable of doing it. And that's when, um, I don't know, I couldn't really wrap my-- - and I couldn't wrap my brain around it. Things just got really hostile, um to work on a daily basis. It was really bad.

As if the inscribing of physical symbols of hate and terror were not enough, Maria explains that her return to work was also coupled by a hostile work environment from other colleagues who would also gossip about her to other colleagues and students, further marginalizing her within a community she should be welcomed into. When we are taught and learn to endure the violence of these environments, we take that into our adult life and end up tolerate it.

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Black educators in integrated schools sometimes report feeling alone and isolated. In many instances, particularly in white segregated schools, they are one of the only ones, if not the only one in their schools. In Phil’s case, we also works as the Affirmative Action Officer for his district. In the excerpt below he explains his frustration with the district administration and union leaderships lack of sensitivity towards the ways that Black educators are targeted in schools by administrators. In the excerpt below, there are all Black educators who were recommended by the administrator for non-renewal of their contract or disciplinary action:

We got like Black teachers in --throughout the district who feel like they aren't supported. And I was like, "Joe!" Like Ryan Wellington, Fran Jones. Like, I'm giving him names of new people-- people who've been here for eight, 10 years. Veterans like these folx have come to me and want to file affirmative action, you know, claims or whatever. They don't feel like--they don't feel supported. So I just used like what little stuff I have with affirmative action. So when like the list came out for people who weren't going to be rehired, I'm like, "Justin, you guys just see the list of names so you don't know who's African American, who's a person of color-- You know? Whatever? I'm like, "We have folx who are feeling targeted and feel like they're going to be-- because they're non-tenure-- they're going to be punished" I said, "I need you to look at, you know, these names." And so Ryan's name luckily wasn't on it. But that other woman? Oh God, Justine, right? She ended up--we ended up--- they ended up saving her and moving her somewhere else. But like, like that was Millie at Bridgeville Middle. But the Union man, it's like I'm--I'm not going to keep trying to protect, you know? Yeah. Because it's bullshit. I'm like we [the union] don't stand for shit.
Administrators are often the challenges and gatekeepers that Black educators encounter within schools. The fear of being targeted becomes a reality. We know Black children, are relentlessly under the gaze of their teachers and targeted for disciplinary practices. This unrelenting gaze is not only from white educators, but from educators of color as well (Gilliam et. al, 2016). These Black students grow up into Black educators, so what happens then? Black studenthood to Black educatorhood at risk of being targeted by colleagues and administrators. This fear is not only from the white administrators, but from Black and other administrators of color who also pose a threat to their existence.

The other layer to this that Phil lifts up is the failure of the union when it comes to being prepared to protect and support Black educators. This was a fear Black educators had well before the American Teachers Association (ATA) merged into the National Education Association (NEA). Black educators worried their needs would not be met, and that the unions would not know how to properly defend the rights of the Black educators while supporting the needs of Black students and community.

Schools as sites for anti-blackness is the norm of white supremacy (Dumas, 2014). For Eloquence, that looked like being explicitly complicit in the anti-blackness that takes form in predominantly Black and Brown public schools, specifically a charter school. He explains below:

I was at a charter school. And it was such a heavy focus on testing and frankly my job was test prep--my job was test prep. Now I --now I was around some other amazing English teachers who could still find their way in the midst of the test prep landmines and such. And I look up to them to this day. I think they were amazing teachers. But it-- for me it was, it was too bothersome for me and I don't think I just had the capacity and skill set to maneuver it the way that they could.
And so I decided, you know what, I have this background of 30 credits in chemistry. Like, let me see what it would be like to teach that.

Unable to figure out a way around it, Eloquence chose to get a chemistry teaching certification as a way to escape the anti-black pressures as an English language arts teacher, who were required to teach to the test. What is interesting in his response is the fact that he refers to them as being the “test-prep landmines.” Landmines, used in war, planted underground, in multiple numbers, so that the unsuspecting target--not only does not know where they are, but must calculate and maneuver to avoid injury. Because there are so many “landmines” insidiously hidden throughout, there is difficulty in maneuvering and more times that none, result in death. Eloquence’s use of the word “landmines” positions them as institutional technologies of intellectual and spiritual war--thereby insidiously planted throughout the school day, curriculum, pedagogy, and practices, that unconsciously prepares both students and teachers for an incessant death.

Just like Eloquence, Cookie sheds light on her role within schools as a school psychologist whose primary role is to administer a tool used for anti-blackness within school. She acknowledges this fact and reflects on this dilemma. In her words:

So my primary responsibility is to administer IQ tests. [laughs] That's my--and when I say my primary responsibility, I'm the only person in that building who can do that-- that is certified by the state to do that. Maria's had training in it, but when it comes to the State, I'm the only person that can do that. So it-- it causes me to think really seriously about the test, who I'm testing, what the results mean, who's going to view the results, how the student thinks about the results, how the parents think about the results, how staff members think about the results. So, you know, my comment to Maria the other day was because she struggles with
students that she's dealt with who have not been—who've been mis-identified using IQ tests. So I look at it as: I've got training on this tool that can be weaponized and I need to be really—not certain, but I need to be careful. I need to be reflective. I need to be careful about how I use it. Um, so I don't always have a choice as to when I use it. Sometimes that's dictated by what the question is that we're trying to answer in terms of why the student was referred to us and why they're having academic difficulties. Um, I have some choice in the type of measure that I, that I use. But I need to be very reflective about that. And, you know, Maria made the comment that she doesn't think that a lot of people are when they use them and you know, my thought is, well I remember the training that I received that, we talked while it was, the training was with a-- an older white male. We talked a lot about the history of this and we basically kind of learn how to use the assessments and then we did a lot of readings about why we shouldn't use the assessments.

Unlike Eloquence, Cookie has reconciled her role within the system by credentialing and emphasizing her training, qualifications, and reflective sensibilities. At the same time, she still uses the tool, as it is her responsibility.

Black and Brown folx all over the nation find themselves turning out to be the “diversity” hire which creates multiple challenges for the person of color in the workplace. In the excerpt below, Lauryn shares how she was treated after being hired as a permanent and full-time staff member.

I do computers. I started out as language arts. My LTS position was eighth grade language arts. I got hired for seventh grade math-- where that principal there in
general, he kept me for quota. Evidently they had a--they had some type of incentive for principals to get members of color on their staff and to retain them.

And so he kept me. And, but he never supported me. Like a parent questioned my credentials or whatever. He didn't support anything. Like I was pulled out of conferences-- parent conferences to teach a lesson because the parents wanted to see how I taught. He never-- as long as I know all the years there, he never did that to anybody else. He did that to me twice. And the union wasn’t fighting him on it. And like, they pretty much-- But at that time, the union president at that time, he didn't like me because my hair was different colors. So I never got the support.

It is not uncommon or unheard of for schools and administrators to have to have hiring quotas with the school, especially after getting pressure and pushback from community to hire more people of color. What is not factored in, is the internal resistance to hiring these educators. This means that although they are hired, they are unwanted. This, then leads to different levels of aggression directed at these Black educators. What Lauryn experiences is 1) being told she was a “quota hire,” 2) not being supported by the administrators when parents also pushed back against her presence, and 3) the lack of support from the union. What this demonstrates is the multiple levels in the breakdown of institutional supports that were absent for Lauryn.

****

Anti-blackness within Black Educatorhood can also manifest as retaliation for offenses, slights, and misunderstandings they have with colleagues and other administrators, with very little room for error. Black educators are held to not only unrealistic standards, but unfair
practices for dealing with these slights. In the excerpt below Faith tells us about one of her teachers, a Black womxn, who was targeted for retaliation.

Faith: Well, one was, but she's been transferred twice this school year. And I feel bad because I think it has made our relationship strained.

Okaikor: Oh Wow.

Faith: A little bit. But um, we went to the showing of BackpackFull of Cash. And so I met someone who knows her and I was like, I really want Tonya be involved. She was like, "Yeah, I heard she got transferred." And I was like, "That's why I need her involved" Because they pick on us. She's a BD teacher. Came from high school, put her in fifth and sixth grade and it takes some time. But they want those kids to be-- So he moved her out and put one of his friends, a white guy, in her place and moved her to elementary. But it'll probably be a blessing in disguise. But, because she won't [inaudible] the workload is not the same. She's an inclusion teacher in elementary school. But I'm like mid-year, those kids already are-- don't do well with transition and change--and she was their constant and now. And you,

Okaikor: And you moved her.


They were trying to write her up. I had to fight for her. And she was like appreciative. But I think when they transferred her I was just like. And I just happened to look at the board minutes and I saw it. So I went to her principal like,
"We just had a conversation!" He was like, "I mentioned it to the super. He never followed up with me, so I didn't know he actually was going to do it." He said, "I just looked that the board minutes too."

Okaikor: Supervisors are allowed to do that?

Faith: Superintendent.

Okaikor: Oh, Superintendent.

Faith: So, her building principal they had--there was an issue. But I resolved the issue. And really it wasn't her fault. They thought she wasn't on board with the child study, but we got it resolved. It really was the administrator's fault. So she didn't get the write up. She didn't. Everything was okay. But I think he was so angry in that moment.

Okaikor: That superintendent?

Faith: No, her principal. He went to the superintendent and was like, I would like to transfer her out. But the superintendent never told him yes. No. Why?

Okaikor: Yeah.

Faith: And then on the next board agenda, she was around there as being transferred. So he said, "I'll--Faith, I promise you, I really did not know. It was a conversation, but there was no follow-up so I didn't know my-- the super was going to do it." I'm like, that's not how people supposed to find out. Like when you open up a board agenda and you see you're being transferred to elementary. And it was immediate. She ain't have a week. She had like two days to pack up her room and go.

Okaikor: Wow!
Faith: And to tell her kids. So, that kind of stuff. You know? But I think she just-- I don't take it personal. I think she just through with what...

Okaikor: Yup, Yup, Yup. No, I get that.

Faith: So I, I, I get it too. So that's why I'm like, I'm not, I don't feel any kinda way about it. You know?

Okaikor: That's messed up, though.

Faith: Mhmm.

Within systems of domination, particularly ones situated in anti-blackness, white supremacy and patriarchy, one is required to go along with the leaders. Steering away from the established “leader” or their representative, is not only frowned upon, but isolated and ostracized from the community. Even the threat of having a different opinion placed the Black teacher at risk of being written up and eventually transferred without notification. And because this transfer was done in the middle of the year, those who are also sacrificed by this act are the Black and Brown children in those classrooms.

Schooling for Black people, particularly as experienced post-Brown can often be hailed as a triumph in this nation’s history. These counter-narratives paint a different picture of schooling that never achieved any of the goals it stated and claims. Holding the etymological origins of the word integration, coupled with the experiences of the study’s participants—both as educators and students—framed within Faenita’s desegregation/integration experience, this chapter reconceptualizes what was proposed, what was attempted, and who actually unfolded.
CHAPTER 6

BARRIERS

Background

There were several institutional and individual barriers that showed up in the relationships and interactions between the participants and within their groups that ended up serving as hindrances to their collective progress. The barriers that presented themselves in the study’s participants ranged from larger structural conflicts to interpersonal conflicts which I chunked under two broader themes: internalized patriarchy/patriarchalism/patriarchal oppression (IPO) and internalized racial oppression (IRO) or framed another way as internalized racial response. These barriers I have identified as manifestations of what some grassroots organizers like the People’s Institution for Survival and Beyond (PISAB) refers to as internalized racial oppression (IRO), and what feminists refer to as internalized patriarchalism/patriarchal oppression (IPO)/internalized patriarchy.

In this chapter, I have included a list of manifestations of IPO and IRO with many of the manifestations overlapping with each other. However, I only focus on isolation, repression of ideas that do not align with the authority/dominant figure, commitment to the status quo, manipulation, and power and control for IPO. For IRO, the manifestations I hone in on are: pigmentocracy or colorism, protectionism, misogynoir, tokenism, tolerance, and silence for IRO. I contend that these barriers should not be seen as trivial interpersonal conflicts, but as internal codings and algorithms that people have taken in and live out resulting in hindrances to collective liberation, as they serve to maintain the status quo and prevents collective progress. In fact, the institutional barriers that presented themselves in the experience of the participants gave way to the individual barriers that hindered their growth; one could not happen without the other.
A few examples of these institutional barriers are in the ways Black educators are tokenized within the system; the isolation and ostracism; retaliation for speaking up and questioning the status quo; and the silence and/or lip service paid to the Black educators as a way to silent them.

As the study’s participants wanted to organize and build authentic community with others in the hopes of gaining wins within their district, they all ran into barriers that hindered progress. With one set of participants, one of these barriers was internalized racial oppression --more specifically the ways that colorism manifests as internalized racial inferiority (IRI), while Cookie and Eloquence ran into bouts of patriarchy and how it was internalized in the institutions and people they worked with. Many of these manifestations were in coordinated dialogue with one another. Although I am parsing through them individually, they rarely operate in isolation.

These manifestations of IPO and IRO are not the actual systems of patriarchy or racism, but are ways people internalize them, live them out, and project them on one another, and within our organizations. For white people, IRO manifestations are displayed as internalized racial superiority (IRS) and for people of color, it is displayed as internalized racial inferiority (IRI). On the other hand, for IPO, people who are gendered as men/boys, the manifestations are internalized as internalized patriarchal superiority (IPS). For those who are gendered as womxn/girls, gender non-conforming, non-binary peoples, the manifestations are internalized patriarchal inferiority. In many ways, these behaviors are coping devices to survive the violence of a white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.

Individual levels of IRO and IPO are what fuels racism and patriarchy. While the participants were experiencing the manifestations on an individual level, they were most importantly the target of these oppressions on a much larger and structural level. From the ways they were tokenized within the schools and districts, to the ways they were isolated from other
people of color in their schools, to the way leader would pay them lip service in order to appease their grievances, to the destruction of individual will-power, and lastly in the ways they were retaliated against for dissenting.

Below are charts for both categories of manifestations of racial oppression and patriarchal oppression. Another way to view them is as responses to feelings of superiority or inferiority:

Table #3 Manifestations of Internalized Racial Oppression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANIFESTATIONS OF INTERNALIZED RACIAL OPPRESSION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superiority</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arrogance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tolerance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Color-Evasiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Addictive Behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokenism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fragility/Defensiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnocentrism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shame</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distancing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rationalization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intellectualization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dichotomous/Binary Thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obliviousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lip-service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹⁹ Mimicking is listed at the top of the list for the inferiority column because it encapsulates the ways the marginalized group may mimic most of the manifestations of inferiority.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myth of Meritocracy</th>
<th>Rage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entitlement</td>
<td>Exaggerated Visibility/Invisibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation to Comfort</td>
<td>Depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Dissonance</td>
<td>Model Minority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Appropriation</td>
<td>Self-hate/Hatred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Projection</td>
<td>Self-doubt/Self-rejection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rugged Individualism</td>
<td>Imposter Syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paternalism</td>
<td>Low-self esteem</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saviorism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scientific Management</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust in the Written Word</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
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<td>Violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exceptionalism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language Superiority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guilt</td>
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<td>Tinkering</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perfectionism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Misogynoir</td>
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Table #4 Manifestations of Internalized Patriarchy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANIFESTATIONS OF INTERNALIZED PATRIARCHY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superiority</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme Competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imposed stereotypical roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonize emotional expressiveness, compassion, nurturing qualities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensiveness/Fragility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exaggerated Visibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexist Violence/Sexualized Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secrecy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addictive Behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaslighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokenism/Tokenizing Marginalized Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racist Patriarchy and Sexism/Misogynoir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronyism (Yes-men)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inoculation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misogyny/Sexism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cover up Mistakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation/Ostracism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to the Status Quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empty/Hasty Apology to avoid criticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retaliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myth of Meritocracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table outlines various stereotypical roles imposed or embraced within the context of Black educatorhood possibilities, emphasizing the negative implications such as demonization, protectionism, excessive niceness, exaggerated visibility/invisibility, among other toxic behaviors.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hierarchy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dichotomous/Binary Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation of Uncritical Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destruction of Individual Will-power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoarding of Resources and Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation of Dependency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repression of Thinking Whenever Departs from Authority Figures’ Way of Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allegiance to Status Quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfaction with Work Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Boys will be boys”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebration of “Macho” and “Alpha Male”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although not a monolith, there are times when some Black folx are often acutely aware of those who are ridin’ and those who ain’t. Just because someone may share melanated skin tones with another, sure don’t mean they are for you or in favor of what will facilitate collective liberation. Most of this comes from the fact that some Black folx have “arrived” or been so well rewarded and situated in white dominant culture. There are instances when people turn on each other which is a reflection of the larger system of the white supremacists capitalist patriarchy (hooks, 2010). We could scour through history to find examples. In order to fully understand racism as a system, we need to also understand how BIPoC are complicit.

I do not raise this dilemma lightly. It is a delicate one that is painful for Black folx and other people of color. When we examine IRO, it is important for us to understand why some people act on these messages of whiteness that they take in. What are the conditions that would enable them to act out on these dehumanizing characteristics? Human beings are complex. We
are beautiful, and glorious, and magnificent, while also being horrendous, violent, and destructive, sometimes all at the same time. In the midst of the educators creating space to be rehumanized, flickers of that which harms and causes pain, takes form and rises from the unconscious, authoring the course of the outcomes and successes. One of these manifestations is pigmentocracy, also known as colorism.

**Pigmentocracy/Colorism**

Coined by Alice Walker (1983), colorism is defined as, “prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color,” (p, 290). Dhillon (2015) describes pigmentocracy or colorism as being “the practice of intraracial groups applying a preferential valuation to light skin, resulting in a system of contextual privileges and discriminations based on skin color (p. 2). Matlock et. al. (2017) explicates that colorism is the positive association with “everything light and/or close to white, while everything associated with Black and/or dark is negatively characterized (p. 1). This goes from beauty, intelligence, behavior, culture, etc. and who we give and show empathy towards.

“...colorism is defined as an intraracial system of inequality based on skin color, hair texture, and facial features that bestows privilege and value on physical attributes that are closer to white” (Wilder & Cain, 2011, p. 578).

Walker adds that unless our communities --particularly within our sisterhood--work to address it, we will not be able to progress, “For colorism, like colonialism, sexism, and racism, impedes us,” (p. 291) (as cited in Monroe & Hall, 2018, p. 2039). That which impedes us seeps into our families, friendships, and work experiences. Black families have been harmed by this construct. Friendships and potential friendships have been fractured. Life opportunities have
been limited due to it. It can be said to be one of our Achilles heels to organizing and being in community with each other.

**Pigmentocracy, Distrust**

Pigmentocracy or colorism may not always be readily visible or obvious to people. In many cases, it may be harder to prove unless the offending and discriminating individual openly admits to this sort of discrimination, or if there is a pattern of pigmentation-based discrimination. However, as mentioned in the review of receipts, it is an actuality that has led to divisions and unhealed wounds within families, and colleagues.

For two of the study’s participants, the challenges of pigmentocracy interfered with their ability to not only organize with each other but lead to the active sabotage of the group’s progress. This ranged from the lighter skinned individual actively blocking, or not inviting the browner Black individual into meetings with leadership that could potentially alter the course of the success that they could achieve organizing together. In another instance, the browner-skinned individual refusing to participate in activities that the lighter-skinned individual would organize, even discouraging others from attending any meetings or activities by speaking poorly of the individual’s meetings and any activities they organized. Most importantly, the browner-skin person’s response, in these cases, were actually their response to being violence and invisibilized in the meetings they would attend.

Ultimately, this gave way to distrust on both sides of the conflict. At no point did the two individuals share what they were feeling about each other; they continued to develop distance between each other and could not organize together. This is one of the reasons it was hard for them to organize together.
Tokenism

The tokenism that is sometimes extended to us is not an invitation to join power; our racial “otherness” is a visible reality that makes that quite clear. ~ Audre Lorde (2007, p. 118)

As defined by Laws (1975), “Tokenism is the means by which the dominant group advertises a promise of mobility between the dominant and excluded classes” which usually comes at the heels of the dominant group being under pressure to share privilege, power, or other desirable commodities with a groups which is excluded” (p. 51). In Kanter’s (1977) analysis and framework, the dominant group is referred to as the “numerically dominant group” (p. 966). However, I would like to challenge that idea. In a society ruled by white cis-heteropatriarchy, it functions not just because there are more white people in the United States; it functions because there is a system where all are complicit. Dominant culture and the dominant group have historically assumed a hierarchical place of power which has created the dynamics and imbalance in power.

Greene (1999) explains that “...tokenism is a model of limited integration in which institutions include a minimal number of people of color without altering the presumptively White character of an institution” (p. 179). This is instructive for helping us to not only examine the behavior of the marginalized group within the institutions, but also situates tokenism as a function of white [organizational] culture.

The Black educators in Evergreen were challenged by the presence of the Black male leader within the district, who they all mentioned at some point in each of their interviews; they were all triggered by his presence. However for this section, I will focus on Cookie’s story. For
Cookie, his presence gave the impression that the district would be more welcoming to people of color. He was a Black face to the organization and just that. Cookie shares her thoughts, “I think it's, it was good to have him at the time that he was here because you see a brown face in a position of, um, relative authority. You know, as an assistant superintendent, you're just below the superintendent...:”

So, he, Dr. Williams, is an older Black male who was an assistant superintendent in the district and is now currently working as one of the principals of the alternative high school. He historically has been the one who's been behind of--or the kind of figurehead for, um, kind of issues of diversity. I wouldn't say social justice. I don't think he, he's not there yet [laughs]. So, I'll say diversity. Um, and you know, I use the word figurehead because that's kind of, he is a figurehead. I think his philosophy is “it's good for, for people to see us" But I think he still kind of goes along with what, what the organization demands and expects. So, he limits himself based on what is acceptable in, in the, um, in the system.

Even though Dr. Williams was a Black man, Cookie believed his advocacy was limited by the system, and he did not align with the issues these Black educators, who are advocating for racial justice in their district were advocating for. There is a comical perspective of him by the Black educators interviewed for this study. His advocacy is limited to getting a few Black and Brown faces hired, and as Cookie puts it, “being visible”. She explains it best here: “you hire people of color and they don't stay. Um, you yourself get moved around. And now you're in a position where it seems as though people are trying to push you out. Um, he's not effective [laughs]. You know? He's not effective" When asked if she could explain what she meant by “he limits himself based on what is acceptable…” Cookie goes on to explicate:
Oh, an example! There was a, um, big to do about the South production of-- um, what was that play? What was that play? I can't remember. The name of it escapes me right now, but it was just last year.

