There's a Rhythm to Our Method: An Endarkened Narrative of Four Black Women Teachers' School Discipline Practices

by

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Abstract

Due to Black women teachers' cultural and historical legacies, Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) suggested that Black women's form of care is often demonstrative of a womanist ethic of caring, which is defined by three characteristics (a) an embrace of the maternal, (b) political clarity, and (c) an ethic of risk. This approach is particularly salient as it relates to Black women teachers' disciplinary practices with Black girls in the classroom, as it emphasizes the importance of reconceptualizing what we mean by discipline. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study was to employ Toliver's (2021) Endarkened Storywork (narrative inquiry) and Beauboeuf-Lafontant's (2002) womanist caring as a method to explore Black women teachers' approaches to school discipline. Specifically, this study was guided by two questions: 1) In what ways do Black women teachers embody a Womanist Ethic of Care as it relates to their described discipline practices? Specifically, how do Black women teachers embrace the maternal/othermothering, express political clarity, and engage in an ethic of risk in their discipline practices with Black girls? 2) How does Black women teachers' embodiment of a womanist ethic of care contribute to discipline strategies and practices that are beneficial to Black girls' learning and development? (Milner, 2020). Analysis revealed that the teacher-participants embodied a womanist ethic of care by using pedagogical, intellectual, and identity-centric ways of knowing to engage in aspects of mothering, sociopolitical consciousness, and spirituality and empathy, to affirm the social-emotional needs of their Black girl students. In addition, discipline was conceptualized as providing caring and healing forms of (re)lationship, (re)covery, (re)solution, and (re)presentation that honored the political realities of their Black girl students. Recommendations and implications for research and practice are also provided.

Acknowledgements

"There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal."

-Toni Morrison (2015)

Language both verbal and nonverbal has the power to transform and liberate minds and communities. It also holds the power to control and destroy communities. I choose the former, and this dissertation is the first of many-healing ways in which I plan to do so. However, this dissertation itself would not have been possible without the love, support, and guidance of many people. So, I want to first thank God for carrying me and giving me the strength and endurance to remain committed and dedicated to the pursuit of this degree. It is through my spiritual guidance and connection with the most High that I was able to maintain the level of resiliency and mental capacity required to complete such a task. To that end, I'd also like to thank my elders and ancestors who have gone on to another realm of life. I honestly know and believe that your prayers have withstood the test of time and as a result, I am walking in many of your answered prayers.

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And lastly, I would like to give a special note of recognition and thanks to myself:

Look at you girl, you did it!

Even through moments of self-doubt and depressive bouts,

you stayed committed.

You always knew that obtaining this degree was much bigger than you.

And that God has a calling on your life to show other Black girls that they can do it too.

And although many of your experiences may not have been reminiscent of the homeplace bell hooks speaks of,

Each moment was used as a tool to sharpen and mold you into the woman you've always dreamed of.

So, as you use your life and works to champion the next generation of Black scholars,

Please remember to bask in this moment, as it is truly a privilege and honor.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"We Want Double"

Double double this this

Double double that that

Double this, Double that,

Double double this that

How many of you out there know what it's like to be Black in America?

Me, me I do. And I ain't raising my hand for fun,

It's to symbolize Black movements and that it's just my hand-and not a gun.

I will never truly understand God's plan for us.

I mean, aren't we supposed to be amongst the chosen ones?

Yeah we have more melanin, and our hair is coarser and may differ from the white standard of beauty.

*But that's just it- because underneath we are still **human**.*

I'm so tired of the media and society depicting Black women as the problem.

And then when we push back, it's "oh, we're so intolerable."

But imagine having generations of unmet and unacknowledged needs.

*Having to protest and plead, for society to "hear you out, **please**!"*

Imagine being treated like an uncommon and rare breed,

*And having to ask, "Can I please just **breathe**?"*

Imagine being the only one in the room everyone seems to notice,

but when you begin to talk, people seem to lose focus.

Our Blackness is so visible,

And yet it's the reason we're treated so minuscule.

There's so much to unpack and I don't know exactly where to begin,

But I do know that we want in.

So, if this = life, and that = liberty.

Come close… because I want you to hear me.

We want…

Double double this this

Double double that that

Double this, Double that,
Double double this that.

The writing of this poem came from a place of well-justified anger that resulted from the dehumanizing social and political realities that Black women, men, and children have to contend with on a daily basis. Researcher and author Brittney Cooper (2020) published an article in *TIME* magazine titled: "Why Are Black Women Still an Afterthought in Our Outrage Over Police Violence?" as a response to the delayed media coverage of Breonna Taylor, Tanisha Anderson and many other Black women who were killed at the hands of police officers. Cooper's (2020) work also inspired my poem, "We Want Double," and served as a precursor to my dissertation topic. Cooper (2020) maintained that "femininity is a weapon only if you're white," and that "we keep missing the intersection of race and gender when it comes to Black women," (para. 6). Cooper's (2020) analysis is spot on. When it comes to Black women and girls, U.S. culture and society has historically and contemporarily refused to give proper attention to how racism, sexism, and other socially constructed systems of power and domination shape our lives, which in turn, renders our bodies, voices, and experiences as inhumane and unworthy of public concern and care. I can keenly remember ruminating on the title of this article and using it as fuel to write my poem "We Want Double.

During that time, I was filled with anger and discontentment of how I and other Black women were and still are being treated. I had grown tired of society's negligence and complete disregard of our lives and experiences in the workforce, education, media, and in all other social sectors. Additionally, this poem serves as an act of resistance against society's perspective of Black communities and as a petition to voice what we as Black people want and deserve. Here's just a glimpse of what we want. We want double for our ancestors who were forced to endure the Atlantic slave trade, The Antebellum South, and Jim Crow South. We want double the quality of education for our children. We want double the economic and political privileges that white families have had

for centuries. We want double the respect, care, and protection as a human race. Bottom line, we as a Black community want double for our troubles.

One of our most concerning troubles is within the field of education, as it has created a continuum of racial barriers for Black families and children. Specifically, for the purposes of the study, my most troubling concern was geared towards the disciplinary response to and treatment of Black girls in U.S. schools. Not only are the mis- and mal-treatment of Black women and girls' bodies conducted in public and by the hands of police officers (Cooper, 2020), but also behind school walls and by the hands of teachers, administrators, and school resource officers (Morris, 2016). All too often, we see and hear about the violent and forceful removal of Black girls from the classroom for minor behavior infractions (Amemiya et al., 2020), such as dress code violations, disobedience, and disruptive behavior in the form of tantrums or sleeping (Morris, 2016) and being perceived as having an attitude (Wun, 2017).

For instance, Morris and Perry (2017) conducted a 4-year, longitudinal multilevel modeling study that utilized school discipline data from a Kentucky public-school district involving middle and high school (6-12th) grade level students. Using an intersectional framework to examine the relationship between race, gender, and the likelihood of receiving an office discipline referral (ODR), Morris and Perry (2017) concluded that Black girls were more likely to receive an ODR for minor rule violations (e.g., disruptive behavior, dress code violations), and "significantly and substantially more likely to be referred to the office than are girls of any other race," (p. 135). However, it is also important to note that "minor infractions are not minor," as indicated by Amemiya et al. (2020), and that such infractions only lead to major consequences, such as student disengagement from school altogether (Skiba et al., 2014).

Teachers are mediators at the classroom level and have the power to control the extent and rate in which office discipline referrals become distributed (Gregory & Roberts, 2017).

Although this positions teachers with the power to become discipline 'gatekeepers' (Williams et al., 2020) at the classroom level, it is important to acknowledge that race, class, and gender impact teacher expectations of their students (Scott-Jones & Clark, 1986). This has unfortunately become a phenomenon all too familiar to Black girls in K-12 settings, as I experienced discrimination and bias based on my race and gender during my high school years. A description of one out of many incidents is written below.

Statement of the Problem

As a high school student at a large, public school located in suburban Alabama, it was not odd to see school resource officers (SROs) walking about freely roaming around our open-style campus setting. So, this particular day failed to strike me as any different. It was my senior year, and I was sitting in my English class when a sudden announcement came over the classroom's PA system stating, "Mrs. Long,[1] could you please send Jasmine Betties to the principal's office?" Everyone turned and looked at me with a look of shock on their faces [1]because they knew that I was an honor roll student, a member of the dance team, a writer for our school's newspaper staff, and so on. I was an all-around 'good student', so they were just as perplexed as I was when our school secretary summoned me to the principal's office.

When I entered the office, there was an SRO standing in the corner, and my honors chemistry teacher, Mrs. Peters, a white woman, standing next to a chair that was pulled out specifically for me. With the SRO standing in the corner, and her standing over me in the chair, Mrs. Peters stated, "Yes I called you in because I have some concerns about you having some sort of gang affiliation going on." Shocked and confused, I stated, "What have I done to make you think I am affiliated with a gang?" She continued by informing me that my drawings of crowns on my course assignments were concerning to her because she knew it was a known

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[1] Mrs. Long is a pseudonym. All descriptive details and names of people (other than my family members) and research participants have been changed throughout to protect their privacy.

symbol associated with a Latin gang based out of Los Angeles, CA! I confidently stated, "ma'am my nickname is Princess," (thankfully I actually had on my princess jacket that day, so I pointed to the word on my jacket), "I draw crowns on my paper because it symbolizes royalty or the word princess…. I am an honor roll student, I am on the dance team, and I work part-time." I furthered continued, "So, when would I find the time to be in a gang?" Her face turned red, and with a tone of embarrassment she replied, "I'm sorry, you can go back to class and please do not mention this to anyone."

There is a problem in our U.S. school system in which Black children, and in particular, Black girls are being ridiculed and/or punished for minor, or in my case, imagined offenses. It is important to note that I am aware that my status as an honor-roll student, and as a student who did not have a disciplinary record privileged me at this moment. However, as I will mention in later sections, this incident forced me to subscribe to a politics of respectability or the pressure to use my being labeled a 'good' student to appease her and the police officer. In retrospect, I can now pinpoint how demeaning and offensive this incident was to me as a Black girl student.