She remembers the play and then continues:

Yes. He was the building principal at South at the time. He would have approved that play to be presented by the students. Um, no consideration was given as to the conversation that may be needed to be had about that play, um, how it would be received by, not just your majority members of your community, but by all people that were represented in that play and characters. So that was on your watch, Dr. Williams that, that happened. And he kind of really just, I think either people didn't hold him accountable and I think a number of people didn't hold him accountable for allowing that to happen because of who he is. Mhm [laughs] mhm. Um, yeah, it was kind of sucky. And then the way that it was handled was not handled well. And again, it was under his watch. He was the assistant principal. So, you know, I questioned his leadership skills in those, in those areas. I don't know beyond that, what type of leader he is. I haven't been impressed with what I've seen thus far. Um, but yeah.

Cookie references an incident that took place in the community and school in 2017. The incident involved the use of the n-word in the school play. There were some Black members in the community who were rattled by the district’s decision to use the n-word during the play, particularly without community-wide preparation and dialogue. According to Cookie, the
assistant superintendent was not proactive about it and even “allowed” it to happen under his watch when he was the assistant principal of the school.

As a manifestation of tokenism, predominantly white and/or institutions will hire Black, non-Black people of color leadership, and gender tokens to project a message of “inclusivity” and “diversity,” all the while, maintaining structures that end up having disparate outcomes. There is an unrealistic expectation that Cookie and the others Black educators have for the Black assistant superintendent, that he should be at fault for the host of issues relating to racism in the district. The heavy load of when something bad happens, especially if it involves “Black issues” it then falls on the Black “leader...” There is an expectation of impossibility happening here. It is a performance of institutional Black and Brown face. Greene (1999) goes on:

A regime of tokenism is one of symbolic equality in which the professional lives of tokens exist within the paradox of isolation as a person of color within a majority White institution and the heightened visibility and scrutiny to which professors of color are exposed.

As a result, those who are tokenized by the institution are expected and required to: 1) serve as the symbol of “equality” and diversity; 2) serve as role models; 3) meet community needs as well as disprove assumptions of group inferiority; and 4) uphold the values and culture of the institution. The danger in tokenism is that it is used as a tool of avoidance. Institutions use it in an effort to avoid structural and systemic changes but will appease by using superficial approaches. The most famous example of this was the election of President Barack Obama (Orelus, 2015). It is not to say that Obama did not have the qualifications and credentials for the position; however, his presence in the White House did not alter the outcomes in the nation, nor would he have been allowed to do so.
Additionally, the “tokenized” individual may respond to these false notions of scarcity in ways that will eventually harm the collective and place either unearned accolades or blame on them that they had very little to do with. Because institutions are constantly communicating messages of scarcity, some responses to that by people from marginalized groups, who lack a critical and societal consciousness, may respond with: 1) hoarding of information, resources, and access within the institution; 2) limiting collaboration; and 3) arrogance.

When the tokenized individual begins to internalize these “accolades” or “blame” they may also begin to internalize it. When heaped as “accolades” they internalize it as being inherently greater and more deserving than other people of color or other marginalized people from within the organization. When heaped upon as “blame” they may internalize it being unworthy and deserving of the blame. Both will internalize an imposter like syndrome, that they are frauds scheming the organization.

In the case with this Black administrator, Dr. Williams, he held on to and embraced the position of being the “expert” on race issues within the district, and the “one Black guy”. When the district failed at addressing the issues with racism, he was harshly blamed and scapegoated for the entire break down of the system. What a heavy load and a precarity of being used as the Black or Brown face within the institution.

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Protectionism and Misogynoir

The most disrespected person in America, is the Black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman. Malcolm X
In 1971, in a conversation with James Baldwin, Nikki Giovanni eloquently and powerfully convicts him, along with all Black men in the violence they cause Black womxn. What 28 year old Giovanni so plainly makes clear to him is how the violence against Black womxn is a unique kind of violence because we are impacted not only by the racism of a white heteropatriarchal capitalist society as a whole, but we are also impacted by the violence, and patriarchy from Black men in our homes; we are in the direct line of fire for this violence.

Moya Bailey gifted us the language of misogynoir to articulate this phenomenon of hatred against Black womxn. Bailey (2016) coined the term misogynoir while Twitter celebrity, and womanist, Trudy amplified and lifted it up, solidifying it in our collective lexicon (Bailey & Trudy, 2018). Before then, we had not the language to articulate and name the ways our very presence and body irritated people and the systems dictating our lives. There is a uniqueness to the way Black womxn are hated; there is a collective and conscious and unconscious societal conspiracy to shrink our divinity. This shrinkage can be observed in our day-to-day, within our workspaces, organizing spaces, classrooms, and even homes.

*****

I love to watch children play from my patio. It is one of my favorite pass times. We learn a great deal about their dispositions and the way their parents, guardians, and/or influencers communicate with them. I learned this from my own children. On any given day, I can detect traces of my mannerisms, speech, inflections hidden in their communications with each other. I cringe.

My family and I live in a multi-ethnoracial section of our predominantly white segregated town. It is, I am sure, the result of redlining. Outside, children are playing. I am children-gazing from my patio. The weather is just right. It is late September--by this time, the residuals from the
summer sun rays have begun to subside; the cycle of seasons are showing evidence of changes. Coupled with the light breeze that accompanies the northeast Fall patterns, there is a comfort in that air--the comfort found in our childhood memories. I am reminded of the children playing. They are creating those memories, running, hiding, seeking, and tagging each other. Parents at the edge of the manicured lawns look on while in conversation. Laughter embraces the air and tango in a seductive dance to capture our eardrums. The children range in age, height, gender, and race. There does not seem to be any visible difference in their play. They run. They hide. They seek. They fall and get up again and carry on.

Black girl, age 3 falls--instantly rises with tears that fill her tear ducts. I am moved to jump up from my patio. I sit. Interesting. No one moves. No one comes to her aid. The other parents outside continue to talk and engage in conversations that could not possibly be that important. It was as if she was not even there. She was invisible, in that moment. I am observing from a distance. The young Black girl runs into the house to her parents where she will surely get the attention, the love, the support, the reassurance that her existence matters that she is visible, and she is flesh--not magical--but magically real. Even as I retell this, I am convicted and question my own (in)actions in that moment and time. I too must reconcile with that.

Not shortly afterwards, a young white girl--5 years old, falls--instantly rises with tears that fill her tear ducts. I am curious to see how others will respond. They all move in synchronized movements and chaotic rhythms. Both adult womxn jump into protection. One of them is her mother. The children circle around her to ask her if she is okay. Her cries get louder, sharper, more intense. The attention is seductive. She is smitten.

These smitten young white girls grow up into adults expecting nothing less. We all deserve nothing less than to have our humanity also seen. But these ignored young Black girls
grow into adults, sometimes expecting their treatment to be business as usual; society’s standard operating procedures (SOP) internalized by all. What Cookie and Maria share below is the adult version of what happened with the children on that Fall day. It is a lesson that stays on repeat mode, broadcast on the airwaves of our internal radio. What we share here is Cookie’s story. Her story is not isolated. It is part of a collective and national psyche; white womxn need saving. Black womxn get ignored.

Internalized Racial Inferiority (IRI) is a topic Black folx and other non-Black people of color find taboo. We do not want to talk about it often because people from the dominant culture are constantly peering into our lives and attempting to dissect us. We are encouraged to remain silent about it, keep it enclosed. I argue that doing so is a manifestation of patriarchy and white supremacy and serves to only keep those systems of dominance invisibly operating without threat of extinction, while we die a slow and silent perpetual death. Here Maria and Cookie describe the time a white womxn colleague in their department received support from a Black man while Cookie received none:

Maria: I mean it was so---it was a lot. And she [Cookie’s office mate] was supposed to leave and not Cookie!

Okaikor: Ohh. What happened? How did that happen then?

Cookie: [laughs] AHHHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA

Okaikor: [laughs]

Maria: And then she---you wanna tell the story?

Cookie: [laughs] Yes. So, the decision was, there was going to be two--

There's two social workers. One here, and then one at South. Out of the two, one
of them was going to get moved to another building. So, we're like up in arms.

Steve goes to-- Steve who I'm going to get smelling salts for.

Maria: Steve who --is here when he wants to be.

Cookie: --walked to--he went to central office and like talked to all the administrators. Expressing his disapproval of this decision-- and it's not right.

Yeah. Went to bat for her. Went to bat for Becky. Right. I send this email. Well--well written as to all the reasons why she shouldn't be moving. They were like, they were all valid reasons-- not to take anything away from her professionally.

All valid reasons as to why wouldn't be a good idea to move her. Month later, who gets an email that they're moving? Me! [laughs] and she stayed.

Okaikor: [laughs]

Cookie: And she stayed [laughs]

Maria: But you know, you wouldn't let me talk about it. You wouldn't let me talk about it. This was the part she left out. Everyone's freaking out because Jess' going to leave and I look. And I'm looking at Jess and I go point to Cookie and I go, "You're the one that's gonna to leave." Cookie said, "Don't put me in."

And I was like, "I'm just telling you." And the funny thing is Steve like disappeared. It was like-- he disappeared so quickly. Because I was like, "Where is Steve?" And you were like, "He's at central." "What's Steve doing at central?"

"He's talking to them why Jess shouldn't go anywhere?" And you're like, "I'm not going to talk about it." You're like, "I'm not going to talk about it." He was there [snaps fingers] Like that.

Cookie: Yeah.
Okaikor: So, who went--who went to the office for you?

Maria: [laughs]

Cookie: Nobody.

Maria: Steve was like, "Okay. See you later. Cookie," [laughs]

Cookie: Yeah, nobody.

Maria: But didn't you ask him? And he said he would do it for you too?

Okaikor: Did he really?

Cookie: Did he? I'm sure he did. Yeah, but no. Uhh uhh.

Maria: I'll do the Same thing for you.

Cookie: No. He didn't

Okaikor: He said that? "I'll do the same thing." But he didn't go?

Cookie: No. uh uh

Maria: Nooo.

Okaikor: [laughs]

We all laughed. It is a familiar laughter that is coated in the pain and familiarity of the betrayal we have all seen and experienced before. Before Cookie shared the full story, I knew. I knew how this story would end. More times than not do Black womxn find themselves betrayed by a collective logic that espouses they are less deserving. What is most disappointing, yet not surprising is how quickly this Black man --the person they had all developed a relationship with, stood in solidarity with when they confronted the superintendent on behalf of Black educators in the district. However, in time of need and support, he was not there for Cookie. This is an all too familiar narrative for Black womxn. Because of the fascination some Black men and womxn
have with the womxnhood—the feminization of white womxnness. They are seen as more worthy of protection and saving. He jumps into protection mode when in fact the Black womxn needed support just as well.

What must be acknowledged is that the protection of the white womxn colleague was not limited to the Black man, Steve; Cookie also admits to writing an email on this colleague’s behalf, naming all the valid reasons why Jess should not be transferred from the high school. Jess does not return the favor when Cookie becomes the target of transfer.

Later in the interview, Maria and Cookie share that not only did Cookie’s office mate not end up getting transferred. But once everyone found out Cookie would be leaving, others in the office gave flowers to the white womxn. They stated it was because they heard she was sad that Cookie would be leaving. Cookie received no flowers; nothing.

Cookie continues because she wants to share that Steve really could have also advocated for her. She explains:

Cookie: And he's good friends with the womxn who's going to be my supervisor now. Yeah, no he didn't. It's alright though. I remind him. I don't need you to save me. I'm good. I'm good. I don't need you to save or protect me. I'm alright. I can. I'm alright. I'm alright. It is what it is.

Maria: It is very, very. He needs to check that out. Like what was about that?

Cookie: I'm going to CVS to get some smelling salts and leave it on his desk with a reminder: "Take these periodically."

Okaikor: [laughs] Once a week.
We laugh again. It is a healing laugh. It is an, “I see you, sis!” laugh. Who will come to the aid of Black womxn? We tell these stories to heal. When we examine our own roles in upholding systems of dominance, we can also begin to change our behaviors and heal.

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Technologies of the Patriarchy: Manipulation and Control

Black feminist scholar bell hooks (2004) defines patriarchy as being “a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence” (p. 18). Patriarchy often goes undetected and unnoticed in our society because it is built into every aspect of our nation, its culture, and structure of our society. Because of this, we all become active participants, willingly and unwillingly. In this part of the chapter, I have chosen to focus on a few of the manifestations of IPO, of which isolation, manipulation, abuse, control, and commitment to the status quo are the foci.

Isolation

...so, I guess I'm feeling, I guess as far as my workplace, a whole lot of racial isolation…” ~ Faith

There is something deeply inhumane about the very concept of isolation. Think about it! To either physically, emotionally, or psychologically remove, exclude, segregate or ostracize other human beings is an act of violence that we are all structurally complicit, in some shape or form. We make people disappear--in actuality via the carceral system, or in our imagination and the real-life adult pretend-play that we engaged in on the daily. These actions of isolation have
real and long lasting effects on people, their families, and generations to come. This, too, is a product and manifestation of a patriarchal system.

People shuffle in and out of being in community with others every day. This in-and-out motion takes on a rhythm often hollow yet weighted with the agony associated with feelings of loneliness. The literal and figurative isolation produced at the hands of these systems of dominance consumes us from the inside out. Being in community with other human beings, whether it be your family, friends, school, or work in order to grow, develop, and co-create a more perfect world is community. It is the interconnectedness of who we are. The opposite of that which is community, is isolation. When searching the dictionary for the words, “isolate” and “isolation,” the definitions carry a slightly different, and more profound meaning. Words like, separation, segregation, “to cause a person or place to remain alone or apart from others” to “cut off the electrical or other connection to (something, especially a part of a supply network)” and to “place (a person or animal) in quarantine as a precaution against infectious or contagious disease”

Significantly, social scientists have defined [perceived] as something “known more colloquially as loneliness,” which was defined in earlier research as “a chronic distress without redeeming features” (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009) is defined as “an aversive signal that evolved to motivate one to take action that minimizes threats or damage to one’s social body” (Cacioppo, Hawkley, Norman, & Berntson, 2011, p. 291). This tool that people developed in nature triggers an “error” message, because as social beings being connected to

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20 I place the word “perceive” between brackets because the word implies that the isolation is an interpretation of reality and not reality itself—as it the feelings of isolation are only in the mind of the person feeling isolation and that there are complex systems of domination creating the conditions and circumstances, or when it is on an interpersonal level, that the person from the dominant group are not intentionally creating the conditions for isolation and exclusion. The use of the word “perceive” is a form of gaslighting.
community and others is essential to our well-being and survival (MacDonald, & Leary, 2005; McDonald, 2009). The difference between the dictionary definition and the definition constructed by social scientist is its distinct quality of being nature’s internal coding in us all to prompt us to respond to the isolation in order to maintain survival.

Our society’s imaginative capacities and socialization have conditioned us to often inflict pain and harm on each other for offenses and slights we have interpreted. So, we use isolation and loneliness as a form of cruel and unusual punishment within our carceral system, our child welfare system, and within our schools, by way of our in-school and out-of-school suspensions, detentions, and exclusionary practices (NPR, 2019). Consequently, isolation is reserved for those our society wants to exclude from our interpersonal relationships, and even the entire human race. It is the go-to response we have witnessed in our own personal lives, in the media, even preached about in some of our religious institutions; it is the answer to how we conceptualize the “other.”

The layers by which we practice this unnatural and peculiar response to differences takes on multiple forms. We isolate and exclude people based on race via our system of apartheid and segregation, however, demonstrating our lack of imagination and capacity to dream of new axiological and ontological practices and ways of being. We isolate and exclude folx from our Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer/Intersex/Asexual+ (LGBTQIA+) communities by relegating them to the deviant. Some of our families practice isolation in their day to day--disowning and throwing away family members we have deemed as “other” and thereby, disposable and unworthy of our love and connection. Like demi-gods, we decide who is worthy of access to their full humanity and by default, with every complicit act, daily we lose our own humanity. It is a practice we have become so apt to at almost every facet of society, that any
other way that counters this has also been othered and initially considered incapable of being conceptualized and imagined. When white dominant culture and all of its institutions and systems excludes Black people, they are subjecting Black people to a social death (Hartman, 1997), a social and spirit murder (Williams, 1987), placing us in a cyclical and perpetual purgatory, unable to cross either side of death.

To help us understand this better, like isolation, social exclusion, as a concept and way of being, emerged from “the breakdown of the structural, cultural, and moral ties which bind the individual to society, and family instability is a key concern (Levit as, as cited by Munck, 2005, p. 34). For which, I am defining “racial isolation” as the loneliness one feels that is associated with a racial social distress without redeeming features. As I walk us through an analysis of Faith’s experiences, I must attempt to parse through the definitions and analyses of these words to help us trouble the discourse of Black Educatorhood and the experiences they have in their schools.

Although all six participants articulated feelings of isolation, this section will only focus on the experiences of Faith and Phil. Each of the participants expressed some level of isolation in their workplace as Black educators who are organizing for racial justice in their place of work and/or community. This isolation that Black educators endure is endemic of an impotent collective national imagination--one dwarfed by the limits and borders used to define Black place and space in society.

From years of study and observation, it has been known that humans do not fare well when isolated from community and other people. Human beings need to be in community with other people. It is how we learn, grow, find love, and gain the nurturing necessary for brain, social, emotional, and intellectual development. It is how we construct and build knowledge and
support the growth and development of others we are in community with. It is our life-line. At the same time, it is also known that a person can be in community with other people and still feel deep isolation and exclusion; just being with other people does not remedy this (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2001). Researchers who study isolation, exclusion and loneliness also emphasize that people do not just need to be in the community of others, but they need to be in the community with “significant others who they trust” who give them purpose, a goal, and meaning in life, and with whom “they can plan, interact, and work together to survive and prosper” (Cacioppo, et. al. 2015).

The act of isolation (i.e. loneliness) or more specifically, relatively [perceived] isolation, can result in demoralization which may dramatically impact the overall cognitive performance, faster cognitive decline, poorer executive functioning, more negativity and depressive cognition, heightened sensitivity to social threats, a confirmatory bias in social cognition that is self-protective and paradoxically self-defeating, heightened anthropomorphism, and contagion that threatens social cohesion” (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009).

The national policy on Black and Indigenous life has always been isolation. We have witnessed this form the moment Black folx were brought onto this land, to the attempted annihilation of our Indigenous people even today with the discourse around the Mexican border. It will be crucial for us to continue to build on the analysis and a collective understanding of the conditions that Black folx, specifically for this research, Black educators face daily. And it is crucial that we examine the impact of isolation and social exclusion on our lives, and the collective well-being of us all. It is also critical for us to understand how feelings of isolation can affect Black Educatorhood.

**Faith and Phil: Isolation, Exclusion, Survival**
In this study, the isolation, social exclusion, and the ways the participants felt cut-off from and disconnected took on various forms. These forms were identified as: 1) racial isolation; 2) ideological isolation; 3) epistemological and pedagogical isolation; and 4) onto-axiological isolation. Often times, these forms of isolation operate in production with each other and are not experienced in isolation. In the excerpt below, Faith shared what she referred to as the racial isolation she felt within her work environment:

But um, so I guess I'm feeling, I guess as far as my workplace, a whole lot of racial isolation. In my department, as far as eighth grade, I'm the only Black teacher in it and in the eighth grade. So, like, I wish I had somebody to collaborate with and bounce stuff off of because when I mention certain things, I get blank stares. And we're teaching civics and economics and I'm like, how can't you look at it through a lens of social justice. And um, but when you don't have likeminded people working with you, you feel a sense of--it's disconnected. Like, I feel like I don't want to play with anybody. And I know that's not like--I shouldn't be in that space because maybe I can insert myself and then move it further and be more progressive.

Racial isolation is the feeling people of color get when they are one or one of the few people of color in a white dominant space. People of color can also feel racial isolation when they are in fact in the company of skin folx but are feeling an onto-axiological disconnect with no redeeming features. What Faith describes here is not just about being the only Black teacher in her department, but what she describes here is not having like-minded colleagues to bounce ideas
off. This is what I call the epistemological and pedagogical isolation, in what she names as being a “disconnect” or being “disconnected.”

Faith also sees her role as an educator to help shape the pedagogy and classroom instruction through a social justice lens. The isolation experienced here is multi-layered because there is no one to share ideas, knowledge, and pedagogical practices, as well as no other teacher with whom she shares a racial affinity. The mere skin color and/or racial affinity does not instantly mean an ethical, ideological alliance, but there is a collective experience that Black people have in this country; this collective experience being how the institution and its representatives interact with, view, and treat Black people. Black people are not a monolith, however, for some, being in proximity with people who share this experience may be more comfortable than not being with any at all. At the same time, being in company with skin folx does not necessarily provide or guarantee any level of comfort and/or community.

Additionally, there is a national discourse around increasing the racial diversity of teachers (Milner & Howard, 2004). Many of these calls are without critical foundation yet have positioned Black educators as the “superman” (Pabon, 2014), and miracle magical solution to improving students’ performance or closing the “opportunity gap” for Black and Brown youth (Milner, 2006; 2016). However, all students need to see and experience Black educators in a substantial way. In the excerpt below, Faith discusses the lack of representation of Black and non-Black educators of color in her district:

Mhmm. In our school we don't--in my middle school, we don't have any Latino/Latina teachers. Even our Spanish teacher is white-- a white man. And we've never had a Latina/Latino Spanish teacher since I’ve been there 17 years.
And --Before when I first came, we had German and French. We didn't even have Spanish. And then the German teacher left and it's hard to find another German teacher. So, we got Spanish. And she actually was white. She worked for the [government agency], I wanna say. She was interesting. She wasn't that kind to our kids. But she must have translated for the agency. She wasn't that nice, so she left. And then we had another white womxn who really wanted to be in high school. So, she left and then they bought the high school Spanish teacher to the middle. Yeah. Not one. We had one but I think they RIF'd or non-renewed her. And her and her mom was an assistant in the district. And she was so nice--so good. They got rid of her. We had a guidance counselor, but her husband was Gonzalez--not her. She's white. Not one. Out of 80 teachers in my building. Ain't that something. But people think we have a diverse staff. What they think is diverse is if you have one--you're diverse to them.