For instance, I am now aware that at that moment, Carter Andrews et al.'s (2019) concept of Notions of Femininity and the Policing and Surveillance of Back Girl Bodies was at play. Meaning, my behavior (drawing crowns) was being policed and surveyed in a discriminatory way that played into the stereotypical beliefs regarding Black communities and gang culture. I am also cognizant of how Mrs. Peters' demand "please don't mention this to anyone," served as a silencing moment, and was done in an effort to trivialize her wrongdoings in the situation. Additionally, this incident was rooted in a fear of Blackness and was used as an opportunity to weaponize my creativity, freedom, and joy (Neal and Dunn, 2020), for simply being a Black girl who could think or dream of imagined possibilities (Toliver, 2021). So, it was not my mere presence as a Black girl that was the issue, but being a Black girl with ambition, purpose, and aspirations (Love, 2019; Neal and Dunn,

2020). Therefore, I approached this study with both a sense of frustration and creativity, as I had the need and want to be revitalized through the narratives and experiences of Black women teachers. Their narratives in and of themselves conducted the racial uplift work that myself and other Black women, and Black girls are continuously seeking.

Purpose of the Study

During the years before school desegregation, Black teachers in Southern, segregated schools excelled in attending to the developmental and emotional needs of Black students (Milner, 2020), and were committed to creating a caring climate for their students (Siddle-Walker, 2019). Mogadime (2000) also suggested that some Black women teachers operate from the perspective of being cultural workers or othermothers when teaching Black students. This pedagogical perspective is critical, as it is aligned with Black women's self-defined Afrocentric perceptions of care (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002), and effective classroom discipline practices (Dixson, 2003).

Specifically, Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) suggested that Black women's form of care is often demonstrative of a womanist ethic of caring, which is defined by three characteristics (a) an embrace of the maternal, (b) political clarity, and (c) an ethic of risk. An Afro-centric perspective of care is important when responding to Black girls' behavior, as white-normed constructions of femininity undergird the ways in which most teachers, administrators, and other school officials respond to girls' behavior in schools. In doing so, Black girls often become subjected to disciplinary experiences that fail to acknowledge how they self-define and perceive their racial and gender identities, and therefore, generally do not align with their expressive behaviors (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020).

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to employ Toliver's (2021) Endarkened Storywork as a methodology to honor and center the way Black women teachers self-define and describe their discipline practices with Black girls. This area of focus was

particularly salient due to the minimal research written by and for Black women that centers the narratives of Black women's teaching and discipline practices with Black girls (Monroe & Obidah, 2004). To do so, I employed Beauboeuf-Lafontant's (2002) definition of womanist caring (embrace the maternal/othermothering, political clarity, and an ethic of risk) informed by the tenets of Black feminism-womanism (Collins 1986; Collins, 1989) to mobilize the experiences and disciplinary perspectives of Black women teachers. The following research questions guided my narrative inquiry process:

1. In what ways do Black women teachers embody a Womanist Ethic of Care as it relates to their described discipline practices? Specifically, how do Black women teachers embrace the maternal/othermothering, express political clarity, and engage in an ethic of risk in their discipline practices with Black girls?

2. How does Black women teachers' embodiment of a womanist ethic of care contribute to discipline strategies and practices that are beneficial to Black girls' learning and development? (Milner, 2020).

Methodological Overview

For this study, I utilized Toliver's (2021) Endarkened Storywork as a methodology to mobilize the experiences and disciplinary practices of Black women teachers. Endarkened Storywork was critical to this study, as it served as a culturally authentic and relevant approach that honored the ways in which Black women story their lives and experiences (Toliver, 2021). In addition, my method of inquiry was guided and informed by Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant's (2002) definition of womanist caring and the theoretical tenets of Black feminism-womanism. According to Lindsay-Dennis (2015), a Black feminist-womanist paradigm is acknowledged as a culturally congruent model that invites researchers to view research on a continuum rather than isolated acts, to examine how Black women and girls' behavior and decisions relate to their

worldviews and expectations. Lastly, this approach was critical to the direction of my study because according to Rodgers (2017) Black feminist-womanist scholars accentuate constructs that emphasize Black women's intrinsic need for self-definition, self-valuation, name and reaffirming Afrocentric analysis in everyday experiences.

Significance of the Study

By centering the perspectives and personal narratives of how Black women teachers must navigate the complexities of race, gender, and social class oppression when making discipline decisions regarding Black girls' behavior, I was able to identify both the successes and challenges that comes with developing culturally, racially, and gender responsive discipline strategies in U.S. schools. It was in my hopes that my findings would also inform research on teacher education programs and influence the way teachers of all ethnic backgrounds can work to disrupt the negative schooling experiences of all Black students (Milner, 2006), and particularly, the disparate discipline sanctions experienced by Black girls in schools. Lastly, as noted earlier, this study sought to enhance the current body of educational literature and research pertaining to Black teachers and their classroom discipline practices by centering the often hidden and neglected perspectives and experiences of Black women teachers, in turn, offering a unique, Black feminist-womanist perspective on the nuanced ways in which schools influence the ways in which teachers interact and respond to Black girls (Nyachae, 2016).

Definition of Key Terms

Black and/or African American- This study uses Black and African American. This choice of terminology will be used as "a self-referent for Americans of African descent," (Ghee, 1990, p. 75).

Black feminist thought/Black feminism- is both an ideology and political movement that specializes in creating and rearticulating the distinctive, self-defined standpoints of African

American women that reflect special perspectives on the self, family, and society (Collins, 1989; Collins, 1986).

Embodiment- the term embodied, or embodiment refers to Black women teachers' ways of (re)presenting physically, emotionally, and intellectually the "politics, creativity, and spiritual consciousness" of our life and work as Black women (Dillard, 2021, p. 9).

Exclusionary discipline- refers to discipline sanctions that remove students from the standard classroom learning environment. Sanctions include in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, expulsion, and alternative school referral.

ODRs- stands for office discipline referrals, which are often issued by teachers of students who are being perceived as exhibiting disruptive behaviors. ODRs follow a chain of command that starts with teachers (classroom level) and then ends with school administrators (school office) who then assign consequences to the referred student (Gregory & Roberts, 2017).

SROs- stands for school resource officers that are "sworn law enforcement officers assigned full-time to patrol schools," (Theriot, 2009, p. 280).

Subjective discipline- refers to discipline decisions that are based on a teacher's discretion. Oftentimes, these practices are discriminatory and rooted in anti-Blackness (Baggett & Andrzejewski, 2021).

white- For the purposes of this study I will choose to lowercase the 'W" when referring to individuals or groups in racial or ethnic terms and the impact of white supremacy and whiteness. As Laws (2020, para.1) maintained, "White carries a different set of meanings; capitalizing the word in this context risks following the lead of white supremacists."

White and/or whiteness, can be defined as:

> Whiteness is a location of structural advantage, or race privilege. Second, it is a "standpoint," a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, at society. Third, "whiteness,"

refers to a set of cultural practices, that are usually unmarked and unnamed.

(Frankenburg, 1997, 1, as cited in Kumasi, 2015, p. 212).

Womanism- Black feminism is also used interchangeably with the term womanism (Collins, 1996). Based on Alice Walker's (1983) concept of 'womanist,' Collins (1996) insisted that it is used to represent the "cultural, historical, and political positionality of African American women, a group that has experienced slavery, segregation, sexism, and classism for most of its history in the U.S," (p. 72).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the background, problem and purpose statement, and a brief methodological overview of this study. Due to the nature of this study, it was important that I share my personal narrative in order to assert the power of the voice and emotion in knowledge claims. In chapter 2, a review of the school discipline literature is presented to reveal the negative and consequential impact it has on Black girls. I also provide a review of how Black teachers have acted as a buffer to the negative discipline experiences of Black students and bring a particular focus to Black women teachers. Chapter 3 will provide an in-depth discussion of the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological approaches and procedures I employed, and how it informed my data collection and analysis process. Chapter 4 provides the narratives of four Black women teachers, along with an analysis of the story findings. Chapter 5 includes a further discussion of the findings and recommendations for practice and future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

School Discipline Defined

So, what is school discipline and what is it doing in schools?

Cameron (2006) defined school discipline as:

> School policies and actions taken by school personnel with students to prevent or intervene with unwanted behaviors, primarily focusing on school conduct codes and security methods, suspension from school, corporal punishment, and teachers' methods of managing students' actions in class. (p. 219)

According to Gaustad (1992), school discipline has two goals: a). to ensure the safety of staff and students and b). create an environment conducive to learning. Gaustad's (1992) notion of school discipline being about safety and learning is ideal, however, my subsequent analysis will reveal otherwise. Regarding the beliefs of Black teachers, Milner (2020) maintained that Black teachers defined discipline as a method to support Black student learning and development as opposed to current discipline practices which are used as methods to punish and exclude students. Moreover, schools usually meet the intended goals of school discipline codes and conduct by enacting discipline policies and practices that involve differing levels of discipline and punishment. Yang (2009) clarified the distinction between discipline and punishment by asserting that punishment is the exclusionary outcome of an offense committed by a student, which removes them from the opportunity to learn, whereas "discipline is an act of rigorous physical or mental training, a practice of will that can lead paradoxically to docile compliance or emancipatory possibilities," (p. 49).

Historical and contemporary analyses on school discipline policies reveal that school personnel and teachers' strategies primarily involve punitive measures and are intensively focused on maintaining control (Bear, 1998; Chesler et al., 1979; Tulley & Chiu, 1995; and

Skiba & Losen, 2016). In addition, school discipline is also understood in terms of how well a teacher can manage their classroom environment and students' behavior (Tulley & Chiu, 1995). Although classroom management is a necessary component within teacher education courses (Cladera et al., 2019), the concept of classroom management is historically linked to maintaining order and control (Doyle, 1986). Such practices also become generic and fail to link classroom management with cultural diversity (Caldera et al., 2019).