In the 2017-2018 school year, Lenape Town had a white teacher disproportionality index of 8\textsuperscript{21} which means that the students were eight times more likely to have a white teacher than a teacher that looked like them.

Although we have established that having Black or Brown teachers does not necessarily mean the teacher will employ humanizing practices that center the humanity of BIPoC. On the other hand, scholars do know that Black teachers are more likely to do so than their white counterparts (Irvine, 1989; Quiocho & Rios, 2000). However, BIPoC students need to know the potential they have inherently within them, the wealth of history and innovation Black people have contributed to society even prior to, and during modern civilization. Because of the

\textsuperscript{21} For disproportionality index equation, see Figure 3.
concerted and systematic practices that ensured the exclusion and segregation of Black folx, from modern society and human civilization, there is a common yet mythological image of the inferiority of Black people (Armah, 2018).

My friend, she is the only African American math teacher in the whole district. So middle/ high school. And in the Science department my girlfriend.

There are no Black male math teachers. No. Most of our Black male teachers are either history department or Special Ed. And one like on the elementary level that I know of--they are gym teachers. And there's only one African American womxn in our science department-- so middle and high school. There used to be two but she became-- she's now a supervisor. And the coach is Asian. That's it. And there might be an Asian in the math department up there. I'm not sure though. So, like when I say it, people don't. They think…

With the decline of Black educators since desegregation, (Foster, 1997, Siddle Walker, 2001; 2005), there have been efforts to increase the number of Black and non-Black educators of color. In a district with more than 85 percent of its students identifying as Black or Latinx, white educators make up 80 percent of the educators, while white students only make up 10 percent of all students in Lenape Town (NJ DOE, 2018). In this particular case, the district leadership was a challenge in ensuring the substantial and sustainable diversification of the district. When Faith approach the superintendent about hiring teachers of color, the superintendent's response was that he would do so as long as they were qualified; a common response from people who are being asked to disrupt their anti-blackness and racism. And this too is the precarity of Black Educatorhood.
Memories of Holden Caulfield capture my psyche as I play back Phil’s memory of isolation at the all-boys predominantly white Catholic school where he not only taught, but where he also walked the halls during his high school years. I imagine, as I imagined Caulfield’s prep school, there were little to no other Black boys there—as there were no Black teachers. Phil’s isolation at the prep school he taught at, came at a cost. Also being the school, he attended during high school, Phil makes the conscious decision to return to the school he graduated from. After 10 year of service there, he parts ways, realizing his epistemological, ideological, and pedagogical approaches were a mis-match for this prep school:

That wasn't, it wasn't supported as much in Canterbury Prep. Like I tell people there were days when, the level of noise that was coming from my classroom, would land me in the headmaster's office or the Dean's office like the next period. And they would want to know, like what was I doing in class because, you know, kids were, you know, loud, and there's a lot of laughing or kids seemed to be having more fun than learning. And this idea that learning can't be fun. Right. [chuckles] And what it was again? It was like students-- it's all boys school, right? High School. So, they're talking. If there's-- you know? So, but I had small-group work and students like engaging each other. And they were clearly, you know, like they were enjoying this work and debating each other and coming up with lists to present to the class. And so, my time at The Prep started to become a little bit of problematic academically when those things started happening.
This pedagogical and ideological isolation is not uncommon for justice oriented educators. Because prep school education is committed to maintaining the status quo of white culture, dominance, and superiority, anything that troubles the hegemony and dominance will be exiled and forced out. Phil was a disruption to that norm. Even though he was educated in the school under those ideals, he had veered off from that foundation, making him a threat to the establishment and “order” of things within the schools.

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The questions that Phil raises here are significant in that they hit at the heart of a collective Black existence in the United States. This is the dilemma by which Black people exist—in a perpetual death whose value is assessed by how our bodies are ceaselessly able to be objectified or thrown away. In Phil’s words:

When I finished—I graduated, I finished undergrad in 1991 and when I think back to what education was like when I started all those many years ago and where we are now from a—from the perspective as a Black male educator, I guess that's my biggest concern is—and not just for Black males, but for just Black educators in general, like, are we—are we becoming expendable? You know, to what degree does the profession truly value us? And, and I guess that’s—am I in whatever time I have left as an educator. I think that's kinda where I would like to spend my time or spend my energy. Like really trying to support the younger teachers of color, specifically Black teachers—trying to support them in this struggle of really being valued for their multiple areas—areas of—of labor.
Black educators, and Black people in general are tolerated only as far as they continue to uphold the status quo. Our existence is an act of resistance; any small action that veers off the course gets dealt with immediately. The isolation leads to feelings of devaluation and expendability, as if Black educators are disposable. Phil would like to dedicate a portion of his career supporting Black educators.

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**Phil and Cookie**

Cookie and Phil reinforces clarity about the ways isolation can stem from not sharing the same critical and ideological analysis of oppression and liberation. What has been extremely successful about the function of schooling in the U.S. and Western society is their wide-spread maintenance of white supremacy and domination while systematically attempting to fully erase the knowledge, science, innovations, arts and culture, language etc. of the indigenous people they committed acts of violence against. The current teaching force is the handiwork of that project. From the disproportionate number of white teachers in classrooms all over the nation, to the teaching of Eurocentric norms and curricula, to carceral disciplinary practices that allow adults to exhibit their worst carceral fantasies and project them onto Black and Brown youth.

In the exchange between Cookie and Phil, Cookie expresses concern with not knowing who to trust in her district and school:

Cookie: For me, um, to kind of piggyback on what was just said, what I connect with is needing to make that space and identifying folks who can be part of that with me. I think the challenge for me kinda has always been knowing who to let in to be part of that space with me.
Phil: What is that like based on like certain experiences you had with folks and so when I asked this more guarded or is it like something that you've always kind of been that way or?

Cookie: Um, I think it's probably a little bit of, of all of that. Um, for me working in, and I'm going to use work as an example or working in a predominantly white school, it's been more of a struggle to kinda figure out what people's agenda is and whether it's aligned with mine and how can we work together.

Phil: And, and you can be isolated--I mean I know you are in a predominantly white school, right? But even in a not so predominantly white you could still feel like isolated. And I can't tell you how many times in my 15 years in East Denwood-Bridgeville, right? All diverse you know--where like I got to close my door and like you said, and, and, and do what I do until-- it doesn't mean I'm not still tryna to do the whole interconnected and work with--. But at the end of the day, like yeah, I need to close my door and deal with these folx and we need to get our thing done. So I hear you, sis. I really do.

Eloquence: Straight up!

Phil: I hear you. It's sometimes it's survival as well. Like, you know this is for me to keep from going off on one of y'all. Or like, you know like...

Faith: [laughs] Yes!

Eloquence: Mmmmmhmm!

Phil: Let me go and deal with my kids and my students and teach because, hey I might just lose my job today.
Eloquence: Mmmmhmmm!

Phil: So, I hear you.

Here, Phil draws attention to what may seem like an act of “self-isolation” to self-preserve himself from the harm of other educators as what he refers to as “survival." What is happening here is that he is creating a space and community with his students in order to survive. Although it may seem like complete isolation and exclusion, it is not. Likely triggered by the pain and an aversion to colleagues who do not share the same ethical values, his coding instructs him to create a shell where underneath is a beloved community with students. This form of survival is not a solution to the entire problem, but a way to cope with the oppression in the moment.

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There are times when people create their own communities in order to be in contact with others who will help sustain their life and presence. The Black student organization that Phil ended up advising served that purpose for him. In the excerpt below, Phil describes how the student group ISE-PAC started:

Okay. So, yeah-- the situation at Canterbury Prep, when I was there, I was the only African American teacher, and I want to say the only teacher of color. So, given that reality and the reality that the student population was overwhelmingly white, that kind of created the context for the group. So, the student group was the Black student union. And then when I became, like shortly after I became the advisor, some of the students wanted to change the name and they changed it to ISE-PAC. ISE-PAC was spelled--and this is important, right? ISE-PAC was
spelled I S E and then there was a hyphen and then PAC. ISE-PAC. And, and it was an acronym for Intellectual- Soldiers of Ebony- Pan African Club.

I also was a moderator of an extracurricular club. So, ISE-PAC was the name of the group. ISE- was the Intellectual Soldiers of Ebony and PAC was Pan African Club. And that experience again, afterschool, taking kids on field trips, doing reading inquiry, watching documentaries and having discussions. Also, I think again in a predominantly white institution, with being the only teacher of color while I was there-- I was the only educator of color with a student of color population that was small too. So that extracurricular club and the time we spent together was therapeutic, I think for-- for everyone-- for me as an educator. I think it was also therapeutic for my students. Like they were able to get access to readings and literature and information that they weren't getting in their classes during the day. And I think that kind of made up that time we had together in the extracurricular kind of made up for some of what they lost or didn't get. And again, I--even though they were able to get it in the extracurricular, you know, setting, there's something to be said for having, you know, Black studies and ethnic studies be a part of our core, lessons in our core curriculum.

The relationship Phil was able to develop and nurture with the students by way of ISE-PAC, helped create and serve a mutual role and function. What he describes as therapeutic for both him and the students is what helped them through their experience and time at Canterbury Prep. Creating a learning environment that served multiple functions to: 1) develop the critical
consciousness of the students; and 2) create community and support; and ultimately function as a source of healing by default of its structure. Providing the Black students access to readings, resources, and discussions that they could not get in their traditional classrooms, created a learning environment of community, support, and interconnectedness. Although the informal learning environment, ISE-PAC worked against the school’s status quo, this new structure planted seeds for Black students to get a sense of their own power, learn about who they were, and be intellectually challenged, while also being a support system for Phil.

Both the teacher, Phil and the Black students, in this case, were also isolated within the school. In many cases these schools tend to hire and admit Black and Brown faces to manufacture “diversity” for white students and the broader public. Although, on the surface, it appears progressive, they are in actuality upholding a sophisticated example of IPO and IRO by way of isolation, tokenism, and repression of ideas that are counter to dominant culture. In fact, all other cultures or diverse ways of knowing and learning are relegated to the margins. The lack of visibility within the school curricula were the impetus for Phil’s choice to weave it into the extracurricular programming. But in doing so, it does not shift the organization or school, although it may plant seeds in individual students.

**Manipulation and Control**

Eloquence teaches in South Denwood. A unique district of its kind, with a mostly Black faculty and staff in Eloquence’s district, the union also reflects that same racial demographic. South Denwood’s educators are 26 percent white, 64 percent Black, approximately 8 percent are Latinx, 2.1 percent are Asian, .1 percent Native American/Indigenous, and .2 percent are two or more races. The Black womxn who leads the union in their town comes from an old-school school of thought; there is one leader and one leader only. And as a Black womxn, one of very
few in the profession, better yet the union, there is no other leader. The position is held tight. The gates are blocked and only opened for those who will assist in the leader initiated or approved agenda. Eloquence further describes why he chose not to get involved with his local union again:

I got to know our president better. And I discovered who she really is. And I can't subject myself to that kind of manipulation or abuse. So, I -- that's no longer an avenue for me to explore while she's the president. And they're very committed to the way that they've been doing things they're very committed to the status quo. The status quo is, you know, collect dues, and, you know, make teachers feel that without them, you know, they won't be able to grieve when they really need it. And there's not much more than that. There's no real like attempt to educate teachers about opportunities within the union or the broader context of the political struggle of being an educator. There is and there's no desire for that, at least at that level. They're happy with the way things are. So, as long as our union membership is you know 96-- 97 percent, it will be business as usual. Doesn't matter if anything ever gets resolved or not.

Manipulation and abuse are often tools used to maintain power and control. For many of us, we know no other structure. It is the foundation by which our families are structured, the foundation by which our schools function, are organized, and are operating daily. It is the way parents enter into relationship with children, the way workers are exploited daily within their workplaces and even how institutions like our unions, which were created to disrupt power, privilege and control, end up replicating these same values writ-large. These are all known manifestations of patriarchy.
Eloquence explains that not only were there manipulation and abuse, but that the leadership was committed to the status quo and wanted to maintain a structure of teacher/member dependency, rather than independency.

I wanted to, in my capacity as a-- as an exec board member, I wanted to try to empower teachers to you know deliver workshops on topics that they are already kind of masters of. I mean we're not often treated like we bring our own mastery to this profession. And there's always like an outside consultant or someone who has the knowledge. But for me I was like you know let's set it up so the teachers can present on any-- any branch of education that they feel they've mastered, or they have something to share with others on. And let's compensate them. It may be small but just a token gesture of appreciation. And sadly, that idea was not really welcomed by our [union] leader. So.

Just because Patty is another Black womxn does not mean she shares the same values--ideological values Eloquence embraces. In fact, Eloquence ran into push back and resistance from Patty.

What Eloquence explains is an active sabotage of democratic and participatory practices that would engage other union members and educators.

Okaikor: Your leader?
Eloquence: The president of the union SDEA, Patty Jones.
Okaikor: Why was that not welcomed?
Eloquence: She is accustomed to the way that it's traditionally been done in this district, which is to hire outside consultants. It's the only way she knows. And therefore, it's the only way to do things. You know? She meets any new ideas
with resistance. Nor did she accord the space for one to plan or prepare it. Like we're not allowed to---[laughs]---we're not allowed to meet and collaborate on our own on the e-board in order to accomplish these things. So, it makes it rather tough to plan new and innovative ideas when you're restricted to formal board meetings to do that. So, she hindered those plans in that way.

What is odd about this structure and practice is that it runs counter to how a democratic organization should run. Also, as a teacher in a district that has mostly Black educators and other educators of color, this does not mean that the school is exempt from the ills that Black and Brown students face in schools that are staffed by mostly white faculty and staff.

Eloquence’s unique work environment--majority Black students, mostly Black administrators, and teachers of color produces the same outcomes for Black and Latinx students that a majority Black and Latinx school with a majority white faculty would produce. Unlike most districts, the teachers are in community with other teachers of color. However, Eloquence explains that that fact alone is not enough. If these teachers of color have been educated within the same system that centers and lifts up whiteness and white culture, then they are likely Black and Brown people who have internalized values and practices that have always been designed to destroy people of color and control white people. Many of the teacher preparation programs that graduate Black and Brown students are preparing students for a world that will maintain what hooks (2004) refers to as an “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (p. 18). Without naming it, Eloquence raises this dilemma up in our conversation:

So, yeah. We-- yeah, you know-- I think it's --we're doing some cool stuff. It's just-- it's just like the urban woes. You know. It's like, I just wish --I don't know-- wish had a better more consistent leadership. I just wish it felt more open to
innovation and ideas and not just punishment and drill and…You know? “Write your three part objective!” or “I'm going to come in and check you off?” You know? It's like--it can be frustrating.

When marginalized members within dominant institutions do not align with the dominant culture of the organization, the consequences are punishment. In the case above, it is the internalizing of the “lash” or “whip” (Hartman, 1997; Shange, 2019) that would result in a mostly Black and non-Black staff of color to impose oppressive practices. As Hartman (1997) explains, part of our own socialization has been so successful that we no longer need the presence of an actual whip or lash penalizing BIPoC for stepping out of line; we have internalized on our own.

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Systems of dominance like patriarchy and racism, do not operate without people keeping them in motion. What we bring to the spaces and institutions we work in are deeply influenced by what messages we have all internalized. Our codings are generated around questions of who is deserving and who is not? Who do we, as a society, collectively value versus who do we not collectively value? Who should hold power vs. who should not? And how should power be distributed versus how it should not? These codings are constantly upgraded and updated to ensure proper maintenance of the status quo while disrupting any effort toward collective liberation. For each of the cases, the participants could no longer work with each other when these manifestations showed up on their organizing spaces, therefore hindering their progress.

Consequently, IPO and IRO not only influences our personal lives and relationships we have with friends, family members or colleagues, but the collective well-being of all the spaces and communities we enter. Like a cancer it infects all parts of our lives and the institutions we work in, particularly schools. These manifestations are unnatural and work counter to our
inherent design. It should therefore come as no surprise that the state of Black Educatorhood within the current system is constantly in a position of fight and/or protection for basic survival. The internalization of patriarchal and racial oppression are survival techniques that allow us to “survive” in that moment, however, does not allow us to collectively thrive. And in the words of Bettina Love (2019), in this work and beyond, “we want to do more than survive.”
CHAPTER 7

REHUMANIZATION

The rule is love. Sylvia Wynter, *Maskarade*

For we have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectation and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures ~ Audre Lorde (2007, p. 123)

Black folx, our humanity is so. Not because dominant culture says so or not or must validate it. It is so, because. We are humans because we say so. It is for this reason that we offer gifts that many miss out on because of the national impulse to “other” and invisibilize us. Our gifts are not mystical, magic, or magical; they are truths unheard, silenced, marginalized, and dehumanized. A function of whiteness is to dehumanize us all; white folx included. As evident from the interviews with the participants, it was clear that there is a need for the spaces, communities, schools, and people to rebuild, restore, and rehumanize themselves. This process is an internal process of rehumanization.

In this context, rehumanization is being defined as the processes, characteristics and questions needed to help us reclaim our full complete human selves. It is a continuous process by which we are healing, restoring, and renewing our very being. The interactions that the participants had with schools as children, their experiences as adults, and the institutional and individual/internal barriers they encountered are all justifications for the need to reimagine a conceptualization of Black Educatorhood possibilities. What will be offered here is a preliminary framework in its first iteration for Black Educatorhood possibilities.
The act of rehumanization connects us back to our full humanity and acknowledges each one’s being and voice as inherently divine and deserving. Part of this process means we allow our dreams—our imaginations to guide us towards Black educator futurisms and possibilities. I must clarify, because there are some imaginations that are conceived that end up harming to the greater collective of society and humanity; their inherent function is to dehumanize and other while super-humanizing itself.

From the beginning of this dissertation, I have documented the ways racism and patriarchalism have impacted the lives, organizations, spaces, and work experiences of Black educators. Here, this chapter will examine the yearning they wished for or wished existed within their work environments, schools, organizing spaces, and overall lives. At no point did any of the participants articulate they wanted to rehumanize schools, but they expressed frustration with some aspects of their spaces and in doing so, articulated a language for how things could and should be. Using their own words, I developed a grammar—a vocabulary of sorts—of rehumanization. There are their gifts.

The gifts that Black Educatorhood offers us all—a reimagining—a rehumanization of what it means to be Black and educator and ultimately human. The participants in this study helped ground us in understanding what we all need to create better—more just learning environments and communities for our collective well-belling. This is not a new phenomenon. In fact, I would draw a direct linkage between what I am referring to as rehumanizing sensibilities, and the Black educators that Siddle-Walker (2015) has documented in her research. Their orientation towards advocacy, access, and the aspirational attainment of the unknown was an onto-axiological orientation of Black Educatorhood during pre-Brown, and the same sensibilities of Black
educators during slavery, “emancipation,” and Reconstruction. Here we are in 2019 and we are still walking in a tradition of those who came before us.

If we go back to the era when the concept of race and Man (Wynter, 2003) were being imagined, the architects of this concept and construct, such as the Linneas’, Blumenbachs, Buffons, and a host of others imagined Europeans within a hierarchical racialized caste system as “white.” “White” was associated with being the height of purity, beauty, intelligence and all human achievement; it was a super-humanizing of itself and hyper-dehumanizing of all others. As a direct foil to this imagery, they imagined African people as “black” with all of the associative connotations of evil, dirty, feeblemindedness, and the epitome of the “uncivilized.” In what Wynter (2003) refers to as the “ultimate nonhuman other” (p. 266), or what Lorde (2007) references as “occupying the place of the dehumanized inferior” (p. 115). Created in the minds and imaginations, “white” gets codified and built into the laws and structures of society, ultimately consumed and internalized by all. Moreover, what Black educators in this study are gifted with are not isolated; they are connected codes of what we all can engage in to reclaim our humanity, our profession, and the lives of Black children.

This chapter and its theme of rehumanization is guided by the study’s participants alongside my intuition and a dream I had of a moth flying beneath the moon. I was moved to take my participants’ urges and cries for more humanizing and transformative spaces and environments. These messages were articulated in the data that I classified under a broader term: rehumanization. Taking the characteristics they articulated, I tallied up the qualities and characteristics based on their frequency. After they were tallied, words like support/supportive, relationships, dialogue, and collaboration were several of the characteristics that were more frequently mentioned during the interviews. By taking their ideas, desires, hurt, and
disappointments, I listed these characteristics as an urging for a design for rehumanization. I ground this in the Akan onto-epistemological iconography; an Adinkra symbol known as Nkonsonkonson--the chain-link which means unity, interconnectedness, interdependence, and human relations.

Figure 4: The Adinkra symbol, Nkonsonkonson--“chain-link” meaning interconnectedness.

Although interconnectedness was not specifically named with the same frequency as other words, the characteristics of the words listed above are reflective of the broader category and can be chunked under this broader more comprehensive concept. These characteristics of rehumanization are the gifts of Black Educatorhood that my participants gifted us, their schools, and communities--all at varying degrees. These are gifts, not only limited to our current Black educators, but are a reflection of a long and deep history of Black Educatorhood, that Siddle Walker (2015) reminds us of. These educators were committed to: 1) advocacy--justice for Black Studenthood and their overall personhood; 2) aspirations of what could be--the possibilities that
had not yet existed or been imagined; and 3) access to their full humanity. An ancestral heirloom and offering towards creating a better world.

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There is something peculiarly beautiful about the moth. Unlike its much more aesthetically and typically more colorful and beautiful cousin, the butterfly, which takes flight during the day, the moth is nocturnal. This creature operates in the concealed shadows of the night, symbolically, representing the mysteries of the night as it glides through the darkness. There is a subtlety in its existence; an intuition and psychic instinctual awareness in its movements and decisions. In its flight, the natural guiding light of the moth is the moon, its Mother light. The moon is its Mother--the ultimate symbol of femininity; and the moth is the moon’s babe. Representing the cycle of life, time, and existence, the intensity of the light, also makes for deep reflection, renewal, and life anew.