It is then safe to surmise that school discipline policies and codes of conduct will reflect white, normative assumptions of what is deemed appropriate and/or inappropriate behavior. This assertion is consistent with Chesler et al.'s (1979) historical analysis on the organizational context of school discipline, in which the authors maintained that "we should expect the content to reflect, at least to some degree, the cultural norms and standards of people who are adult, professionals, and by and large white and male," (p. 497). In more recent research, this historical reality is positioned as a 'school discipline net,' (Irby, 2014). Irby (2014) developed this concept using a critical analysis of policy and policy-related documents accumulated from a large urban school district. The school discipline net, as defined by Irby (2014) is "a socially constructed, contested, and symbolic 'space of trouble' that a student falls into when she or he behaves outside of the normative expectations of a school setting," (p. 514). Additionally, Irby (2014) used Cohen's (1985) net of social control metaphor and Becker's (1973) notion of social actors to position school personnel as moral entrepreneurs who can shift, create, and enforce rules. However, the discussion of who constitutes as moral authorities deserves attention.

Historically speaking, morality in education and teacher practices is linked to eugenics or scientific racism and is concerned with behavioral prediction and control (Lowe, 1998). Placing

teachers and school personnel as moral authorities on behavior creates a disciplinary system that perpetuates punishment based on racial and individual student characteristics that fall outside the norm of what is perceived as appropriate behavior. As Irby (2014) contended, "students' likelihood of getting in trouble at school is shaped by the intersections of students' identities; teacher beliefs; school practices; national, state, and local policies; and school locations," (p.522). Irby's (2014) notion is also supported by an extensive amount of literature posited by those who have asserted that race, gender and socioeconomic status account for disparities in school discipline sanctions (Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba et al., 2014; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009).

Subjective Discipline

Viewing school discipline as a net of social control (Irby, 2014) and within the historical context of who established school discipline codes of conduct (Chesler et al., 1979), discipline can easily become a subjectively biased practice or a "discriminatory practice imparted by teachers and motivated by implicit bias," (Martin & Smith, 2017, p. 64). Although both Black and white teachers hold racial biases and stereotypes about Black students (Emdin, 2016), most white teachers have limited interaction with Black students both in and out of school, making it easier to subscribe to racial biases and stereotypes (Love, 2019).

For instance, in the context of the classroom, the type of behavior that garners the title 'disruptive', is largely based on a teacher's perception or subjective examination of students' (mis)behavior (Pane & Rocco, 2013). It has also been shown that teachers' subjectivity and differential treatment of a student's behavior is mostly dependent upon that student's race (Chinn, Quinn, Dhaliwal, & Lovison, 2020; Okonofua, Gregory, & Eberhardt, 2016; Staats, 2016; Warikoo, Sinclair, Fei, & Jacoby-Sengho, 2016). Morris and Perry (2017) contended, "student discipline is a necessary condition for learning, but research indicates that who is

punished and how one is punished differs based on race, class, and gender," (p. 127). Schools typically respond to disruptive students with external discipline, which consists of sanctions and punishment such as office referrals, corporal punishment, suspensions, and expulsions, in turn, influencing student drop-out (Gable, Bullock, & Evans, 2006; Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010). When looking at school discipline practices in public schools located in the Southern U.S., exclusionary discipline disparities become heightened and significantly experienced by Black students.

Based on their findings from Alabama public schools, Baggett and Andrzejewski (2021) found that subjective infractions distributed by teachers, such as disruptions, defiance, and disobedience, have been found to disproportionately impact Alabamian students of Color and primarily Black students at disparate rates compared to their white counterparts. Black students who are on the receiving end of such practices, are often excluded from the social and instructional environment of their school, resulting in either in/out-of-school suspension, alternative school, or referrals to law enforcement (Baggett & Andrzejewski, 2021). Black students who continuously experience racially disparate, exclusionary discipline sanctions, which often include referrals to law enforcement, become at an increased risk of being funneled into the juvenile justice system, also known as, the school-to-prison pipeline (Heitzeg, 2009).

Current Landscape of Discipline in Schools

Several studies have documented the impact of federal and state legislations such as the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994, which introduced the utility of zero-tolerance policies in schools and ultimately led to an increase in school suspension rates nationwide (Allman & Slate, 2011; Caldera et al., 2019; Rafa, 2019). In terms of school discipline policies and procedures, the use of school exclusion, suspension and expulsion, is a cornerstone of zero tolerance policy, as one-year expulsions are written into federal and state regulations regarding zero tolerance (Civil

Rights Project, 1999, as cited in Skiba, 2000). Since its establishment, zero tolerance policies have been intended primarily as a method of sending a message that certain behaviors will not be tolerated, by punishing all offenses severely, no matter how minor. Additionally, zero tolerance policies operate similar to the U.S. criminal justice system, in which a citizen/students' behavior is subject to public opinion, and in the case of zero-tolerance policies, teachers and administrator's discretion, which often result in Black students being targeted for disciplinary infractions (Fuentes, 2012). Morris (2016) indicated that civil rights projects and criminal justice-social reform efforts, such as *Brown v. Board of Education* and zero-tolerance policies, are both an extension of de jure segregation that have worked to further subject Black girls to negative behavioral stereotypes, victimization, and delinquency.

As a recent response to zero tolerance policies and their direct correlation to corporal punishment and racial disparities in student discipline, there is now a wave of school discipline reforms (Ritter, 2018). Rafa (2019) maintained in her recent analysis on school discipline policies that, "multiple states are using opportunities provided under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to incorporate school discipline data into their systems for accountability and school improvement," (p.7). In addition, Southern states like Tennessee, Georgia, Texas, and Arkansas, have enacted legislation on limiting suspension and expulsion and policies that offer alternatives to discipline. Rafa (2019) further maintained that current alternative school discipline strategies include a) school-wide positive behavioral interventions and support (SW-PBIS), b) restorative practices and c) trauma-informed practices (Rafa, 2019).

This is consistent with Caldera et al., (2021), who based on their examination of recent multicultural education literature, suggested a 5-unit curriculum that encourages teachers to cultivate positive and healthy relationships with their students. The 5-unit curriculum included: 1) trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive classrooms, 2) cultural conflicts in the classrooms, 3)

culturally informed care, 4). Culturally relevant/responsive classroom management, and 5) restorative discipline. In addition, Caldera et al. (2021) employed Wadhwa's (2016) philosophy of restorative justice, which is rooted in the cultural norms and practices of Indigenous communities and offers a culturally relevant alternative to traditional punitive disciplinary practices.

In a similar tone, Baggett and Andrzejewski (2021) explored the concept and practice of reparations as a restorative approach to repairing the educational and school disciplinary injustices experienced by Black people of African descent, and maintained that such practices should include: restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition. Baggett and Andrzejewski (2021) further maintained that although this idea of repair and restoration holds much potential, we must acknowledge and address the racist and anti-Black practices that are inherent within our public schools (Baggett & Andrzejewski, 2021). So, although many school discipline reforms are on the rise (Ritter, 2018) and many elected officials have attempted to create more equal education opportunities through reauthorization of the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, these remedies have failed to close many of the racial gaps still prominent in U.S. schools (White, 2018).

Racial Discipline Gap

Racial injustices and violence that are experienced by Black communities at the hands of police officers, or those who are supposed to protect and serve, has been well documented (Chaney & Robertson, 2013; Cooper, 2015). It is also songs like *One Four Love (*Hip Hop for Respect, 2000), and many others, which serve as a method of bringing awareness to the discriminatory and racist experiences that define the lives of Black people in the U.S. The racial violence that takes place against Black men and women in adulthood, begins during childhood and often within school walls. It is in this regard that we can see how racial-based police brutality

in adulthood is often a reflection of the discriminatory and punitive discipline practices experienced by Black students during childhood; as Love (2019) asserted, "schools are mirrors of our society," (p. 40). Therefore, just as police officers are meant to protect and serve, schools are supposed to serve as safe and healthy environments for learning. However, that is not the case for many Black students. In addition, when examining Love's (2019) assertion regarding schools being a reflection of our society, we must first acknowledge that the establishment of race is a socially constructed concept that uses racial categories to differentiate white communities from non-white and as a method to discriminate against African Americans (Decuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2014; Simson, 2013).

Once viewed through this lens, we can then see how race has been used as a tool to maintain systems of power and racially based discrepancies, thereby making race a sociohistorical phenomenon for communities of Color (Decuir-Gunby &Schutz, 2014). Meaning, although race is socially constructed and lacks a material reality, it still matters within and beyond educational contexts (Strunk & Betties, 2019). As Decuir-Gunby and Schutz (2014) posited, "race will continue to play an influential role in the teaching-learning process," (p. 244). Therefore, when we look at schools we should assume that race will also play a defining role in the experiences of Black students and students of Color. For instance, Skiba and Losen (2016) revealed that school discipline disparities have become a sociohistorical phenomenon for Black students, documenting that since the 1970s suspension rates have doubled for all racial and ethnic groups.

The phenomenon that race has created within school discipline practices has led to a dynamic gap in suspension rates between white students and students of Color. The discipline gap, as defined by Losen (2014) describes, "the high frequency with which we remove students from school for disciplinary reasons, and the large disparities in discipline exclusion that flow along the lines of race, gender, and disability status," (p. 1). Historically, Black students *are* the

students being removed at high rates, as evidenced by an extensive amount of educational psychology research that has centered race as a construct to explore the disparate variations and differences between Black students' exclusionary and punitive discipline outcomes compared to that of white students (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Gopalan & Nelson, 2019; Townsend-Walker, 2000). When examining explanations as to why Black students are overrepresented in school discipline disparities, psychological and ecological explanations include: low-income status, repeated academic/ achievement struggles, and higher levels of perceived difficulty and misconduct of Black students (Gregory et al., 2010); lack/level of parental involvement (Marcucci, 2020; McElderry & Cheng, 2014); and emotional/behavioral disorders (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006).