The moon reminds us that all living and breathing beings have an inherent and natural cycle of time, nature, and growth. We see evidence of this in all aspects of life. From the moth that started out as a larva, to a cocoon, to a caterpillar to an adult moth prepared to take its first flight, mate and begin the cycle all over again. Believed to be the influence of our emotions and behaviors, there is an intensity in its luminary light at its height of solar positioning. Its very own cycle is representative of reflection, literal and figurative; its reflection is projected as a guide to us all. Its emergence of being and seemingly disappearance speaks to its mystery of existence, its grandeur, and divinity.

The moth follows the Mother moon as a source of light, knowledge, understanding. As it wanders in the darkness, it too is symbolic of a level of vulnerability and faith; it is vulnerable to the elements of the atmosphere, and will need to move based on natural instincts, intuition and
establish a subtlety in its existence. The metaphor of a moth flying beneath the moon is not lost on me. Representative of life cycles, both the moon and the moth took up temporary shelter within my conscience.

Within my dreams, the word “M-O-T-H e-r-i-n-g” silhouetted on the backdrop of the midnight sky. Mother--being the center of all life--is the beginning, middle, and end of creation. It is in the renewal of life itself where dreams of possibilities are geographically located. Each birth, each rebirth locates hope and the possibility of new beginnings, new life--sustaining life. The epitome of renewal and new beginnings are the moth and the moon as they move in synchronous and harmonic dialogue with each other. A relationship built on trust, they are both descendants and ascendants of ancient entities, guided by a natural purpose; so, goes the rest of us. And so after having written Chapter 5 on integration, which captured a great deal of pain and betrayal, collective and individual, this dream led me to ask the questions: 1) What is here in the data--the narratives of my participants?; 2) What messages are here that will bring us back to a place of collective renewal and rehumanization?; and 3) How do we restore our lives while recognizing the importance of (re)membering to move forward?
My participants’ insights into what can and should be are the gifts they offer in spite of the barriers they encounter daily within their schools and organizing spaces. Figure 5 and what was grouped and categorized under Table #5 are the contributions and offerings derived from the participants’ data, in what I am referring to as characteristics of (re)humanizing spaces based on the interviews and focus groups. These characteristics were mentioned throughout their interviews and observed for frequency across participants within their interviews. Each of the characteristics have been categorized under larger themes of either: 1) Structural Well-being; 2) Community/Collective Well-being; 3) Intellectual Well-being; or 4) Physio-Socio-Emotional/Spiritual Well-being. Despite my use of the binary either/or language, this list should
not be viewed as such. Because there is much fluidity in nature, many of the characteristics will flow in and out any one of these categories or be present in all, at any given time. What is listed below in Table #5 are some of the characteristics, and are not limited to what is listed below:

Table #5: Design for Rehumanization Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design for Rehumanization</th>
<th>Characteristics that make for Rehumanization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural Well-being</td>
<td>Anti-oppression (anti-racist/anti-patriarchy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advocacy/Advocate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community/Collective Well-being</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collective</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commitment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community-centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consensus/Consensus Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>There is a culture of open, honest, and respectful dialogue/discussion and communication that helps move the organization/community forward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egalitarian</td>
<td>An organizational/community structure that believes in the inherent equality of all people. All people are equal importance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human-centered</td>
<td>Place people and those most impacted by decisions at the center of the organization’s mission, vision, and goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interconnectedness</td>
<td>The fact that we are all connected in an intricate balance and cycle of life and because of that, our organizations should be structured in that way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize/Organizing</td>
<td>People coming together to learn/educate, and strategically plan in order to mobilize around creating a more just world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>The act of actively engaging all members of a community in matters that directly impact them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships/Relationship Building</td>
<td>Connecting with people to get to know them more intimately, not in a transactional way, but in a way that nurtures community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>See the inherent rights of all people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support/Supportive</td>
<td>Being able to rely on a community of people who will hold you up as well as the entire community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>There is a commitment to openness of decisions made, what decisions are made, by whom, and where.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust/Community of Trust</td>
<td>Reliability, ability to place faith in another’s confidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity (not Uniformity/Homogeneity)</td>
<td>Joined together to achieve a common purpose or goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Consciousness</td>
<td>“Learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions—developing a critical awareness—so that individuals can take action against the...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intellectual Well-being</strong></td>
<td>oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 1998)</td>
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<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Creation/Innovation</td>
<td>When diverse members of a community collaborate together, the end product can be something innovative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection/Reflective (also self-criticism)</td>
<td>Actively examining oneself, goals, actions, and possibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategizing/Strategic</td>
<td>The careful, intentional, planning and designing of a specific goal to achieve a greater outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring/Empathy</td>
<td>To show kindness and care for others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice/Freedom</td>
<td>The opportunity to make choose--self determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing-Centered</td>
<td>Placing at the heart of our organizing the need for our internal healing. This starts from the premise that we have all been harmed and are in need of healing. With that belief, how do we engage in a praxis of individual and collective care for all?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/Wellness</td>
<td>The group/organization/community is committed to the individual and collective health and wellbeing of all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope/Hopeful</td>
<td>The belief in the endless possibilities and belief in change for the better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love (also nurture/nurturing)</td>
<td>To be committed to the spiritual growth and development of oneself and another (hooks, 2000).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing</td>
<td>See LOVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit/Spiritual</td>
<td>The soul of our bodies and selves. It is that which connects us to all beings (past, present, future)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Care</td>
<td>Caring for oneself--however it does not occur in isolation from the community and collective. It is not an individualistic task because one’s individual well-being is connected to the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>To be heard, seen, and given a sense of one’s own power.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
These characteristics, in isolation, are not unique to Black educators, but they capture the essence of the tradition of Black Educatorhood, who are and/or what they crave for their communities (schools, classrooms, and organizing spaces).

**Collaboration and Innovation**

In this section of rehumanization, I highlight several excerpts from the participants that illuminates the difficulty they noticed was missing or was visible and present in their organizing or work environments. Because of their peripheral perspective of oppression as educators in U.S. public schools, they offer us a gift. It is a heavy gift, nonetheless one that makes visible the possibilities of what can and should be. The first of these qualities are collaboration and innovation.

The binary organizational structures of our language and ways of being have stifled the possibilities that are yet to be discovered or touched. Eloquence lifts up this dilemma in our interview:

> You know. It's like, I just wish --I don't know--wish I had a better more consistent leadership. I just wish it felt more open to innovation and ideas and not just punishment and drill and, you know? “Write your three part objective or I'm going to come in and check you off.” You know? It's like--it can be frustrating.

Eloquence’s frustrations about not being given the space to innovate with colleagues actually goes beyond frustration. The counter to the repression of innovation is to co-create and innovate without permission. Eloquence’s frustrations to having his desire for collaboration and innovation repressed is a natural and human response to dehumanization. It is an example of just one of the ways we have been dehumanized at work, more specifically in schools.
Working and learning environments, whether formal or informal, are complex communities where individuals contribute their way of viewing the world to help the collective move toward a more complete understanding of the world.

As we attempt to organize around social issues, we can no longer perceive these social issues in isolation. As researchers are beginning to learn more about learning, development and its processes, it is becoming clearer that learning and creativity that derives from that learning does not happen in isolation. Contrary to what is believed within schools and workspaces, “Creativity does not happen inside a person head, but the interaction between a person’s thoughts and a socio-cultural context (Fischer et al., 2005, p. 485). In other words, creativity and learning cannot be seen, valued, or measured as an individual taking. What this means for schools, other work environments, and how we measure success and productivity will require these institutions to take on a whole new paradigm that would honor the work of the collective by also recognizing the contributions, perspectives, and talents of each individual present within that community.

He continues on to explain how the union leadership meets new ideas with resistance:

She meets any new ideas with resistance. Nor did she accord the space for one to plan or prepare it. Like we're not allowed to---[laughs]-- we're not allowed to meet and collaborate on our own on the e-board in order to accomplish these things. So, it makes it rather tough to plan new and innovative ideas when you're restricted to formal board meetings to do that. So, she hindered those plans in that way.

For many educators, this is not uncommon. Eloquence understands here that innovative ideas cannot grow when restricted to tight parameters. The union leader’s approach centers a style
reflective of some of the manifestations of patriarchy discussed in Chapter 6, by way of silencing, limiting choices, access, objection to divergent ways of thinking, and freedom of movement. The members’ desire to innovate is restricted and ultimately prevented.

Brene Brown (2015) theorizes, “If we want to reignite innovation, and passion, we have to rehumanize work” (p. 15). Although I mostly agree with Brown, we must remember “work” and all of society does not function in isolation from the rest of the world. In actuality, we make up society. The rehumanization of work will require us to begin this within ourselves as well as within the institutions and systems. When we replace the word “work” in Brown’s statement above, with school, education, and even ourselves, the sentiment still applies, and proves itself to be worthy of examination. It should then read as: a) If we want to reignite innovation, and passion, we have to rehumanize school; b) If we want to reignite innovation, and passion, we have to rehumanize education; and lastly, c) If we want to reignite innovation, and passion, we have to rehumanize ourselves. What would happen if we were collectively compelled to rehumanize ourselves schools and our work? How different would the world be?

However, to maximize this learning and innovation, opportunities for heterogeneous groups of people coming together to stretch the learning capacity and development of the individuals and the community, need to be allowed to germinate. This is where creativity is cultivated. In the excerpt below, Eloquence speaks to the importance of innovation and creativity as a by-product of collaboration. Researchers have studied how creativity and innovation are fostered when multi-ethnoracial groups of people come together to struggle through ideas to create.

The presumption that learning and creative responses to complex problems happen in isolation is a myth (Fischer, Giaccardi, Eden, Sugimoto, & Ye, 2005) that has shaped the
practices and values of our schools and many of our institutions. Fischer et. al. (2005) explains, “Although society often thinks of creative individuals as working in isolation, intelligence and creativity result in large part from interaction and collaboration with other individuals” (p. 482), yet most of our schools are designed counter to this. The state of our public schools and the overall well-being of not just Black Studenthood, but all students, is a complex problem of our time. The stagnation of this nation rest at the systematic elimination and prohibition of Black educators and other educators of color from the nation’s classrooms and schools.

Just as we are moving away from the lone individual creative leader figure-head, this too will need to take form within our organizations, institutions, communities of practice (CoP) and communities of interest (CoI). The artificial borders and boundaries that our organizations have constructed have prevented these very organizations, institutions, communities, and individuals from learning a new language or developing a new grammar to expand upon new avenues of creativity. The boundaries have served as barriers to optimal learning, problem solving, and individual, community and national growth.

In Eloquence’s case, the union president who was also a Black womxn, end up unable to reconcile their differences or which she refused to accept new ways of engaging union members. She is a prime example of the traditional Black leadership that internalizes their role as the decision-maker and mimic the organizational structure of patriarchalism. Her internalization of patriarchalism limits her creativity and growth with the organization.

**Interconnectedness**

In many African traditions and cultures, there are words for interconnectedness--which represents a deeper level of unity that espouses the importance of all elements of life inextricably dedicated to and responsible for their individual’s role in the larger ecosystem. For the Xhosa
and Zulu people of South Africa, it is ubuntu; for the Akan people of Ghana, it is nkonsonkonson. Owusu-Ansah & Mji (2013) further explicate the deeply relational ontological-axiological orientation of Indigenous African Knowledge. They state, “The spirit of the African Worldview includes wholeness, community, and harmony which are deeply embedded in cultural values” (pp. 1-2). Below, Eloquence explains how the Freedom School collective operates, “...we're able to accomplish things as a collective that I don't think any individual in that group could accomplish on their own,”--acknowledging here that there is a dependency that the members have on each other. It is not an addictive dependency, but one that links them all together in unity. Additionally, Eloquence is acknowledging that his organization BrED Freedom School, is only able to achieve so much is because they are connected to a collective group of people that rely on the skills of each other.

Eloquence’s reflection on the symbol Nkonsonkonson, brings him to this analysis about creativity and the current structure of schooling and teaching:

And sometimes I'm sitting alone writing a lesson plan and I'm honestly doubting myself, like this sounds dry and linear and not exciting. But it's not that I don't have it in me. It's the opportunities for the interconnectedness and the relationships that are always absent that result in that experience. And I'll just close by saying that even ties with the personal, that Okaikor inquired about. Because, you know, a few moments ago, you could probably hear me talking about the budget for September as we closed September and just, you know, reflecting. And, you know, I need to reflect in my personal life. I need to reflect in my professional life. I need to reflect in my community organizing life.
What gets affirmed and unearthed in Eloquence’s response is not only how isolating it can be, but what kind of insecurities show up as a result of lacking relationships that foster interconnectedness. In Eloquence’s case, he feels a sense of self-doubt because he is missing that which makes us human and reconnects us to our humanity as a result; our creative and innovative sensibilities go unnurtured and underdeveloped. His feelings of self-doubt are not his making but the making of a patriarchal society that thrives on competition, isolation, and rugged individualism. The unfortunate thing is that the absence of community to collaborate with are not only unnatural, but end up triggering responses of self-doubt, and insecurities.

When Maria articulated her response to the question about the significance of Nkonsonkonson, whose symbolic meaning is associated with interconnectedness, and how that may be manifesting in her work and personal life, she struggled with how to respond. The excerpt below demonstrates this struggle:

I love the concept [interconnectedness] and I strive for the concept of interdependence because we all have strengths that we can bring to the table. And together we're only stronger. And always looking at the humanity in it at all. So, I--this symbol resonates with me and, and what it means. I think it's-- it's what I strive for. I'm not sure how much it's showing up in my--in areas of my life, in general. Cause I'm not really sure.

Maria reinforces the importance of valuing everyone’s strengths that they bring to the table. Although Maria uses the word “strengths” I am linking her use of that word to Armah’s concept of the “spirit” which he believes is what makes us human. As referenced in chapter 2 Armah states:
if I’m blind to your spirit I see only your body. Then if I want you to do
something for me, I force or trick your body into doing it even against your
spirit’s direction. That’s manipulation. Manipulation steals a person’s body from
his spirit, cuts the body off from its own spirit’s direction.

It is also worth mentioning, Maria equates interconnectedness, and seeing the strengths in all
people, with seeing one's' humanity. Everyone’s qualities and strengths bring a necessary
resource to the community. When it is not valued or seen, there is a shrinking and othering of
those who are not given voice or space within the community. If we are seen--our spirit is also
seen in the spaces we occupy, then our strengths are also seen. Our presence there does not
become about how others can use us or exploit and manipulate our bodies into serving those in
power. It becomes about how our collective spirits and strengths which are unique to us can
create a better community. When these individual strengths--our spirits --are brought to the
collective and allowed to flourish, Maria reminds us that “we are only stronger”.

In a previous interview, Maria described the experiences she had with the other Black
educators in her district when they collectively brought their concerns to the superintendent. She
used words like, “support,” “unity” and “united” to describe how their community felt during
that time. In essence there was an aspect and level of interconnectedness experienced from the
community they had formed. However, she does not, in that moment think to reference that
experience as an example of interconnectedness.

Unfortunately, schools in their current form, are structured around an architecture of
dominance and control. From the superintendent to the principals and other administrators, to the
teachers and support staff, to the students, parents and community, the layers of control,
dominance, and silos within schools are consistently enacted out daily. It is because of this that Phil explains:

I don't see the interconnectedness that I speak of in my work, so to speak at my job, but more so in the collective, the teacher collective. But most of us kind of enter that with some type of progressive thinking, unity-- you know? So yeah, it's, I'm getting it in a collective but not necessarily on the day to day. Right? When at the work site.

In comparison to many of the other participants, Phil does not experience interconnectedness at work. This is not shocking, for the design of schools, as we know them, are not about centering the humanity of people, but rather place standardized test scores, and potential earning power over the spirits and humanity of students. In many ways, schools of today resemble that of prisons further linking it to the school to prison nexus and its carceral state, eluding to not only its design for carcerality and obedience but a design for conformity and uniformity.

As established in chapter 6, if we know that isolation is a dehumanizing and painful experience, emotion and action, then we must be in search of that which is the opposite of isolation. As our natural instincts are to fill the void of our dehumanization and the pain associated with isolation, we desire and yearn for community. Faith describes

You know, so that's kinda where I am right now --as far as, but I need that, that interdependence and feeling a collective. Because right now, when you're isolated, yo, yo it's crazy!

I asked her to elaborate on what she meant by the isolation being crazy. She texts me:
I was saying how good it was to be around like minded ppl bc at school it’s so isolating even when ur not the only Black person but the Black ppl around u are perpetuating systems of oppression. It feels super lonely...

And actually undoin’ [racism] has given me the history and language to really name it...in my heart I knew things smelled foul and weighed heavy on my heart but I was also guilty of being the enforcer and being expected to keep brown children in check.

As a system, all are required, by default, to uphold the mission, goals, and practices of the institutions we serve. As Black educators, this too is our fate; to be agents of the State or agents of liberation. Are we, as Faith state, the “enforcers” within our institutions “expected to keep Brown children in check” or facilitate a journey toward freedom? It is a dilemma Black educators find themselves caught between daily and one where their principles and values are constantly in conflict with. Faith continues on below:

...like everyone should be alarmed with how we oppress children and adults but ppl walk around like this is normal so I literally was feeling like I was crazy...it was impacting my health in ways that u can’t explain to a doc or ur family bc ppl assume that schools are safe.

Yup so when I found a community of ppl that were naming the “thing” that I couldn’t quite articulate it was freeing to some degree...I kept coming even when the person introduced me to hope stopped coming lol
Faith’s experiences with being in community with a supportive group of people who could help name the “thing” she was experiencing, was freeing. What she describes here is a level of consciousness she was exposed. Her ability to articulate the experience was liberating for her. Furthermore, it cannot be ignored that Faith later describes having a physical reaction to dehumanization. She explains that as an educator, she has been compromised and placed in positions where she is forced to oppress other Black and Brown students. Faith further expresses it has impacted her physical health. Although being able to name the “thing” is “freeing to some degree” it is not completely freeing as the “thing” still exists. This is the precarity of Black Educatorhood.

**Community and Unity.** In the case of Maria, she not only finds it frustrating, but it was a recurring message she brought up throughout her interviews. It was one of the reasons she found it difficult to consistently engage in EFFORT. In essence there was a dehumanization she was experiencing through the silencing, and unilateral decisions being made within the group. Here she describes the frustration:

> What's interesting about it is, I find this is what frustrates me in my personal life as well as in my work life, that this is not how other people view it. But they don't do what's best for the collective. Or they don't include everyone in this and it really drives me a little crazy. [laughs] It's like every man for themselves. And I'm not--I struggle with that with people. Because everyone has something to bring to the table and there should be a space at the table for everyone and I find that that's not, especially in my current district, it's just, isn't. It doesn't exist.
Everyone has something to contribute towards the greater wellbeing of the community---any community that is created and formed. When people are excluded from the process, there is a shrinking of significance within that community, and a deprivation of the community to better create and innovate because it rejects the diversity needed to evolve and excludes its most marginalized group of people; Black womxn.

For Maria, in addition to the support she felt while organizing with the other Black educators in the district, there was a sense of “unity” and community felt as they joined together for one cause. Their unity also provided a sense of support for each other. Here is what she says in her own words:

I think what came out for me was the significant need for, for unity. And I think we kind of, at least at [Evergreen] North-- there were many of us from [Evergreen] North and I think we kind of became a support for one another. I think that that was something positive that came out of it.

What is particularly important about the unity and support found in this one group was that it was a united front in the face of the racism they collectively experienced at work. There was also a comfort in not being alone. This group ended up having a much stronger, although temporary, bond than EFFORT.

The members of BrED Freedom School span at least three generations and multi-ethnoracial representation. Phil recognizes that this quality is an asset and benefit to the organization. In the excerpt below, he explains:

I think politically, like we're all growing and I think being in different spaces-- different levels of experience, whether it be the years of experience to the depth in
certain areas of study, I think our group unity, even if some of it might, and I don't know how to say it-- but some of it might come from --even if we don't know everything about everybody in the core group, you know enough to know that we're all on the right side. Like, I trust that Okaikor, Thomas, Jake, you know, Eloquence, Jessica--like everybody's on the right side of this, this, this fight-- this struggle. Um, and like we all, I think we bring some different things to the table. And I think that is a beauty too. like I think that we're not a cookie cutter type of group-- is-- like that. I like that. I like that we don't all look the same or talk or, you know, we have like--Even, you know, the fact that, yeah, Eloquence is science and you know, like we do literature and Jake and Thomas are historians. But we all kind of do a little bit of everything. It's just, yeah, I like that. Oh yeah, and that our unity is not uniformity. I think that's the phrase. Like our unity is not uniformity like we... Yeah.

In Phil’s response, he closes by channeling organizational development scholar, Mary Parker Follett’s quote, “Unity, not uniformity, must be our aim. We attain unity only through variety. Differences must be integrated, not annihilated, not absorbed... Heterogeneity, not homogeneity, I repeat makes unity” (1918, p. 39). In doing so, he reminds us all of the importance of unity and the interconnectedness needed for sustainability of the organizing. Most importantly, uniformity does not embrace the curiosity and inquisitiveness that is essential to stepping outside of what is deemed as the “norm”.

**Support and Supportive Community**

Faith realizes the response to the oppression she is feeling in school is also dehumanizing because it disconnects her from being in community with others who may be like-minded. In an
effort to fill the void Faith is naturally craving, she creates a community of support that she describes below:

But right now, I'm like, I'm closing my door and doing what I do by myself. And I don't want to feel like that. So, having an outside organization has been a great assistance to me. Whether it be the South Jersey, the Undoing Racism group that we started with Evergreen [EFFORT]. So that's been really nice to have some support as far as that goes.

Faith’s school and district have been toxic environments for her. It is the outside group that provides her with the support to carry on to help her rehumanize herself. It is a location and geography of hope for her and gives her life.

Like Faith, Cookie has also found a space to regain her humanity through the community of support that the Black educators in their district provided each other, particularly in their time of need, after multiple incidences of aggression. She specifically uplifts, “support” as a key feature to their organizing and overall means to getting through the days at work. Cookie espouses:

I would say the current group, speaking for my experience and a few other people at-- in the building I was at, it was more of support for each other. Because like Lauryn said, we were feeling really isolated. And like cogs in the system where you think you're doing one thing and you think--or you think you're working towards one kind of goal and then you have different aspects of the system working against you--trying to get support within the district, that's not really clear. It's not explicit.
The district did not provide any support to them. However, the Black educators self-organized this support—again as a means to be seen, heard, valued, affirmed, and validated. The feelings of isolation meant the support would be especially useful for the participants in helping them sustain themselves.

Faith adds another layer to the importance of the support group she had organized. She explains that they help build relationships and ultimately a network. “But I think that's why the support group is really, really important as far as us coming together and maintaining those relationships that were built through that.” At another point, Faith also explains that the support groups were “therapeutic” for her, in which she looked forward to attending and being in community with others.

Even though Faith was able to find a supportive community elsewhere, in another conversation, what she raises is the difficulty Black educators and other educators of color have within their district. There is a level of fear that Faith believes is preventing the other Black educators from reconvening with her. This level of fear is also found in the Black board member who she found as an ally.

But unfortunately, as far as our circle or our group has reconvened-- we've only had one-- but I haven't heard from the Lenape Town folks--like our members of color who were part of the initial recent Anti-racism training in June. And so, I'm not sure what that is. Well no I do know. That's just--that's just years and years of us being beat up and I don't think they think much will change. So, I don't know if they think--I don't know. Like I don't know... I think some of them are a little hesitant and afraid. I know that part of the one big thing is like gaining trust within the group. It is a couple different districts involved. So, it's not just, Lenape
Town folk there. So, I don't know how to pull them back in. Like I don't--I'm not sure how to do that.

Faith names trust as a reason why the other Black educators and other educators of color may be hesitant and afraid to get more involved with the group. In a separate interview, she reveals that many of them felt “beatdown,” “hopeless” and therefore did not see the need to get involved or do anything. In this case, fear and lack of trust are what is preventing these other Black educators from being able to access their full human selves.

As Faith recalled her experiences within her district and even the targeting she felt, Phil responds by expressing the need to support Faith and others in similar circumstances. He proposes, “...we gotta do it ourselves. So somehow we have to organize and support you and other folks who go through this and then have like don't get the follow-up.” Even in this moment, Phil is demonstrating what it means to build support and community for each other.

**Relationship Building**

Part of our reimagining means we need to be in community with each other differently. How do we embrace conflict and work through challenges with each other in a way that will bring us closer to our humanity? This is a question we should be asking ourselves as we continue to design spaces that embrace the humanity and dignity of all. Here, Eloquence brings restorative practices into his classes to help nurture the relationships that we are often told we should not nurture.

So, restorative practices-- I like to do circles with my students every so often. And that just helps the relationship building among themselves and with me. I try to-- and there's also been a mindfulness push as well--with that. So just giving them a
chance to-- you know deep breaths not responding with punitive measures all the time. But responding with other kinds of measures.

Much of our schooling and our greater society has taken on punitive and penal sensibilities even as a means for compliance and obedience. Eloquence’s rejections of those sensibilities as a way of being in community with his students is an act of resistance and rehumanization. Because schools have historically been sites for anti-blackness and other forms of dehumanization, the people who enter these structures as they currently are, must constantly be engaged in an unrelenting process and practice of rehumanization--practicing what it means to center the humanity and dignity of all people.

Although being in a predominantly Black environment, with mostly teachers of color, Eloquence also found that the school environment was challenging because of the inconsistency in leadership, penal approaches to discipline, and lack of openness to innovation. When asked how he gets through, he did not hesitate to respond, “But my students help me get through. And a few colleagues as well, who you know, I can confide in, who I get to collaborate and plan with. Yeah, that's how I've been getting through.” What is important to note here is how Eloquence has a relationship that he has nurtured and feels he can confide in his colleagues. In order for people to feel comfortable confiding in others, there needs to be trust. There is a level of intimacy that is accompanied by being able to speak in confidence with each other. In an environment where there is a culture of distrust and fear, compliance and uncritical obedience are often the offspring of such a union.

Cookie acknowledges the dual role she serves in a community of support; one of support for others, and one of the supported by others. Here is Cookie in her own words:
I would say, because for me that's [support] what I do. And for me it's what I need and is important. If-- if being a support to others is just, you know, whether it's, it's natural in terms of personality trait and slash or training for me, that's just kind of what I do. Having the support is different and important being in a space, um, being in a predominantly white space. And it's not even just predominantly white, like that's the other piece too. Like it heightens the issues that you, deal with. But, kind of we all drink the Kool-Aid at different points, right? So, it's knowing that, if I didn't drink it, that there's someone I can talk to that I know who hasn't drunk it recently [laughs].

Cookie also sheds light on the possibility of creating a community of support as being a “personality trait” and/or “training.” This brings to question, is interconnectedness and supportive attributes a natural design in nature, including humanity? If so, how has it shifted? How do we train others to develop a sense of community, interdependence, and interconnectedness while abandoning individualism, patriarchy, and self-reliance? Ultimately, we will be designing for rehumanization.

Cookie also emphasizes the phenomena of what it is like to work in a predominantly white space, for it heightened the issues Black educators faced. She likens the experience to the term “drinking the Kool Aid,” a stigmatizing term used to describe people who are brainwashed and lack an awareness of reality. The terminology is an allusion to a brainwashing and being unaware of one's reality so much so that the individual drinks themselves into a symbolic death of the individual. In the excerpt below, Cookie goes on to add:

22 “Drinking the Kool Aid” is used in reference to the mass suicides of over 900 of Jim Jones followers in Guyana. The term was coined in 1978 after the cult leader Jim Jones coerced his followers to drink a grape drink laced with cyanide. The phrase is dehumanizing and trivializes the deaths of the cult members.
Like, yeah, we know we're sipping it but we gulping it? So, knowing that there's someone there that I can kind of talk to, uh, just get feedback work or get grounded. Sometimes it's just needing to be grounded. Like, okay, it's not me, it's this craziness. And having that, having that as a support. Yeah. Yeah. And that definitely has increased since the group started because I think we were all at, and again I can speak for the people at [Evergreen] North, we were all kind of having our individual experiences and not talking about it or again, having these microaggressions that you register and you just really, you know, you just let it go.

Under the dehumanizing gaze of whiteness, one’s understanding of the world and all of its operating systems, can often cloud our vision, insight, and analysis of our current individual and collective circumstances and experiences. Cookie’s analogy attempts to address the unconsciousness of what being in a predominantly white space may cause. Being able to find like-minded people in order to remain grounded, is important to building the necessary ecosystem of support that Cookie and others long for.

The characteristics listed in this chapter that I chunk under a broader term of rehumanization are just some of the qualities or algorithmic codes that will be useful for us to rebuild our collective and individual humanity. As it stands, our bodies are in a one-way discourse within a system that seeks to objectify that which is mind, body, and spirit for profit and production. Because it is an unnatural relation, our minds and spirits send warning signals to prompt us to disrupt that dehumanization. However, because these are individual reactions and meant merely for survival, we do not thrive because the system remains in place. Our role then is to design for rehumanization.
A design for rehumanization is an amalgamation of intellectual well-being + community and collective well-being + physio-emotional/spiritual well-being. The wedding of these three factors is what I am arguing will help support structural well-being.

The question I am posing is, how then can we take this framework and apply it to our personal lives, personal relationships, and grassroots organizing spaces? The questions we need to ask is, would such a framework thrive in public schools, or other state sanctioned institutions? I am inclined to say no. I am also inclined to urge people away from using this as a checklist, but figure out how people can use this for their own collective and internal growth alongside friends, colleagues, partners, students, and family who are willing to do the hard work of unlearning harmful ways of being that have resulted in the nation’s collective stagnation. I am predisposed to imagining and believing the potential that such a framework could spread pushing us towards complete abolition of violent structures.

*Figure 6: Designing for Rehumanization Equation*
Figure 7: A Matrix for the Design for Rehumanization.

Figure 8: Restoring Healing and Unity: The linkage between the Design for Rehumanization and what one needs for their overall restoration of healing and unity.
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS/IMPLICATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

A mind that remains in the present atmosphere never undergoes sufficient development to experience what is commonly known as thinking ~ Carter G. Woodson

This is the cusp of a Black Educatorhood possibilities. This study sought to explore the experiences of Black K-12 educators in public schools who were advocating for racial justice within their schools, districts, and/or communities. To do so, I interviewed six educators, who represented different roles within schools, and from different socio-economic communities. Four of the participants were classroom teachers, two in high schools, another two in middle schools, while the remaining two were support staff in a high school; one served as a learning consultant and the other as a school psychologist, both members of the child study team. The research questions found in Figures #9, #10, and #11 seen below were used to guide this study were: 1) What collective/individual narratives emerge as six Black K-12 educators advocate and attempt to organize for racial and social justice within their organizing communities, schools and/or districts; 2) What are their collective experiences in schools as students and educators within schools; 3) What are the individual, group, and systemic barriers/principles that hinder/elevate progress?
Research Question 1: What collective/individual narratives emerge as six Black K-12 educators advocate and attempt to organize for racial and social justice within their organizing communities, schools and/or districts?

Individual Narratives:
- Eloquence: Balance
- Maria: Exhaustion
- Phil: Legacy
- Faith: Advocate with Patience
- Cookie: Do for Self
- Lauryln: Overwhelmed

Collective Narratives:
- Integration Narratives
- Nkonsonkonson Narratives
- Santrofi Anoma Narratives
- Mothering Narratives

Figure 9: Individual and Collective Narratives Emerged from the Data

Research Question 2: What are their collective experiences in schools as students and educators in schools?

Collective Experiences as Students:
- Racial isolation
- Racial aggressions (from students and adults)
- Nurtured from family/community

Collective Experiences as Educators:
- (Racial and ideological) isolation
- Anti-blackness
- Institutional violence
- Bureaucracy
- Trauma
- Aggressions/Emotional Abuse
- Emotional tax

Figure 10: Collective Experiences in Schools as Black students and Black educators.
Chapter 4 of this dissertation aimed to provide a short overview of each of the participants and the communities they came from. In no way should it be seen as an absolute; it is just one individual’s perspective merged with some of their very own words. Each participant was allowed to review my interpretation of who they were and make suggestions or comments as a way to honor and be respectful of them and how I presented their narratives.

In chapter 5, each of the participants shared stories of their own experiences in so called “integrated” or “desegregated” schools. And when these stories were not their own, they were the stories of their children, the humans they were fortunate to carry on with a legacy. In the chapter on integration, I explored the participants’ experiences in school as children as well as their experiences in school as educators in these so-called desegregated/integrated public schools post-Brown v. BOE. Built behind the backdrop of my cousin, Faenita Dilworth’s story and the
etymology of the word “integration,” I tell their stories--to birth an understanding of Black educators’ experiences within the systems we espouse to love. Their narratives, like a painting, illustrate a common thread and collective narrative we have not fully explored or examined because of the excitement that surrounded the prospect of what could come of integrated schools without integrating with any intentionality. In the end, I found their experiences as adults bore similarities across participants, as well as similarities as children attending school.

One of the themes that cut across participants were feelings of isolation which I compare to the experiences of being exiled willingly and unwillingly. Although experienced by all participants, this study chose to hone in on the experiences of Faith and Phil more specifically as it relates to isolation and exile. The Russian stacking dolls of prisons; with each layer, each prison formation, it is more intense, and intricate, and deeper--a never ending flow of prisons.

When examining their experiences within their organizing spaces, all the participants ran into barriers that ended up disrupting their organizing in one way or another. I chose to concentrate on the ways internalized patriarchy and racial oppression showed up in their organizing as barriers and hindrances to their work. I could have included all participants and discussed the ways that internalized patriarchy was manifesting in all, however, I only focused on the experiences of Eloquence and Cookie. For internalized racial oppression, more specifically, colorism, I focused on two of the participants. Because there were so many more manifestations, I chose to list the manifestations as they revealed themselves through the data as well as the readings. These manifestations can be located in Tables #2 and #3. The purpose of listing these manifestations in the way they were is so that we can make these characteristics visible and shed light on what they are and how they move in and out of our organizations and ultimately, us.
Each of these will hopefully read as warning signs against how we do schooling, education, and organizing in order to shift towards a framework that is not only just, and equitable, but a place where we can thrive and enter a continuous process of rehumanization. Although I do not believe education can change society, I do believe we can change the way we do education and schooling. Nonetheless, I believe this can take form only when we begin to undergo a “revolution of values” (King, 1967/2002). Understanding patriarchy and racism as collaborating systems that are internalized by all members of our society, who then enter into our institutions with these internalized messages about patriarchy and racism, only to build programming, construct policies, procedures, regulations, laws, and practices that implicitly, sometimes explicitly, reflect the patriarchy and racism we have consumed. Most importantly, we must understand how these institutions produce the outcomes of a system built by people who have internalized these messages, all while creating structures to uphold them. The first step is understanding how they manifest in us, in our institutions, and organizations is to name them, and work towards undoing them.

Lastly, I took the focus group data, parsed through what messages the participants were communicating about the rehumanizing qualities and characteristics needed for us to thrive. Falling in line with constructivist grounded theory methodology, I followed up with what I learned from my participants focus group with readings in the literature to build upon and co-construct the qualities of what these reimagined spaces could look, feel, taste, smell, sound, sense like. In order to draw this out of the participants, we centered our conversation around an Akan onto-epistemological iconography; an Adinkra symbol known as Nkonsonkonson. Seen below in Figure 12, Nkonsonkonson, also known as the “chain-link,” translates as
interconnectedness, interdependence, and human relations. The results of that conversation helped me build a list of qualities and characteristics.

Figure 12: Akan onto-epistemological iconography; an Adinkra symbol known as Nkonsonkonson

Because these are systems, rehumanizing ourselves and the institutions we build and work in will need to go beyond language use in policies and regulations. Nor can it be achieved by swapping out men in positions of power for womxn or gender non-conforming and/or trans folx. That would be superficial and miss the point. Replacing one person with another does nothing to shift the manufactured order of things as they are, nor does it change the system. We are beginning to see this in education with an increased shift in Black and Brown educators being actively recruited and entering into the classroom. However, the same policies and practices continue unchecked, unexamined, and accepted as is. This will help Black K-12 educators as they begin or continue to organize, understand the barriers that may impede their organizing. I only offer a snapshot of internalized patriarchy as manifested through manipulation, control,
power, etc., and internalized racial oppression as manifested through tokenism, colorism, but there are a host of others that may enter into the organizing space.

As I began sifting through the data, integration became a common theme across participants although I was not seeking this out specifically. I have no suggestions just observations and analyses. I encourage us all to reimagine something together. Nonetheless, I raise important questions about what this sacrifice means for the socio-emotional health, well-being, and self-esteem of all Black and other melanated educators and children if our practices do not change and continue in our tradition of being the moral compass of a fraught nation?

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Autoethnography

I came into teaching because it was a profession I knew I was designed for. Coming from a long history of Black K-12 educators in my family, I am not sure if it was the stories of my ancestors who came before me that inspired my aspirations to become a teacher, or if said ancestors of mine whispered lullabies and commandments to me in the wind as I slumbered through the night, “Be still our child. You have a journey to complete for us all.”

I hearkened.

My class was on the third floor in one of the Blackest most life giving schools in the district. We were the Blackest in every Black sense of the word. Our students were hella lit and intelligent, and ratchet, and creative, and beautiful, and the fashion shows were provocative, and queer--with ballroom influences straight out of Pose--where art galleries and creativity break through the brick walls and imposed metal detectors designed to cage them in. And our pep rallies? Lit. We were complex. We were the school so many wanted to attend or work and concurrently the school so many wanted to flee from. Although, sometimes opportunistic, people
came to get their whole entire lives here to replace their bland unseasoned chicken lives. It was also the location where academic and educational experiments would take place with limited critique or reflection from those imposing these experiments. Wherever Black folx occupy, experiments often go unchecked by those in power. As for those of us on the margins, we stay critiquing, and constructing a critical and sharp analysis of failed policies and practices, particularly those that end up harming us.

“Ms. Price!”

Since getting married, my students often called me “Ms. Price” or “Ms. Aryee” – never “Ms. Aryee-Price” – which I would always insist upon at the beginning of the year. It was a way for me to maintain what little I had left of the Motherland – it was an act of (re)membering so that my descendants would (re)member.

Jamil was one of those students who would just call me Ms. Price. Standing at about 5’9 with a slender build, this Black boy teenager exuded confidence and curiosity. The kind of curiosity that kept me on my toes researching and questioning just as much. His contributions, when he presented them, often offered such great insight to our classroom. On this one particular day, it was no different.

“Ms. Price!”

Standing, hunched over at one of the student-designated desks towards the front of the classroom, I respond, directing my gaze towards him,

“Uhhuh?!

“Do you realize that you’re my only Black teacher?”

I smirk. Going down the list of all his teachers, calling them out by name – one by one, he then lands on my name--
“You’re my only Black teacher! That’s a shame when most of the students here are Black…”

The other students sit silently. Some are performing mental calculations of their own. Others do not seemingly appear to be moved by Jamil’s moment of revelation; they carry on with their current occupations. It is an ordinary day for them. And although I had already noticed we had a disproportionate amount of white faculty and staff in comparison to the student population, it was the first that I heard a student recognize it and communicate an analysis about it. The children are watching us.

I think at this point, my smirk ends up stretching into a broad smile. He was correct and I was aware that the Black educators we created community with were no longer with us. These were the folx I created memories with, shared stories and grievances in the back room of the nurses office, in the hallways, the teachers’ lounges, at school events, during union meetings and during celebratory milestone events.

What Jamil was illuminating on was something I had been thinking about. He was absolutely right. He started our high school right at the beginning of the Obama Administration's Race to the Top (RttT) Turnaround grants--a time when the district had mandated, under these grants, a change in the staffing and structure of the school. This change, which used turnaround strategies, also known as “quick wins,” under the grant, called for an extended school day and/or year, an increase in new supervisory positions designated for the school, as well as the firing and/or transferring out of 50 percent of the staff, and the principal. This staff and principal were then replaced them with new staff and a new principal. I was hyper aware of what Jamil was sharing. I had tragically witnessed my Black colleagues forced out of our school. I had experienced and witnessed the demoralization that accompanies what happens when bureaucratic
decisions are imposed on educators, students, parents, and the entire school community without their voice, input and participation--when people disappear from the community without reason or explanation. I had witnessed what happened when colleagues are disappeared, the animosity, betrayal, anger, and distrust that takes form within that community. A place-based symbolic death and wake. A precarity of Black educatorhood situated in a perpetual wake. Mourning in the midst of the storm of the educational destruction of our babies.

In the wake of the storm (Sharpe, 2014; 2016).

****

*In the wake of the storm.*

It is the middle of April. The weather app on my iPhone tells me that it is 75 degrees outside. I know this only because there is a curious Black boy child I have the pleasure of mothering asking me. Apparently, this little human cannot stop asking questions; I hope he remains this curious forever. I enjoy his inquisitiveness and sense of wonder.

We are on our way to the school where I began my career. Outside, I notice the green tulip leaves beginning to break through the earth--it always fascinates me that the seeds we planted in 2006 continue to show up with each cycle and rebirth of spring. I am immediately transported to that cold Fall day of 2006 when my group of peer leaders planted those seeds. Thirteen years later, and they are still there. There is a warmth and familiarity that rushes through my body as I begin to enter the school. I may just be the only person left who (re)members what my students and I did then. I smile. Walk right into the school. The metal detectors are there, but I do not take notice of them. They are familiar. I (re)member them.

Greeted with huge hugs and bewilderment--and air kisses--actual kisses--I am (re)minded of what used to be. Former students turned educators walking the halls, holding court, occupying
offices, my heart is overwhelmed. There is love and community in the air. We are all there to celebrate a former co-worker and the new addition to his family. We laugh. We tell stories. Get hella extra--hella JerZ--hella Chilltown. We eat. Roll our eyes at the oppressive administrators who, when we were all there together, attempted to make life hell for all of us, particularly the Black womxn. It was like old times. After the celebration of this new life, I walk down to what used to be the library when I taught there. It is now a school that has co-located in the building space. After Lillian Williams, my mentor passed away, we named the space after her. She was an unapologetic Black womxn who demonstrated intelligence, excellence, and a brilliant boldness I could not wait to exude. Her name, painted across the entrance of the door frame to the library, was the salutation that would greet you each time you entered. It is there no more. It is now a figment of my imagination.

They disappeared her.

They want us all to disappear. And when society cannot disappear us, it makes our experiences so unbearably difficult that they create policies to disappear us, displace us so that we never have a place to call home or make a home, or they create conditions so that we disappear ourselves--then make claims that we are not showing up, died of natural causes, or come from broken single-family crumbling homes (Moyihan, 1965). A report whose myths of Black motherhood--Black personhood has tragically shaped and influenced policies, legislation, and practices with long-term and harmful effects often used to justify disappearing Black life--Black existence.

They attempt to disappear Black educators after the ruling of Brown vs. Board of Education. They disappeared us after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans (Mitchell, 2015; Rivlin, 2016; Felton, 2017). They disappeared us in Chicago with the closure of 50 schools (Kelleher,
2012; Rizga, 2016; Esposito, 2019). They disappeared us under RttT policies, which tied student test scores to teacher evaluations, teacher pay, school evaluations, and school closures, with the majority being in Black and Brown communities (Karp, 2010a; 2010b; Johnson, 2013; Lipman, 2016); they attempted to disappear us, but we are still here. And we are they.

In this attempt to disappear Black educators from schools, communities, and the collective society, the nation has, by default, propelled the nation’s collective stagnation. This cannot be seen in isolation from the collective attempt to erase Black people from humanity; these things are inextricably linked together.