There is also research demonstrating the connection between school structure and support as explanations for racial discipline disparities. As Gregory et al. 's (2012) statewide analysis on 199 schools in Virginia maintained that Black students in schools characterized by higher levels of urbanicity and lower levels of academic expectations, care and support, had higher suspension rates compared to white students. However, it has been demonstrated that student and school demographic factors are not sufficient in explaining the gap, and that race is still a contributing factor in school discipline disparities (Gregory et al., 2010; Rocque, 2010; Skiba et. al., 2011). This is consistent with the work of abolitionist theorist and teacher Bettina Love (2019). She maintained that the very existence of racial disparities in school discipline practices, or in any sector of social life, is a representation of anti-Blackness and how the legacy of slavery, racial segregation, and racism is perpetuated structurally and systemically. Anti-Blackness, as defined by Love (2019), "is the social disregard for dark bodies and the denial of dark people's existence and humanity," (p. 14). In support of this, additional educational researchers like Carter et al. (2017), found that racial discipline disparities prevail due to patterns stemming from racial

segregation, implicit biases, microaggressions, and color-evasiveness. As a result, there is both a Black/white student-suspension gap and office discipline referral (ODR) gap (Gregory & Roberts, 2017).

According to a report conducted by Losen et al. (2015), the average suspension lasts 3.5 days, with suspension rates being three to four times higher at secondary grade level versus elementary grade levels, further indicating that 7.6% of elementary grade level Black students were suspended compared to 23.2% Black students at the secondary grade level. These numbers represent dangerous outcomes, as exclusionary discipline practices such as out of school suspension and expulsion, have been linked to lower levels of school engagement, achievement, behavior, and overall lower quality/perception of school climate (Skiba et al., 2014). In addition, all these factors have direct linkages to increased dropout rates, which adversely increases students' juvenile justice contact/involvement, known as the school-to-prison-pipeline (Skiba et al., 2014).

It appears that fostering school belonging and positive teacher-student relationships can be further developed by recognizing how school discipline policies and practices impact Black students (Gray et al., 2018). This is consistent with Bottiani et al.'s (2016) study, in which the authors conducted a multilevel latent variable approach on data that included demographic information on students who received one or more out-of-school suspensions during the 2011-2012 school year. Bottiani et al. (2016) utilized secondary analysis obtained from the 2012-2013 Maryland Safe & Supportive Schools School Climate Survey, which included measures on perceived equity, school belonging, adjustment problems, and demographic information in a total sample of 7,664 Black students and 12,662 white students across 58 Maryland high schools. Findings indicated that the Black students reported having a negative association with perceived equity, school belonging, and adjustment as it related to the Black-white suspension

gap. Bottiani et al. 's (2016) findings further demonstrate how racially disparate discipline practices negatively shape Black students' perceived level of school support and belonging.

Black Girls and School Discipline

And every time I've tried to be

What someone else thought of me

So caught up, I was unable to achieve

Lauryn Hill (1998)

In the above lyrics quoted from her song, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill,* Ms. Lauryn Hill, a Black woman, described her struggles with trying to live up to what others expected her to be and how in doing so, it negatively influenced her self-concept and ability to achieve on her own terms. As stated within her lyrics, it is also evident that Black women and girls both in and out of school walls are fighting against dominant narratives and perceptions of who and what we should be. This can be attributed to the fact that schools are often the site in which normative assumptions regarding racialized, classed, and gendered constructions of femininity and girlhood are (re)produced.

By positioning the behavior and femininity of white women and girls as the cultural universal, (Carter Andrews, Brown, Castro, and Id-Deen, 2019), and placing Black womanhood and girlhood as the doubly retracted other (Fordham, 1993), Black women and girls face oppressive social and behavioral expectations, due to both our racial and gender identity. In the context of school, there has been a connection between Black girls at the middle and high school grade levels and their increased risk for being suspended and receiving ODRs based on teachers' subjective examinations of their behavior (Morris & Perry, 2017; Townsend-Walker, 2020). However, most of the research concerning racial discipline disparities focuses primarily on the disciplinary experiences of Black boys (Ferguson, 2000; Howard, 2013; Lewis et al., 2010;

Monroe, 2006). This is because Black girls' experiences often become conflated with the experiences of both Black boys and white girls (Collins, 1990).

When this happens, the voices and schooling experiences of Black girls become overlooked and excluded (Walker, 2020), and white-normed constructions of femininity become the dominant way in which teachers, administrators, and other school officials respond to girls' behavior in schools. This is a prime illustration of how we as Black women and girls are often placed in vulnerable and disempowering spaces and become subjected to unfair and unrealistic white-normed perceptions and expectations of our behavior (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020). This forces us to become what Fordham (1993) termed, "culturally invisible," which happens when Black women are pressured to fit in by subscribing to narrow categorizations of white womanhood and are forced to choose "silence in exchange for success in the existing patriarchal structure" (Fordham, 1993).

While brining attention to white, patriarchal constructions of what it means to be feminine and/or a woman or girl, it is also critical to briefly highlight how the history of slavery and racism in America created the racial stereotypes and sexually exploitive depictions that continue to exist regarding Black women and girls (Donovan & Williams, 2002). Slavery worked to render the Black woman's body as inhuman by excluding our bodies from social and legal protection and invalidating us as members of "true" womanhood or humanhood (Battle, 2016). The racism and violence inherent in the treatment and perception of enslaved Black women created long-term derogatory and dehumanizing views of Black women and girls' behavior and sexuality, (Bell, 1992), resulting in the contemporary practice of upholding Black women and girls to white supremacist and patriarchal standards of physical beauty and behavior (Griffin, 1996).