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I occupy a fluid locale somewhere on the spectrum of introvert and Cardi B. No really. True story. It is a place I have been since I can remember, at least that is what I like to tell myself. When I was younger, my mom used to joke around, “You know you really only have one good friend,” and it was true, at least in her mind it was. I distinctly remember that one particular day when she made that off-handed comment, after a long exhausting exploited day of work. Mommy, stretched out in a tub full of scalding hot water mixed with the green-label Avon Skin-so-Soft oil, to offer a gentle balance of subtle freshness and moisture; it was the all-purpose product-mosquito repellant, we all swore by--Skin-so-Soft. Y’all know what I’m talkin’ ‘bout. But I could feel the steam from mother’s bath water greet me with salutations of clarity at the entrance of our bathroom door, as I balanced a conversation on my black cordless Panasonic phone with Regina on the other end, and my mother in the tub right within my purview. She knew I was talking to Regina without me ever having to tell her. Mommy had the intuition and perception of a soothsayer. It was an ancestral gift that I inherited. Without physically listening, she always listened in on my calls, or at least it felt like it. Maybe it was the pitch in my voice,
the volume that drew from the opening of my mouth and diction chosen to answer my calls. Whatever it was, she knew.

Regina; she too, is an educator, a kindergarten teacher to be exact. She often jokes around, “I be telling people, ‘kaikor got y’all fooled. Y’all be thinking she nice and all, but she got another side…” She laughs. I laugh. She funny like that, though. But she accurate too. Anyone who has grown to know me, knows there is a side to me that will fight for truth and justice. I get it from my mama, Grandmama, and all the other powerful Black womxn who taught me, who modeled a boldness of unapologetic truth telling that could only rise like an African Phoenix from the soul of a Black womxn. What else do we have to lose?

I begin with these short pieces because this is my story. *They* are my story--pieces of me--a collective we. It is a story of a Black womxn educator--truth-teller whose thirst and hunger for truth, justice, and love posed a threat and challenge to the status quo and to a profession she cherished dearly. It is a story of love and the complexities we confront from a world that will not love us back because it does not know love. It is a story of parallel. A story of what happens to Black educators who are advocating for a better world, our Santrofi Anoma who get pushed out, exiled out, and submit to a forced self-exile--with a system that only imagines a carceral state for those of us who are Black.

This exile, imposed implicitly or explicitly, is to render us homeless without a place to call home--to belong, without an identity--it is the ultimate act of isolation. A violent act of dehumanization, one that we who are Black and of the diaspora know most intimately. And I sit at the nexus of that intimate knowledge base because of the lineage of my mother and grandmother, as the progeny of formerly enslaved Africans. Concurrently, I am also at that place where that feeling of (dis)placement is foreign to me. This knowledge of African continental
homeplace comes at the benefit of my father, the progeny of continental Africa, from the country of the Gold Coast, from the Ayi Clan of Accra, and more specifically, from Ga Mashie-- the Ga Mantse’s House--translation, the Ga Chief’s House. With memories of a voluntary yet forced three-year exile to Ghana at the age of 11 because of the oppression my 10 year old brother experienced here in our “beloved schools."

As each of my participants shared their experiences with me--their experiences as children and as adult educators in so called “integrated schools," their experiences of isolation while there, the barriers they encountered, and the ways they advocated, resisted, spoke up, attempted to organize, and imagined a better future, I could not help but to examine each one of their experiences through my lenses and own experiences. From distilling through how and why my parents made the decision to send my brother and me away to Ghana, after my brother endured extreme targeting and pressure from the teachers in our “integrated” and “diverse” school district; or from the lack of autonomy and constant monitoring experienced in the turnaround high school I taught at; the lack of upward mobility and constant shrinkage from a top administrator within the district--who has a pattern of shrinking Black womxn; or the unilateral decisions of top-down reform policies under RttT that were imposed on the school, resulting in the principal and 50 percent of the staff being removed and replaced with a “new” principal and mostly white new hires/staff, in its first year, in a school that was 86 percent Black; and lastly the outright targeting and threatening my job as I actively and openly engaged in anti-racism and abolitionism organizing work.

Santrofi Anoma

Speak the truth to the people

Talk sense to the people
Free them with reason
Free them with honesty
Free the people with Love and Courage
and Care for their-Being

*Mari Evans, from I Am a Black Woman (1970)*

Truth tellers are not always palatable. There is a preference for candy bars.


Santrofi Anoma, the nighthawk sits in its legendary place within Akan mythology. In the tradition of the Akan people of Ghana, the Santrofi Anoma, also known as the “dilemma bird,” is thought to bring great fortune and anguish to the people. Santrofi is a truth telling bird. Its chirping, like its truths, cuts deep and sharp as each sound takes form and its pitch elevates its way from our ears to our hearts and guts. Our impulse is to reject its gut wrenching truths while synchronously embracing its beauty all at once. That is our dilemma. This is its precarity.

The aesthetics of Santrofi are alluring; its form as it takes flight is a marvel. Nonetheless, its aesthetically melodic songs we are not always ready for. Its songs-- its melodies are of justice, love, and (re)mind us to find balance in all aspects of life. Santrofi obliges us to submit to humility, and for that we would like that it not exist--breathe--or be. It interrogates and questions our institutions, their functions, their harm, their injustices, their lapses in upholding human-centered values, inequities, and corruption. Kofi Ayindoho (1997) provides a rich description of this “dilemma bird” below:
Endowed with mysterious treasures of the mind and voice, Santrofi is both a blessing and a curse. Santrofi is a blessing for the clarity of its vision and for the transforming beauty and power of its gift of song. But Santrofi is also a curse for its irritating and irrepressible urge to expose the unsavory side of society. That is why that it is often said that the hunter who carries Santrofi home also brings misfortune home but the hunter who abandons Santrofi in the wilderness leaves behind a rare treasure. Society is blind without Santrofi’s visionary guidance, but it stands forever condemned by Santrofi’s persistent accusations of improper conduct.

The Santrofi of our society occupy a special, yet lonely and isolated place in our socio-milieu. They push us to become our better selves, for its providential insights are warning signs. For human is full of hubris--death inducing, murderous hubris. And as Ayindoho (1997) reminds us, Santrofi is both a blessing and a curse to all (p. 5). Egya (2015) likens Santrofi to the oral performer who, “in spite of being (overwhelmingly) loved by community, questions institutions, interrogates complacency, and does not shy away from topicalizing the moment of performances or at their sober moments, reflecting on critiquing and criticizing the issues raised” (p. 194). Santrofi is not only a treasure or gift, it is a lifeline to maintaining, connecting, and being in full community with our complete humanity.

Like the educators in this research, my story is/was not that far off from their stories--their experiences. My experience within a desegregated/“integrated” school in New Jersey as a child is its own book. My journey from teaching in Jersey City to Hackensack--the racism, isolation, and also barriers that aimed to shrink, and further dehumanize me could make for a tragic comedy of sorts. The ultimate absurd. But these stories are not fiction, nor are they
comedy. Like Santrofi, Faith, Phil, Maria, Eloquence, Cookie, Lauryn, and I offer the world gifts; we are the truth-tellers. Our proximity to the margins gives us a peripheral [view or understanding] of the center that those in the center have no access to. Our flight offers a privileged [yet painful] view. This is because society’s impulse is to punish Santrofi, isolate it, abandon it in the deep pines of the forest, only to be swallowed up by the elements left to consume in—the elements of racism, anti-blackness, settler colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy isolation, and silence. Unfortunately, for the naive and unknowing, truth cannot be buried or suppressed, for its frequency rises in the shadows, carried by the wind only to seep into the depths of our dreams, and nurtured in our hearts, and grown by our refusal.

The Santrofi Anoma teachers of our world are silenced, isolated, fired, threatened, demoted, shuffled around from school to school, targeted, left alone in the wilderness, particularly when the truth becomes too much to bear. We are despised, yet secretly loved.

This is not to say all educators, no matter the race, who are fired, threatened, demoted, shuffled around, etc. are the truth-tellers or Santrofi Anoma; those folx could very well be harmful to students, parents and community and should not be left to care for or educate them.

Exiled from my profession, forced into a carceral state away from my professional home—my original professional homeland. But this is not that far off from all the other Black K-12 educators who were also sent on a forced exile during the implementation of Brown v. BOE or the host of Black K-12 educators exiled from their classrooms during the Obama administration's RttT initiative. Unfortunately, the data on the number of Black K-12 educators impacted by these reforms are not fully known but should be explored. While the nation is decrying the need for Black educators in the classroom, we have seen a rapid decrease in their presence in cities such as Boston, New York, New Orleans (NOLA), Chicago, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Washington,
D.C., Los Angeles, and San Francisco (Shanker Institute, 2015), with cities such as Chicago and NOLA unable to regain their presence.

**Standing on the Shoulders of…**

I walk in the tradition and stand on the shoulders of a host of Black womxn educators who came before me. Black K-12 educators who were driven by an impulse to build up their people, one person at a time in the classroom, while simultaneously working toward building a better more just society for all; they are my touchstones. They are the people I danced and took flight with in my dreams, who, when I examine the path my life has taken, were guiding me along the way. It is no accident that I was a teacher, who is an organizer--a “cultural worker” (Collins, 2000; Freire, 2005; Dingus, 2006) of sorts, who was exiled from her profession she only imagined for herself, who encountered intense sexism and misogynoir from the very men I should have been fighting alongside, and who is now writing this dissertation and helped co-found a Freedom School for adults and educators, but at a tremendous cost.

**Black Educatorhood Possibilities of Anna Julia Cooper and Septima P. Clark**

Chaos is a good thing; change is what comes of it. *Septima Poinsette Clark*

(Dark)matter’s seemingly mysteriousness, spontaneity, and its combination of the (dis)order, (pre)order, and (re)order bubbles up anxiety, uncertainty, and chaos in all the universe’s organisms, giving birth to change. It is this change--this reconciliation with change--the change that will alter the well-being, reality, and situatedness of Black life, that will bring forth hopes of a new existence, reality rooted in the righteous imaginations of our possibilities. It is understanding who and what we were in place and time, who we are not, and who we will be.
It is the chaosity grounded in the discourse between time, place, and change that leads to the futuristic longings and clarity with what becomes of it.

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*Septima: Latin for seventh or seventh child; named after an aunt from Ayiti,*

*Septima Peace; in Ayiti, “Septima” carrying the meaning of “sufficient” in which Clark tells us she was supposed to be “sufficient peace” (Clark & Brown, 1990/1999), p. 91).*

*Anna: meaning “favor” or “grace”*

*Their Grace is Sufficient for me*

Like a master architect, we take the blueprints, foundations, the traditions that were paved—laid before us, to collectively construct and build upon the infinite curiosities that rest within the people who came before us. Their Grace is Sufficient for what was needed to envision a design for the hereafter. To say that Septima P. Clark and Anna Julia Cooper are two touchstones who should serve as a gauge by which Black educators measure our dedication and (past, present, and future) commitment to Black communities and Black students in the classroom, is an understatement. Not without flaws, and risking essentializing and immortalizing their presence, their work, and contributions in our society, I want to emphasize that I am using them as an example and not “the” example.

There were/are many Septima P. Clarks and Anna Julia Coopers who flowed in and out of our society; most of their stories will never reach a place of notoriety or occupy the public

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23 An allusion to a Bible verse: “But he said to me, *My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 2 Corinthians 12: 9
discourse. They have been disappeared. Many are silenced in the movements in which they are working, erased from memory, lack the access to resources and spaces to lift up their voice, and even encounter misogynoir from the very people they should be working alongside. For Cooper, that manifested in the decades of barriers that existed which prevented her from getting her work published and out there to the general public, invisibilized and ignored (Keller, 1999). This, in fact included her struggle to get published via DuBois’ magazine, The Crisis, and his inconsistency and failure to fully support her in this manner (Moody-Turner, 2015) although, intellectually and pedagogically speaking, they were arguably peers (Alrdige, 2007). While, for Clark, it was manifested in the ways that men would be credited for the victories and work while also assuming the visible role of “civil rights leaders." And like other leading womxn in the movement, Clark would be relegated to the proverbial back door as a result of sexism and misogynoir (Baumgartner, 2006; Hall et. al, 2010; Vickery, 2017). It is a tangled web of externally manufactured barriers (im)possibilities meant to demoralize and limit, nonetheless they pushed through.

Clark and Cooper, like myself and the participants in my study, were committed to and worked towards this new future we believed we all deserved; a place where our existence mattered, was visibilized, and nurtured. Both as pioneers and classroom teachers, they were not just dedicated to the uplift of the individual students they were entrusted to educate, but they were also working towards a vision of the future, repurposing and making new uses for the technologies and resources at her disposal. Clark was an educator and an organizer who participated in ongoing organizing efforts with the NAACP, whereas Cooper could be referred to as “the original Black feminists” (Brewer, 1999/2016), although she may not have given herself the moniker. An intellectual, and organizer against the injustices of Black people of her time
(James, 1997; May, 2000; 2012; Giles, 2006; Johnson, 2009b; Glass, 2005), she transcended her era. Both embodied a pedagogical praxis that generations of Black educators could look to for guidance as a blueprint for collective, educational, and pedagogical liberation (Sulé, 2013; Johnson, 2017). This was a hefty price to have to pay for one’s longing for Black liberation.

Both educators would be exiled from their profession, their livelihood, and the lifelines to their people. In the case of Cooper, as the principal of the M Street Colored High School, her firing came at the heels of her resistance and organizing against the dismantling of the school’s liberal arts curriculum, and the imposition of a vocational education planned for the school and students (Keller, 1999; Giles, 2006, Johnson, 2009b). In the case of Clark, it was after the 1954 Brown v. BOE ruling that prompted policy makers in South Carolina to impose a law stating teachers could not be members of civic organizations (Hines & Jones, 2007, p. 4). Clark’s association with the NAACP came at a cost; the loss of her job as a classroom teacher in Charleston County, South Carolina, and her pension (Hines & Jones, 2007, p. 4).

In one of Clark’s autobiographies (Clark & Brown, 1990/1999), she explains how, “The white power structure of the South decided to destroy the southern operation of the NAACP by using legal tactics,” by calling for special legislative sessions where they passed into law actions that called for the public release of the NAACP’s membership lists (p. 140). Other states followed the lead of South Carolina and passed similar laws that barred teachers from joining the civil rights organization, under the guise that these organizations were working in the shadows as Communist organizations. From there, Clark would join the Highlander Folk School where she would take her pedagogical praxis to the people; meeting her adult pupils where they were, using their day-to-day resources as technologies and tools to help them become literate, grasp concepts, ideas, and solve problems. This was literacy to the masses as a liberatory and
abolitionist tool. These are the technologies we have embraced as time capsules to propel us into the future. This is not about achieving material freedom, but the intellectual, physio-socio-emotional, and spiritual freedom needed to be whole.

My narrative is somewhat similar. Not only is racism in the north a bit more subtle at times, but in 2019, we would be hard pressed to find a law explicitly banning educators from joining civil rights organizations. But in “post-racial” “we don’t see color” Anytown, New Jersey we can find individuals within organizations consciously and unconsciously applying these practices within their institutions. This is why my affiliation with grassroots organizations committed to liberation for Black and Brown people can become the subject of discussion amongst administrators, union representatives and staff as they debate my future. This is also why after three years, other Black educators from the same district can approach me because the issues I was attempting to address around the disproportionality in racial representation of teachers, the lack of support that Black educators received from the administration, the students who were being excessively suspended, and introducing staff to conversations that center race, power, privilege within the classroom. What has been growing more and more evident is that our schools want to tokenize our presence but rather we be silent and not advocate for our children and communities. We are supposed to be good negroes, as was the case for me, and my participants.

What is disturbing is not only are Black educators and other educators of color are tokenized through their hiring, and not supported in districts such as Hackensack, Evergreen, Lenape Town, and Bridgeville-East Denwood, but they are actively pushed out. If we take a look at Table #6, we can see for the year 2018-2019, the district saw a decrease in the Black educators represented in the district. They are the only group to see a decrease in representation; the chart
gives us a visual representation of just one small piece of the district’s anti-blackness. This too, is the precarity of Black Educatorhood.

Table #6: Hackensack Public Schools Educator and Student Demographics Data

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Latinx</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Pacific Islander/Hawaiian</th>
<th>2+ Races</th>
<th>Native American</th>
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<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>Educators</td>
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<td>13.8%</td>
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<td>.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>Educators</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>Educators</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
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<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>Educators</td>
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**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of six Black K-12 educators who are organizing and advocating for racial and social justice in their schools/districts. This group of educators were chosen because they are pushed so far to the margins by their institutions, because of their liberatory-based perspective. These marginalized educators therefore have a different view of the systems. While there is research on the experiences of Black K-12 educators between pre-Brown v. BOE their firings, there is not as much research on their experiences post-1970s. What were the experiences of Black educators in these new “integrated” schools? What are their experiences today? How do these experiences differ across region? This study’s findings support the importance of knowing that these Black K-12 public school educators have fraught experiences in schools which include, isolation, trauma, institutional barriers, as well as gifts. Institutions of education, community organizers, and parents throughout the nation must build resources around supporting, developing, and maintaining the growth of Black K-12 educators. I propose the importance of creating support systems in place to promote their overall health and well-being of our schools, and ultimately nation.

**Limitations**
The benefit of this research is that it provides useful information about the experiences of a small demographic of Black K-12 educators who teach in public schools. Even though this study provides insight into the experiences they are having while there, there are some limitations I must lift up. My experiences as a Black womxn--with ancestry from both formerly enslaved Africans, and Ghanaian ancestry, who has taught in a large district with mostly Black and Brown impoverished students for over 14 years, has shaped my perspective. Because of this, I have developed a critical lens essential to understanding the experiences of Black K-12 educators who also do racial justice organizing work.

Another limitation to the study is the number of research participants (6) who were involved in the research. The Black educators in the study may not represent the experiences of Black educators throughout the nation. The participants in this study were Black K-12 educators who were organizing for racial and social justice in their schools and/or district. This is a very specific and limited group of educators whose experiences do not reflect the experiences of all Black K-12 educators in the nation. Additionally, I did not include the experiences of elementary school teachers in the study. Future studies should investigate the experiences of Black K-12 educators, including those who are in elementary schools, who are not involved in racial justice organizing work as well.

Considering the time and financial limitations, the research was concentrated to a limited number (6) of Black K-12 educators in New Jersey. The design of the research was never to include Black K-12 educators in multiple states. However, future researchers will want to investigate the experiences of Black K-12 educators in other states to provide a more comprehensive and comparative understanding of a larger pool of Black K-12 educators.
In our follow-up interview, one of the participants asked if I had considered the financial, family, physical, and mental health impact their experiences had on them. Unfortunately, I did not have the capacity to dig deeper into these vital questions. In our follow-up interview, she mentioned having to spend money on a therapy, missing work, and even missing family events because the toll work experience was having on her. Future researchers will want to attempt to quantify the financial, economic, familial, physical, and mental health impacts the work environment was having on individual Black K-12 educators as well as on the collective, disaggregated by region.

**Implications**

The state of Black K-12 educators is a persistent question that has captured the educational discourse since Black educators have been in state-sanctioned schools. Since Brown v. BOE, Black educators have seen a steady decline in their representation in schools. While desegregation and integration have been lifted up as the panacea to many of the educational woes in the nation. However, the experiences of Black K-12 educators well after the Brown ruling, or more specifically, post-1970s, have not been explored extensively. Understanding the experiences Black K-12 educators are having in schools will help us better support them so that we not only increase recruitment of Black K-12 educators but improve the retention rates of them. It is also worth noting that I use the term “Black educators” broadly to include teachers and other certificated staff such as child study team members, guidance counselors, social workers, etc. However, this did not include administrators. Further research should explore the experiences of Black administrators (principals, assistant/vice principals, supervisors, directors, and superintendents).
Equally important, but more specifically for Black K-12 educators engaged in organizing work, there is an expressed need for us to understand the factors that contribute to the pitfalls and progress within our organizing spaces. In BIPoC anti-racist organizing spaces, much of the attention is spent examining race and class. However, patriarchy, internalized racism and how they intersect with classism often goes unchecked and unexamined, leading to divides and animosity. This research will help us to reconsider the impact as well as the factors that contribute to the success and failure of maintaining our organizing. Implications for organizing and understanding the pitfalls and barriers as well as the principles and values that elevate our organizing.

In my narrative, my student Jalil raised awareness to the fact that I was the only Black teacher he had that year, in a school full of Black and Brown students. The tragedy of this, is our children are paying attention to who and what our institutions value, and that message is being internalized in them. If our students, all students, not just students of color, do not have access to Black teachers, the messages around the inherent inferiority of Black people will continue to persist. Our work must be around disrupting these archaic, racist, and damaging messages that have dominated the white imagination and global structures. When our students witness Black educators, who have the audacity to advocate for inherently humanizing practices, and principles, in our communities and within our schools, being punished, silenced, and othered for their advocacy, it sends a sharp and piercing message about who is allowed voice, and who is not; who is valued, and who is not.

Ensuring the health and well-being of Black educators will also help ensure the health and well-being of the students in their care, as well as the schools and communities they are located in. Implications for the overall health of the school community and the community at
large, would be a systems-wide approach that incorporates the intellectual, cultural, educational, emotional, physical, psychological health and wellness from K-16+. When educators and students have a healthy sense of self, this helps support the overall well-being of everyone. Black K-12 educators who are organizing for racial justice are also engaging in a form of activism. And although they may not always be putting their bodies physically on the line in front of para-military forces such as the police, they are enduring emotional, and psychological trauma on top of the historical and racial trauma they carry with them. One of the participants described her experience as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and it would be essential for us to explore this more thoroughly. What are the conditions of an environment that would make someone equate their experiences to PTSD?

Finally, there is a need for researchers to investigate the experiences that make it difficult to stay for Black K-12 educators to not only enter the profession but stay particularly those who are doing racial justice work in their work environments or communities are still at risk of being pushed out the profession. This research can give us some insights into why these educators are leaving, and/or pushed out of the profession. Ultimately, this can be summed into one sentence. We need reparations for all Black folx in this nation at every level. That is how we repair, renew, and restore.

**Recommendations**

This part of chapter 8 includes recommendations for Federal, State, and Local level educational agencies, along with suggested actions and ideas for data scientists who are exploring equity work in education. In chapter 7, I outline a theoretical framework for what I refer to as Design for Rehumanization which includes: 1) intellectual well-being; 2) community and collective well-being; and 3) physio-emotional/spiritual well-being. This is a model for not
only personal and internal critical reflection, development and growth, but is useful for communal and institutional change—specifically looking at how we may apply it towards a school and classroom design.

If we were to apply the Design for Rehumanization to a dream school that embraces a Design for Rehumanization it would probably be a school whose motto would be: *Aspiration. Advocacy. Access.* This is a school that has a reverence for history embraces power sharing, and innovation as integral to our collective creativity, and growth and development. When you walk into the school, you are instantly greeted by vibrant colors, murals, and the overall beauty of the space; with the 3 A’s plastered above the entrance. The hallways are bursting from the seams with overwhelming excitement, joy, curiosity, exploration, and the sound of students and educators as co-learners and co-creators together. This space is where all members of the community are not only co-learners, but are also committed to beloved community of restoration, renewal, and healing. And this school is why the school is fully staffed with a healing center—*Open Arms.* The *Open Arms Center* will be key to upholding the Physio-Emotional/Spiritual well-being of students and staff in the building as an intentional effort to achieving sustained and structural well-being.

**Intellectual Well-being**

This school is not perfect, but the students, staff, parents, and community are continuously in a dialogue about their imperfections to push a vision of the future that embodies a better version of ourselves. Their intellectual well-being stems from their ability and freedom to challenge, interrogate, and question, power and privilege from a place of critical consciousness. The curricula are culturally relevant and reflective of not just the students, and community but the richness in diversity of the nation and the global community. Grounded in the
deep rich history of critical ethnic studies that bring to the fore indigenous knowledges integrated in how they not only understand social studies, history, and the humanities, but how they understand science, astrology, technology, math, architecture, the arts, and music. The students are continuously in the process of examining the impact of their actions, decisions, and policies on the greater environment, while advocating for a better world.

Classroom sizes are between 15-20 students and uses a co-teaching model for all grades and classes. The learning in these classrooms or learning hubs are uninhibited by walls or the siloed subject and content areas of ancient days. It is experiential, transformative, and critical. Question posing approaches are essential, students’ curiosities have space to be explored, understanding the students’ curiosities and thirst for learning and gaining knowledge. Curricula are designed to uplift their histories, origins, culture, past, present and future.

Instead of the 3 Rs (Reading, wRiting, and aRithmetic) the collective learning is framed by the 3 A’s: Access, Aspiration, and Advocacy. All members of the school community not only embrace this in the classroom, but it has become the collective consciousness of all educators, staff, students, parents, and community members. This means all members of the learning environment will be able to access the dignity of their full humanity, but not at the expense of another’s. All members of the community continue to aspire for the unknown and create learning environments that aspire for the unknown. And through advocacy, members of the community are perpetually advocating for each and all in order to build the collective strength of our community and each individual.

Community and Collective Well-being

As not only an aspect of the Design for Rehumanization framework, embedded within the principles of community and collective well-being are built into every fiber of the school.
Relationships are key here. This includes the school’s relationship to the larger community and parents, and the relationships built between and within classrooms so that educators can strengthen instruction as well as grow and develop each child along with each educator.

There is no shortage of BIEoC and genders in this school and although there are white educators, they are in no way the majority but reflect the proportion to the student population. The BIEoC are fully supported by structures in place that will ensure the success of BIEoC. The community is evaluated by how well they all treat the most marginalized in their community. This includes marginalized racial groups, genders and gender expressions, persons with (dis)abilities, and those on the spectrum of sexual orientation. Who we are visibilizing and invisibilizing is a persistent point of reflection every day to help us re-center the dignity and humanity of all?

This school understands the importance of centering the needs of the community while maintaining respect and accountability that is multi-directional. It is the kind of accountability that understands power, its misuses, and the importance of interconnectedness that champions unity but not uniformity, for the purposes of developing students who will continue to rehumanize themselves. The principles of collaboration, collective purpose, and advocacy shape each aspect of the school’s operation.

**Physio/Socio-Emotional/Spiritual Well-being**

*Naps are spirit work.* ~ Tricia Hersey

In the spirit of The Nap Ministry\(^24\), we are reminded that rest is a mode of resistance in a white supremacist capitalist patriarchal society that expects all workers and potential workers to

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\(^24\) The Nap Ministry, an organization founded by Tricia Hersey, “is a meditation on naps as resistance. It is an artistic, historical and spiritual examination on the liberating power of naps. It reimagines why rest is a form of resistance and shines a light on the issue of sleep deprivation as a justice issue. It is counter narrative to the belief that we all are not doing enough and should be doing more. We are community centered. We are focused on radical
labor and grind at rates and expectations that are unrealistic, unnatural, and dehumanizing. Our schools, work environments and communities are often replicas of this reality, forcing children and the adults in their community to work for unrealistic periods of time, with enormous loads of students to care for, and with little to no recourse in between. Often times, children, particularly Black and Brown children from impoverished communities, are given exorbitant amounts of homework and mundane work to ensure they remain “busy” and have little to no free time for leisure. “No excuses” sentiments encapsulate schools that served, poor Black and Brown communities resulting to police presence and draconian disciplinary practices. Consequently, recess gets eliminated from the school day or is used as a form of punishment, systematically relegating rest, and recess to technologies of privilege and not basic rights as human beings. As a result, schools have not only removed naps and rest from the early childhood classrooms, but educators are taught to punish rest and naps in schools, and within classrooms (Margolis & Fram, 2007).

As this school and community is working to build the intellectual and the community/collective well-being of all in close proximity to the school, it is also a place where students, their families, and faculty and staff can receive wellness check-ups and decompress. It is where pedagogical approaches to learning center healing as well as a collective commitment to the spiritual growth and development of oneself, and each other. It is where endless hope for a better future lives on as a disciplined practice and praxis, cultivated each day. In this school, students must have access to nutritious meals in order to fully function intellectually. Break self-care.” It is ultimately a Radical Black Feminist articulation of the importance of rest within a white supremacist capitalist patriarchy https://thenapministry.wordpress.com/
times are built into everyone’s schedule where students and staff can relax, sit in silence, and/or leisurely read a book. These are considered sacred moments for everyone.

*Open Arms* is a resource all schools should have in their schools. In order for it to function properly, as designed, it will be important for the staff in the *Open Arms Center* to not be overworked with too many clients otherwise, it will defeat the purpose. This center includes the following staff: 1) two licensed clinical social workers for every 100 students and an additional two for every 50 educators and staff; 2) school-based crisis/trauma doulas who are part of the crisis team to respond to students in crisis and need; 3) circle keepers rooted in the community; 4) two school registered nurses; and 5) a midwife and nurse practitioner. In order to support the staff, the *Open Arms Center* must be fully stocked and resourced, have a meditation room where staff, and students can go to re-center themselves, and exam rooms for yearly student screenings. And to effectually maintain the integrity of what is being created here, there is absolutely no police presence in this school community.

In order for all this to happen, to some degree, within schools, I am recommending that policymakers permanently allocate several billion dollars a year towards fully funding and supporting what I am calling *Funding Futures for Educational Equity 2030 (F²E² 2030)*. Although I believe abolition and liberation will not come at the hands of the state, I do dream that our schools can become places of wellness. The collective illness of this nation is or inability to reconcile with past and present harm, and the harm sitting within the very bones and DNA of those whose ancestors were harmed and continue to be harmed. At the same time, as Black and Brown folx, we cannot sit and wait for the state to legislate our wellbeing. Therefore, I build in recommendations for what Black educators can and should do at the grassroots level in order to create space for their own growth, development, healing and well-being.
**Recommendations for Black Educators**

I begin with recommendations for Black educators, particularly those who are part of collectives whose work is committed to building cohorts of strong and well supported Black educators. I begin with Black Educatorhood because my hope is firmly situated in what Black educators can create and build and is not reliant on what policy makers can do. Liberation, freedom, and/or abolition cannot be legislated. From this research study, we learned a tremendous amount about the experiences that Black educators encounter in schools. Reflective of the society in which anti-blackness exists, Black Educatorhood is in a perpetual state of precariousness. It is because of this that I recommend that Black educators create and build critical creative, and healing spaces for them to grow, develop, learn, create, renew, and heal using the Design for Rehumanization.

The Design for Rehumanization is really for us—to help create a world that will reconfigure itself towards a vision of humanity that is redesigned, reinvented, and reimagined. Using this framework to create healing spaces for Black educators while influencing healing all around is for which the framework was initially designed. I can imagine it now—Clark-Cooper Educator Academy retreats where Black educators spend time learning, unlearning, and digging deep into political education, a place where Black educators can also unwind, be in community with each other, rest, nap, and plan for a new future. Held together by a dedication to not only the 3 A’s—Aspiration, Access, and Advocacy, but by an unwavering dedication to our critical and collective intellectual, physio-emotional and spiritual, and collective and community well-being.

Table #7

*Recommendation Action Steps for Black Educators*
1. Organize yearly retreats and on-going spaces for BIEoC that embody the Design for Rehumanization principles and framework.
2. Build on the relationships created to sustain on-going support for BIEoC.
3. Perpetually reflect on and intentionally disrupt the ways in which internalized patriarchalism and racial response, and other forms of oppression show up in your spaces.

**Recommendations for Policy Makers**

Calls for more Black teachers and educators have crowded the national educational airways in cycles since Brown vs. Board of Education pushed thousands of Black educators, out of the classroom (Foster, 1997; Milner & Howard, 2004; Tillman, 2004; Siddle-Walker, 2013). Since then, our nation has seen a steady decline of Black K-12 educators, now reaching a plateau; this is the nation’s educational crisis—and collective stagnation.

More currently, organizations like the Journey for Justice Alliance, and Black Lives Matter at School Week of Action have called for our nation’s schools to hire more Black educators. Some are framing the urgency for diversifying the teaching profession as an imperative because Black children need Black teachers as role models and mentors (Maylor, 2004), which scholars rightfully highlight as “professional racism” (Milner, 2006). Lost in that argument is that white students and other non-Black students of color also need Black educators as well (Anderson, 2015). Often invisibilized, there is an axiological, ontological and epistemological sensibility of Black Educatorhood that should not be dismissed but should be seen as integral to society’s collective well-being (Irvine, 1989; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002).

We have also seen an erasure in the calls for more Black teachers submerging into the more general call for the broader “Teachers of Color.” It is not that non-Black educators of color are not needed, but there is a history of Black causes getting erased by general lumping into the broader teacher of color discourse. Therefore, the erasure leading to Black folx being excluded altogether. I posit that it is the anti-black sentiments, and the situatedness of Black people as the
ultimate “other” that is the cause of this erasure and submergence. I would encourage us not to fall into this trap, but to be intentional about including Black educators in the end. One way to ensure this is to reach for proportionality in representation.

In the year 2000, the United States aimed to reauthorize the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was a policy action passed by the Johnson administration as a solution to childhood poverty (Robelen, 2005), in the form of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The educational miracle\textsuperscript{25} that framed the policies that gave the nation NCLB, like much of this democracy, was built on faulty grounds; a myth (Hanley, 2000; 2001). In what was in hindsight, referred to as the myth of the Texas miracle, becomes the foundation for the NCLB legislation. In short, NCLB posited that the nation was “at risk,” and therefore tied funding to mandates that compelled schools throughout the nation to increase accountability measures with a hyper focus on achieving 100 percent proficiency on high stakes standardized tests, 100 percent graduation rates, 100 percent attendance rates, and 100 percent decrease in dropout rates (Hanley, 2000) by 2014. Since these policies failed to address the heart of the multiple axes of inequity in this nation, there is a need for the nation to rethink and reimagine a different method and approach. The nation needs an approach that addresses poverty from a racial equity lens.

It is my recommendation that Federal policy makers establish education as a federal constitutional right for all people and dedicate funding for educational equity. This would be Funding Futures for Educational Equity 2030 (\textit{F\textsubscript{2} E\textsubscript{2} 2030}) to allocate trillions of dollars in state-level grants to: 1) re-align State Educational Agencies and all their departments and divisions’ mission statements, vision statements, procedures and policies, and practices towards a racial and

\textsuperscript{25} The myth of the Texas miracle in education by Walt Hanley (2000) explored that claims that President George W. Bush made about the educational “miracle” in his home state while he served as the governor. According to Texas, the state made huge gains in closing the achievement gap in several areas from increased test scores, attendance, and decreases in drop-out rates.
educational equity framework; 2) fund structural racial and educational equity initiatives
reflected in recruitment, hiring, retention, curricula, training, staffing, student performance and
learning, student graduation and retention rates, access to quality—well-funded educational and
career opportunities, in addition to safety nets for people from marginalized communities as well
as other indicators; and 3) fund innovative school design initiatives that must embraces the
Design for Rehumanization Framework.

Table #8

Recommendation Action Steps for Policy Makers

1. Congress must amend the constitution to include education as a constitutional right.
2. Fund reparations, including educational equity programs at the federal level to serve as one aspect of
   reparations.
   a. Legisl ate a new educational equity program that place not only poverty at the center but the
      intersections of race, gender, and (dis)ability.
3. Create and invest funding in federal programs that: 1) provide full funding for public state
   university/college admission, 2) provided financial resources to cover the cost of living which would
   include the following but not limited to: a) housing; b) food; c) health care; d) mental health; e) transportation; f) test preparation support and payment waivers; g) a cost of living stipend; and h) childcare
   (Movement for Black Lives Reparations Now, 2019)
4. Invest in programs that support BIEoC and future BIEoC entering into the classroom and remaining there.

Recommendations for Federal Educational Agencies

It is my recommendation that Federal Educational Agencies allocate several billion
dollars to establish an educational equity funding line for the Funding Futures for Educational
Equity 2030 ($F_2E_22030$). This funding line would create funding opportunities for State
Educational Agencies and their Local Educational Agencies to carry out the recommendations
from the policies.

Table 9: Recommendations for Federal Agencies

Recommendation Action Steps for Federal Educational Agencies:

Action Steps:
1. Develop guidelines using the Design for Rehumanization framework and principles for how states must
   implement and allocate funds towards the Funding Futures for Educational Equity 2030 ($F_2E_22030$) that
   include but are not limited to:
a. Provide retroactive and complete loan forgiveness for BIPoC who would like to enter the classroom as well as current BIEoC.
b. Allocate funding towards recruiting, increasing, and retaining the number of BIEoC in public schools.
c. Call a moratorium on teacher credentialing and gate-keeper assessments (i.e. edTPA, PRAXIS, PRAXIS CORE etc.).
d. Every 3-5 years, publish detailed research reports analyzing the state of BIEoC throughout the nation, examining access to certification, credentialing, recruitment, hiring, firing, tenure-granting, non-renewal/rehiring disparities.
e. Mandate cultural responsiveness and culturally relevant pedagogy for teacher, administrator and other educator preparation programs, credentialing, and evaluations.
f. Develop and offer permanent funding to cover the full cost (including all fees) and admission to a public/state university for Black people who want to teach.
g. Design and provide training on evaluations that also evaluate an educator’s anti-racist, culturally responsiveness and relevant pedagogy within the classroom.
h. Fund innovative school designs that embrace a Rehumanization Framework.

2. Develop robust and comprehensive structural supports for Black communities, students, and educators.

**Recommendations for State Educational Agencies**

If State Educational Agencies truly want to be intentional about systemic change, I recommend that State Educational Agencies adopt a state-level $F_2E_2 \ 2030$ program that is implemented not only within the state educational agency level, but at the local educational agency level. One aspect of the State-level task would be to re-align the entire department of education and all of its divisions’ mission and vision statements towards an anti-racist, anti-oppression framework. To build on this realignment, it would be expected that their policies, practices, procedures will also follow suit.

Table #10

**Recommendation Action Steps for State Educational Agencies**

**Action Steps:**

1. Revisit equity-based protocols for school funding and immediately assure full funding of the school funding formula.
   a. Revisit and research the experiences of students in the choice-school districts, and its overall impact.
2. Conduct an equity (anti-racist and anti-oppression aligned) audits of the entire State Department of Education and all of its divisions.
3. Adhere to and implement ($F_2E_2 \ 2030$) guidelines at the state and local level.
4. Develop robust regulations and procedures to protect BIEoC that include but are not limited to:
   a. Implement policy and regulations that will allow the state to fine districts that do not adhere to the equity protocols established by the state.
   b. Mandate community hiring boards that function as separate entities from the board of education.
c. Developing, implementing, and enforcing equity protocols for hiring, attrition and retention of BIEoC.
d. Fund and invest resources in local educational agencies proportionately hiring, retaining, renewing, and granting tenure to BIEoC.
e. Develop an independently governed entity, sanctioned and monitored by the state to oversee racial equity in hiring, retention, renewals and non-renewals.
f. Conduct random audits of local school districts’ equity in hiring/firing/non-renewal/tenure granting patterns and practices and implement fines for districts that fail to adhere to the protocols and standards.
   i. Publish and make public the yearly individual school-level and district-level educators, staff, and student demographic information disaggregated by race and gender.
   ii. Audit districts’ application-to-interviewed-to-hiring ratios disaggregated by race.
   iii. Calculate the individual school and district scores, and publicly publish these district and community scores on an easily accessible website each year.
   iv. Develop a state-wide evaluation system that calculates the racial disproportionality index of the educators and rank districts and communities based on these scores.
5. Fund and work collaboratively with state research universities and ETS to conduct racial equity audits of educator evaluations and publish reports on it every 3-5 years.
6. Develop and implement teacher/educator evaluations that evaluate an educator’s anti-racist, culturally responsiveness and relevant pedagogy within the classroom and school (to be included in lesson plans, disciplinary practices, curricula development, school governance).
7. Mandate and fund on-going anti-racist/anti-oppression trainings, that are not webinars/online based, for all faculty, staff, and school district employees.
8. Restructure Human Resource Departments throughout the state:
   a. Centralize the affirmative action officers building on state-level accountability to also include the following but not limited to:
      i. Human Resources and Affirmative Action Officers that are outside consultants hired and appointed by the state department of education--funded by the district.
      ii. Hiring and firing of personnel are monitored by the state, alongside a diverse group of members of the community.
      iii. Mandating that each school district should publicly post the school level educator demographic data disaggregated by race/gender updated each school year on their websites.
   b. Build in institutional structures that protect educators from targeting and facilitate a disciplinary process for the administrator doing the targeting that would also include a fine. This data should be evaluated every year.
   c. Design and implement a quality 3-year induction-mentor program for novice BIEoC that allows them to study together, plan, fellowship and socialize together.
   d. Implement quality induction programs for veteran BIEoC new to a district.

**Recommendations for Local Educational Agencies**

The heart of education and schools for students in this nation is contingent upon the strength of local education agencies. The quality of not only the leadership, but the school community, district, resources, instruction and teaching, teachers and staff and how well they work together help contribute to the quality or failure of a student’s learning environment. For local educational agencies that are serious about altering schools and shifting towards an equity lens, here are some recommendations:
Table #11

Recommendation Action Steps for Local Educational Agencies

Action Steps:
1. Implement on-going face-to-face anti-racist/anti-oppression trainings for all faculty, staff, and school district employees.
2. Develop hiring protocols, implement and adhere to equity-based hiring practices within the district and evaluate the district’s progress yearly.
3. Publish and make public the yearly individual school-level and district-level educators, staff, and student demographic information disaggregated by race and gender.
4. Invest resources towards proportionately hiring, retaining, renewing, and granting tenure to BIEoC.
5. Work collaboratively with a community-based hiring board to ensure equity of hiring practices.

Recommendations for Teachers Unions

Unfortunately, teachers’ unions throughout the country have mixed and an inconsistent history of supporting or failing to support Black educators, Black students, and Black communities. Some may argue that the union is only obligated to support its members only. This is in fact a talking point of unions or organizations that do not feel an alliance with BIPoC and/or poor communities. Not only is it shortsighted, but it fails to understand the interconnectedness that educators and their unions must have with their communities, schools, students, parents and community members.

In New Jersey alone, with one of the largest teachers’ unions in the State, the top leadership within the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) are all white men, failing to even represent the majority of gender demographics of the teaching profession. Teachers unions, their practices, and structures are steeped heavily in not only racism, but patriarchy, which causes harm for many who do not fit into the white heteropatriarchal norms of society. Teachers unions cannot preach racial and social justice while failing to embody these ideals at every level, from within their organization—from personnel, to practices, procedures, and actions. It is my recommendation that teachers’ unions adhere to the following:
Recommendation Action Steps for Teachers Unions

Action Steps:
1. Collect and publish data on the experiences of BIEoC educators in schools, within the union, as well as data on how Black K-12 educators are disproportionately impacted, disciplined, denied tenure, retaliated against, and/or fired.
2. Train and hire more BIPoC as field representatives, associate directors, and top management positions.
3. Create a systematic reporting and documentation process for BIPoC to use when they are being racially discriminated against.
4. Enforce disciplinary processes and practices when staff do not uphold anti-discrimination and anti-oppression values of racial equity.
5. Prepare field managers and other union staff to be more culturally responsive.
6. Establish clear protocols and steps in order for union members to evaluate and assess field managers on how well they uphold the values of racial equity and anti-discrimination/oppression.
7. Publish data, research, and reports on the state of BIEoC every 3-5 years.
8. Mandate training for all staff on the impact of racism on all levels of society, and how they can properly support BIEoC.
9. Examine the hiring, firing, tenure granting practices of districts in your state and publish a report every 3 years.

Recommendations for Educator and Administrator Preparation Programs

In the early 2000s, we saw a rapid increase in “business-model” administrators funded by billionaires such as, Eli and Edythe Broad, and Bill and Melinda Gates. Many of these leaders, superintendents and principals, spent little to no time in the classroom, but believed a business model of schooling would “save” public schools, particularly the ones in predominantly impoverished Black and Brown communities, with some attempts made in a multiethnoracial and socio-economically diverse community such as Montclair, New Jersey. These models, which focused on neoliberal and scientific management, sought to count, measure, and quantify every aspect of education and human existence within schools, while hyper micromanaging teachers in the classroom and data mining of students. These approaches began to dominate the public discourse, as well as inform pedagogy, leadership styles and structures. What is most disturbing about these approaches is the lack of humanity evident in their practices. It is my recommendation that administrators, and administrator and educator preparation programs utilize
the Design for Rehumanization in designing programming, course work, curricula, structure, and training for their future educators. The following action steps must be taken:

Table #13

Recommendation Action Steps for Administrators and Educator/Administrator Preparation Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Adopt an intentional and equity-based, anti-oppression approach to program design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Develop curricula that will build all educators, principals and administrators who are committed to humanizing principles, pedagogy, and critical transformative leadership (Hollinside, 2017).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mandate training and preparation for faculty and staff who will be teaching future educators, principals, and administrators.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recommendations for Data Scientists

I am also proposing that data scientists develop technologies like an app to help parents, community members and educators decipher the level of equity each district is aiming for while also alerting parents, and future prospects to the level of inequity located in the school/district. As a BIEoC, it can be hard trying to figure out where to apply for work, and as Black parents and other parents of color, it can be hard to sift through all the grime and school rankings that use standardized test scores, attendance, etc. as indicators of “Great Schools;” seemingly, perpetuating racial segregation. Although I am speaking to parents of color, this is also a useful tool for white parents, particularly those who want to demand a better world for their children and their progeny.

Data scientists should design an algorithm that scores each state, community, school, and district, similar to the way schools and districts are scored on real estate apps. The difference is that these apps, created by the real estate companies, use standardized testing and other indicators, ultimately lacking nuance and critical algorithms to evaluate and score these states, districts, and states. What I am proposing here will make readily available the following information and score by state, district, and school:
Table #14  

Recommendation Action Steps for Data Scientists Developers

Action Steps:

1. **District Level Data for Each State:**
   a. Calculate the racial disproportionality index scores for each school/district.
   b. Provide a list of state-wide and district educator shortages/available positions.
   c. Calculate the percentage of culturally relevant and critical multiculturalism curricula, and books/texts built into each grade-level and course.
   d. Calculate scores/results from an anti-oppression (racial/gender/sexual orientation/class/(dis)ability/immigration/language/religion) climate survey conducted anonymously by a sample size of parents, students, teachers, and community members.
   e. Calculate school and district level teacher to student ratios for each state.
   f. Evaluate and score district and school codes of conduct for students and educators.
   g. Gender neutral bathroom policies available.
   h. Calculate the Harassment, Intimidate, and Bullying (HIB) data disaggregated by race, gender, (dis)ability, religion, and sexual orientation, and all the ways these points of oppression intersect for both students and educators.
   i. Calculate the racial and gender breakdown of submitted job applications and the percent hired that year for each district.
   j. Evaluate the quality of special services such as special education, bilingual education, and programs for English language learners.

2. **Educator Level Data for Each State:**
   a. Calculate the racial and gender breakdown of teachers, and all other certificated educators and staff by district and individual school level.
   b. Calculate the number of affirmative action complaints disaggregated by race, gender, (dis)ability, religion, etc. and the number of those complaints which were founded for each district.
   c. Calculate the racial and gender breakdown of teachers who receive tenure/do not receive tenure in that year or who were non-renewed/renewed by district and school.
   d. Determine the comparative and average teacher/educator evaluation scores disaggregated by race/gender per school and district.

3. **Student Level Data for Each State:**
   a. Calculate the racial and gender breakdown of all students by district and school level.
   b. Determine the racial and gender breakdown of Gifted and Talented, honors, and advanced placement (note: I do not advocate for or endorse these courses, because they are inherently hierarchical and rest on the ideology that intelligence can be drilled and tested using biased technologies/tools of measurement (i.e. AP), that some are inherently more intelligent than others, intelligence is narrowly defined…).
   c. Calculate the discipline, suspension, expulsion, arrest, etc. data disaggregated by race and gender, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, and all the ways these points of oppression intersect.
   d. Determine the rate, number, and percentage of Discipline/Office Referrals disaggregated by race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and (dis)ability.
   e. Compute the yearly percentage and number of IDEA violations.

The *Edu-equity App* will function as a resource to parents, community members, educators, students, and unionists. Although some of the information suggested can be found on different platforms, there is no current tool where all of this is found in on location. It will serve as a tool for parents looking for schools that adhere to equity-based practices; BIEoC will be able
to use this hands-on, at your finger-tips data to make informed decisions about which districts and schools are working towards equity in their hiring practices, as well as pedagogical approaches. Community and lay citizens will be able to learn the areas of growth needed for their community, districts, and school and work towards changing that.

**Future Research**

Although Black K-12 educators are not a monolith, there are collective experiences we have because we live in a society that collectivizes all Black folx, particularly in the ways we are treated by every institution and system we interact with. These collective experiences are worth exploring and understanding, as well as our location of divergence. Understanding the experiences of Black K-12 educators in schools helps illuminate the ways racism, classism, and patriarchy impact their experiences in schools as well as the organizing work they may be engaged in. Being able to unfold and articulate the ways post-1970s Black K-12 educators, who are attempting to push towards a better world, are impacted and treated by these systems will give us a more accurate portrayal:

1. We need research that explores and better understands the impact (if any) of integration on Black educators post-1970s.

2. We need researchers to examine any financial, emotional, familial, and physical health impacts on Black K-12 educators. What are the differences in these factors across district type (mostly white segregated, mostly Black/Brown segregated, racially integrated, rural, large city, small suburban)?

3. Researchers will need to investigate the gender differences in how Black K-12 educators are treated, hired, retained, granted tenure, assigned positions, evaluated etc.
4. Researchers will need to explore the root and historical causes in the gender disparity/gap between Black teachers (Hollinside, 2017).

5. Future research should explore the organizing structures and patterns of Black K-12 educators and other people of color activists’ organizing spaces.

6. Researchers should also explore the impact that isolation has on the Black educators’ well-being.

7. Researchers should study the impact that internalized racial oppression and internalized patriarchy has on the organizing efforts within people of color and multi-gender organizing spaces.

8. Investigate the impact of organizations and groups that use the internalized racial oppression and patriarchy chart to examine and disrupt their structures and practices.

9. Researchers should study informal and self-created communities for Black educators and the impact these communities have on their well-being.

**Final word**

This dissertation was the most labor inducing and difficult task I have ever taken up. From the revelations in the data to the way my body experienced and responded to that information, proved to be exhausting, physically and emotionally painful, yet liberating. As a Black educator, former classroom teacher, the experiences my participants recalled and shared were affirming in that I saw myself in them and could validate their experiences. Their profound experiences and stories needed to be told for the purposes of providing warning signs and useful roadmaps and turns that could be taken as future generations begin to grapple with these same issues.
There is pain in disappointment—in seeing an organization of people come together in search of liberation but cannot get past the oppressors within to fully stay organized. There is pain and disappointment in seeing some of these educators targeted by administrators, peers, parents, and the circumstances within the system, where some felt they could find no refuge or shelter within. And just like there was pain in some of them, the seeds being planted by the members of BrED Freedom School as they organized, worked through conflict but kept their eyes towards a future not yet actualized—couched between their dreams and their reality, was refreshing.

There is a soothing and encouraging—like an ancestral balm that covers them as they push through their barriers, and challenges, while relishing in their triumphs and honing and nurturing the treasures they continue to bring to their students, community, and this nation. Black Educatorhood Possibilities is a discipline—a commitment to futurisms unknown yet but nonetheless right beyond the horizon. It is a call for a redesign for reinventing and rehumanizing ourselves, our communities and organizations, and our interactions with each other. It is a brand of hope. In the words of former classroom teacher, turned prison abolitionist and organizer, Mariame Kaba, “Hope is a discipline,”—a praxis that begs us to hold on even within a state and existences of seemingly of precariousness.

Black Educatorhood Possibilities is a daily love letter to those who came before us, to those we are communing with, in and between the present. It is a love letter to those who will come after us. It is a never-ending love letter to us all with an attempt to examine the nuances of our challenges, and triumphs so that you too will have a point reference—a testimony. However, our possibilities are rooted in truth, discipline, love, and again, a disciplined—unrelenting hope.
Be baashe ni wɔhienɔkamɔ le baaba mli.

The day will come when our hope will be realized.
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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Recruitment Letter: Letter for racial and social justice support group members

Dear Racial and Social Justice Group member,

I am writing to ask for your help with a research study about your racial and social justice support group as a transformative learning and expansive activity learning system, as part of the learning process of an informal learning environment.

As educators, educational support professionals, unionists, and education advocates, I am sure you all know the importance of learning across boundaries, and the need to understand the processes, transformation, and development involved within these kinds of informal learning environments.

In a time where public education is being attacked from different angles, the connections between educational justice, racial justice, and labor justice within an organizing space is integral to the survival of public schools.

By studying your experience, I may be able to build on the body of research in the learning sciences and how we understand learning as a process and form of development.

With this in mind, I am seeking your permission for the following:

- Allow me to use your support group meeting notes where you are documenting your learning, experiences, and notes.
- Allow me to interview and digitally audiorecord you at three separate times throughout the study and use them for data analysis. All names of people and locations will be changed.
- Allow me to conduct three separate focus group interviews and digitally audiorecord the group interviews and meetings throughout the duration of the study, and use them for data analysis. All names of people and locations will be changed.
- Allow me to take notes during the group meetings, and individual and focus group interviews and allow me to use those notes for data analysis with all the names of people and locations changed.

Please feel free to ask me, or any other member of the research team, questions about the study.

Sincerely,

Okaikor

Awo Okaikor Aryee-Price, ama56@scarletmail.rutgers.edu
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in an interpretive phenomenological study that is being conducted by Awo Okaikor Aryee-Price who is a doctoral candidate in the Design of Learning Environments concentration in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University. The purpose of this research is to determine what impact a racial and social justice support group and organizing space for educators has on participants’ sociopolitical development and learnings.

Approximately 10-12 individual group members will participate in the study, and each individual's participation will last approximately six months. During this period, the individual member-educator will continue to attend the support group meetings, keep a journal, be observed, and participate in pre/mid/post individual 60-90 minute one-on-one interviews and 90-120 minute focus group interviews for each scheduled interview and focus group.

Participation in this study will involve the following:

- Attending the racial and social justice support group meetings for educators.
- Journaling feelings/thoughts/ideas/questions/notes.
- Participating in three separate one-on-one interviews (pre/mid/post).
- Participating in three separate focus group interviews (pre/mid/post).
- A review of your agenda/meeting notes pre-study, and post-study.

This research is confidential. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about you and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about you includes race/ethnicity, profession, age, gender etc. Please note that I will keep this information confidential by limiting access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location in a locked cabinet, and within a password protected laptop.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, individual and group results will be stated, however the confidentiality of the subjects will always be kept by using pseudonyms if preferred by the subject.

There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study. The benefits of taking part in this study may be to contribute to the research and knowledge around how a multi-ethnoracial group of educators learn, and develop a critical analysis of their challenges while pushing for action and change. However, you may receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study.
Your participation in the study is completely voluntary, but it is very important. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time during the study procedures without any penalty to you. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

The benefits of being involved in this study include being able to contribute to education research to better serve the field of education and learning sciences, and what we know about learning and educational philosophy. You may find pleasure in being able to contribute to the body of research on learning and critical studies. If you would like a copy of the results, I will be happy to provide them to you. There are minimal risks involved in this research. You may find discussing certain issues about your process and/or experience may be upsetting. If this occurs, I will arrange for supportive care from an appropriate professional in your area.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact myself at ama56@scarletmail.rutgers.edu and 862-368-1723. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Beth Rubin, Rutgers Graduate School of Education, beth.rubin@gse.rutgers.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact an IRB Administrator at the Rutgers University, Arts and Sciences IRB:

Institutional Review Board
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Liberty Plaza / Suite 3200
335 George Street, 3rd Floor
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: 732-235-2866
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Sign below if you agree to participate in this research study:

Participant (Print) ____________________________________________

Participant Signature ______________________ Date ________________

Principal Investigator Signature __________________ Date ________________

Form Version 2014.b
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Institutional Review Board: Human Subject Research

Print Date: 1/12/2015
Page 9 of 9
APPENDIX C

AUDIO/VISUAL ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM

Audio/Visual Addendum to Consent Form

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled The Evolution of HOPE: Radial Possibilities at the Intersections of Radical, Labor, and Educational Justice conducted by Awo Chaler-Aryee Price. I am asking for your permission to allow me to audio/record the one on one and focus group interviews as part of this research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the principal investigator, Awo Chaler-Aryee Price.

The recording(s) will include the participants' names, profession, how they identify (race, economically, radical, gender, and any other identifications they are willing to disclose during the interview. If you say anything that you believe at a later point may be harmful and/or damage your reputation, then you can ask the interviewer to remove the recording. Your consent to remove the information will be removed from the audio transcripts. Upon completion of the transcripts, the principal investigator will provide the subjects with the transcripts for review. During this time, the subject will be allowed to add clarifications, to build upon previous points made, or request omissions.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet and labeled with the participants' names, pseudonym or other identifiable information. The recordings will be retained indefinitely.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator Awo Chaler-Aryee Price permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject Name __________________________

Subject Signature ______________________ Date ____________

Principal Investigator Signature __________ Date ____________

For IRB Use Only. This section must be included on the Consent Form and cannot be altered except for updates to the version date.

[Box] [Box] [Box] Version Date: c5.0

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APPENDIX D

INITIAL ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

In an effort to focus on your narrative and personal experience, and not on taking notes, I would like to audio tape our conversations today. For your information, only I will have access to the tapes that will eventually be destroyed after they are transcribed.

In addition, I request that you sign a consent form devised to meet Rutgers University’s human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) I do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for your participation.

Introduction

You have been selected to participate in this research study because you have been involved with a racial and social justice group for educators in some manner. I believe that your participation as a Black educator in the racial and social justice group has been educative. My research project focuses on understanding the process and essence of learning by understanding how the impact of participation can help us understand the experiences of Black educators in these spaces.

This study aims to discover what impact the racial and social justice group has on you and learn more about the group and individual experiences and learning process.

In order to fully understand what patterns of learning are operating, we will schedule three interview sessions. Each interview will be approximately 60 - 90 minutes in length.

<p>| Opening 5 minutes | 1. Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this interview. I would like to begin by you telling me about yourself. - Where were you born and where did you grow up or live as a child? - How would you describe this community? - How would you describe your upbringing? - How do you remember your own personal schooling experiences? - Where do you live now? How does it compare/contrast to where you grew up? |
| Introduction 7 minutes | 2. Tell me about your story as an educator. (individual interviews). Tell me about your professional life and its development overtime. - What do you do? - How long have you been in this position/role? |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transition</th>
<th>7 minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 3. So, tell me more about your racial and social justice group experience. Tell me the story behind how you found your way to this group.  
  What were you feeling about the state of racial justice within your district prior to joining/starting the group?  
  - When did you start attending the group meetings?  
  - How did you come to learn about or get introduced to the group?  
  - What drew you to (start) this group? Why did you agree to attend? And what keeps you coming (when you can)? What prevents you from being able to attend more meetings?  
  - Why do you continue to attend the meetings?  
  What were your initial fears, questions, wonderings about what would come of the group? | |
| Key | 7 minutes |
| 4. How would you describe this racial and social justice support group? Its structure?  
  How would you describe the group’s evolution?  
  What are some things that you have done to defend the need for racial justice in your district/community?  
  Have you presented the need for support in this area with your district leadership, school leadership and/or community members?  
  If so, how? | |
| 5 minutes |
| 5. How would you describe what your meetings have been like?  
  What challenges have you encountered as you work through trying to create this space? Push for changes within the district/school? | |
| 5 minutes |
| 6. How long have you been involved in racial and social justice organizing work?  
  - What was your racial and social justice group organizing experience prior to this space?  
  - How has the group impacted your organizing?  
  - How has being with this group helped you? | |
<p>| 10 minutes | 5 minutes to discuss |
| 7. Can you illustrate for me how you see educational, racial and labor justice as three projects in your work -- where do they intersect, where do they compete, and where do they anticipate &quot;bumps?&quot; | |
| Ending | 3 minutes |
| 8. All things considered, what do you hope for your group? | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Background Information</strong></th>
<th><strong>Separate sheet</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 minutes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Background Information:**

- Name (Pseudonym will be used for data analysis):
- Sex/Gender (please self-identify):
- Sexual Orientation: (please self-identify):
- Age:
- Ethnic/Racial Identity (please self identify):
- Current Residence/City Location:
- Socio-economic Status: Please self-identify

**Wrap-up:** *I think we’ve come to the end of our questions. Let me be the first to say thank you for your honest opinions – you were tremendously helpful at this very early, but very important stage.*

*Again, thank you very much for your participation today. I really appreciate your help.*
APPENDIX E

SECOND ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

In an effort to focus on your narrative and personal experience, and not on taking notes, I would like to audio tape our conversations today. For your information, only I will have access to the tapes that will eventually be destroyed after they are transcribed.

In addition, as mentioned in our first interview, I request that you sign a consent form devised to meet Rutgers University’s human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) I do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for your participation.

Introduction

Your participation in this research has been invaluable. And your participation as a Black educator in a multi-ethnoracial racial justice group will help provide important research information to move the study forward. Your participation in the group has been educative. To reiterate, my research project focuses on understanding the experiences of Black educators as well as the process and essence of your learning by understanding how the impact of participation may nurture the transformative and expansive activity learning on the individuals and group.

This study aims to discover what impact the racial and social justice group has on you and learn more about the group and individual experiences and learning process.

In order to fully understand what patterns of learning are operating, I have scheduled three interview sessions. This is our second interview of three. Like the other interview, this one will last approximately 60-90 minutes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opening 5 minutes</th>
<th>1. So, let’s get started.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction 7 minutes</td>
<td>2. So, what are some updates since our last meeting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition 7 minutes</td>
<td>3. Has your attitude towards being in the group shifted? If so, how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 minutes</td>
<td>4. Can you think of a conflict or challenging moment that happened within the group? - If yes: Tell me about that conflict.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How did you respond to the conflict?  
How did the group respond to the conflict?  
How was the conflict resolved?  
If no: Why do you think conflict has not arise?

**5 minutes**  
5. How do the dynamics within the space change when it is multi-ethnoracial?

**5 minutes**  
6. How do others outside of the group, in your school/district, view your group?

**5 minutes**  
7. What is the role of the union in understanding racial, social, and educational justice as interlocking?

**7 minutes**  
8. How important is the union in helping to facilitate racial justice within the district/school/community?

**7 minutes**  
9. Is there a linkage between racial justice, labor justice, and educational justice?  
Illustrate this for me.

**Ending 3 minutes**  
10. What do you believe is most promising about your group/organization?

**Wrap-up:** I think we’ve come to the end of our questions. Let me be the first to say thank you again for your honest opinions – you were tremendously helpful at this very early, but very important stage.

Again, thank you very much for your participation today. I really appreciate your help.
APPENDIX F

THIRD ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

These questions will be specific to each participant based on the phenomenological three-interview life cycle. Therefore, a protocol adjustment may need to be made for IRB in order to conduct and complete these interviews.
APPENDIX G

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Introduction: Hello and welcome to this focus group discussion. My name is Awo Okaikor Aryee-Price and I am a doctoral candidate at Rutgers University’s Graduate School of Education. I will be here facilitating this focus group as part of my dissertation study. My role here is to help get a conversation going and to make sure we cover a number of important topics that I would like your input on.

Introductions

Purpose: First of all, I would like to thank you all for taking time out of your day to come here and discuss your ideas. I am conducting these focus group interviews to understand the group dynamics and learning. You all were invited because you are all Black educators who are members or a racial and social justice organization who agreed to participate in the research. I want to tap into your experiences and your common opinion. The overall goal is to hear your thoughts about your experiences as Black educators, with the group, and the impact the group has had on your personal and professional lives, as well as the impact on the group’s development and individual development.

The purpose of this strictly voluntary focus groups is to learn from you all because you are the experts and I am here to learn from you.

Housekeeping: The total length of time of the focus group meeting is expected to be about 60-90 minutes in length.

As far as the focus groups are concerned, there are some “ground rules” I would like to highlight:

- I might move you along in conversation. Since we have limited time, I’ll ask that questions or comments off the topic be answered after the focus group session.
- I’d like to hear everyone speak so I might ask people who have not spoken up to comment.
- Please respect each other’s opinions. There’s no right or wrong answer to the questions I will ask. We want to hear what each of you think and it’s okay to have different opinions.
- We’d like to stress that we want to keep the sessions confidential so we ask that you not use names or anything directly identifying when you talk about your personal experiences. We also ask that you not discuss other participants’ responses outside of the discussion. However, because this is in a group setting, the other individuals participating will know your responses to the questions and we can not guarantee that they will not discuss your responses outside of the focus group.
- There are no wrong answers. It is to be expected that you will have differing points of views. Please share your point of view, even if it differs from what others have said.
I am recording the session because I do not want to miss any of your comments and so that I can go back and revisit the information if I need to. As promised, no real names will be used in any reports. Your comments are confidential.

Name tags are being used to make sure that you all can refer to each other by name. Although some of you know each other, this is not the case for all of you and will help everyone refer to each other’s names. Do not feel like you have to respond to me all the time. If you want to follow up on something that someone else has said, either to agree, disagree, or to build upon their point, please feel free to do so. Feel free to have a conversation with one another about these questions. I am here to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has a chance to share. I am interested in hearing from each of you. Therefore, if you are talking a lot, I may ask you to give others a chance. On the other hand, if you are not saying much, I may call on you. I just want to make sure all of you have a chance to share your ideas.

If you have a cell phone, please put it on quiet mode, and if you need to answer, you may step out to do so. Feel free to get up and take of your personal needs if you would like.

Again your participation here today is totally voluntary. So if you are okay with moving forward, I would like to get your consent.

### Opening

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7 minutes</th>
<th>1. Let’s get started. Let’s first find out a bit more about each other by going around the table one at a time. Tell us your name, what you do and what talents do you bring with you to an organizing space?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 minutes</td>
<td>2. Can you talk about the reasons why your groups were started/created?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 minutes</td>
<td>3. After listening to all of your individual interviews on of the recurring concepts or themes that presented itself was the idea of “unity,” “support,” “interconnectedness,” and “interdependence.” I want to show you all an image (display image). Please think about this image and its meaning. Explain if and how this concept may be operating in your lives, and/or your organizations, groups and communities? How do you see it in these places?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Ending

| 7 minutes | 4. Are there any last minutes thoughts? |

**Wrap-up:** I think we’ve come to the end of our questions. Let me be the first to say thank you for your honest opinions – you were tremendously helpful at this very early, but very important stage.

Again, thank you very much for your participation today. I really appreciate your help.