This is consistent with scholars like Cornel West (1995) who provided descriptions of the

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oppressive images that dominate and dictate society's understanding of Black feminine identity. West (1995) stated that "through history, culture, and media Black women have been most often portrayed in some combination of three images: 1) as the highly maternal Mammies; 2) as threatening and aggressive Sapphires; and 3) as seductive Jezebels" (p.459). In addition to West's (1995) descriptions, Gines (2015) provided two contemporary stereotypical images, "the welfare mother (poor, working-class Black women) and the Black Lady (a middle-class image informed by Black respectability)" (p. 2343).

These historical and contemporary images follow Black women and girls through all aspects of social life, with a significant presence in school settings. Several studies have explored the ways in which Black girls' experiences with punitive school discipline result from discriminatory racialized and gendered stereotypes regarding their behavior (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2016; Townsend et al., 2010). Along with stereotypical images, implicit racial biases and colorism also play a role in discipline disparities among Black girls. For instance, Hunter (2016) found that darker-skinned Black girls were further subjected to discrimination regarding their behavior and as a result, were more likely to experience harsher disciplinary outcomes.

Black girls are also subjected to white, heteronormative assumptions regarding their gender identity and expression, leaving transgender and gender nonconforming Black girls to contend with an additional layer of behavioral bias and discrimination (Chimielewski et al., 2016; Morris, 2016). Thus, Black girls who identity as gender nonconforming or on the gender continuum are further subjected to a judgmental gaze (Morris, 2016). This also depicts how Black women and girls experience multiple layers and intersecting forms of racism and sexism (Crenshaw, 1991). Although gender nonconformity adds an extra oppressive layer to Black girls' school discipline experience, there is no hierarchy of oppressions (Morris, 2016). However, it is

important to highlight the multiple dimensions and layers of Black girls' identities in order to understand the complexities of gendered racism.

In addition, it is important to understand how systems of oppression, like racism and sexism shape Black girls' discipline experiences, as they offer a unique portrait of the gendered racism experienced by Black girls in schools (Ricks, 2014). For instance, Carter Andrews, Brown, Castro, and Id-Deen (2019) combined the theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Feminism and Black Feminist Epistemology to examine the racialized and gendered schooling experiences of Black girls in grades 9-12th, attending public schools located in a large urban, metropolitan area. Their study sought to answer two questions: "1) How do Black girls describe and understand their school experiences as racialized and gendered? 2) In what ways does a critical conversation space allow for Black girls' meaning making about their individual and collective schooling experiences?" (p. 2533). Study findings were categorized into five themes, however, four of themes focused specifically on the ways in which Black girls experienced racial and gender discrimination based on whiteness and normative perceptions about femininity: *Notions of Femininity and the Policing and Surveillance of Black Girl Bodies; Black Girls and (Anti)Intellectualism; Marginalization of Black Female Athletes; Black Girls in Relational Contexts; and Necessary Support Structures for Black Girls.*

The first theme, *Notions of Femininity and the Policing and Surveillance of Black Girl Bodies,* refers to Black girls being disciplined and punished for being perceived as being too loud or disruptive, which is representative of the Sapphire stereotype. Also recurrent in this theme, Black girls reported that they believed their teachers to be somewhat fearful of Black students, often resulting in teachers exercising more discipline and control over their behavior compared to their white counterparts. This theme is consistent with my story that I revealed in the introduction of this study. Just as these girls reported feelings and beliefs that their teachers

feared their Blackness, I also felt this burden as a high school student being falsely accused of having gang affiliation and realizing in that moment that the teacher had no evidence of such, other than my Blackness. Another example of the over-policing of Black girls' bodies was indicated in the girls' reports of disproportionately receiving dress code violations based on their natural body differences compared to white girls. As a result, the girls described feelings of being hypersexualized and adultifed. The second theme, *Black Girls and (Anti)Intellectualism,* refers to the perceived low academic expectations the girls described their teachers as having. The third theme, *Marginalization of Black Female Athletes,* refers to the girls' description of instances in which they were subjected to discriminatory behavior from their white teammates and/or school personnel. The last theme, *Black Girls in Relational Contexts,* refers to how the behavior of Black girls is constantly being upheld against white, normative assumptions and beliefs about what girlhood and femininity constitute, which disregards the significant the role that Blackness plays in creating Black girls' authentic form of gender and sexual identity expression in relation to self and others. As a result, the Black girls in this study struggled with many forms of racism and sexism and further revealed the multiple forms of oppressive barriers that Black girls must endure in schools.

Similarly, Monique Morris (2016) in her book, *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black girls in Schools*, observed how San Francisco Bay/Southern California public schools, juvenile detention centers, and the community at large, perpetuated and negotiated the criminalization of Black girls and increased their risk of confinement or as Morris (2016) described, their school-to-confinement pathways. Using critical narrative inquiry and phenomenological methods to explore and describe their educational, socialization, and familial experiences, Morris (2016) pointed out that Black girls are faced with a triple consciousness (race, gender, and class oppression). She also found that their triple consciousness and behavior is often used as a method

of (re)claiming power, space, and respect, thus serving as a survival technique. Morris (2016) further contended that since traditional and dominant perceptions of femininity lack the consideration and acknowledgement of varying narratives and perspectives of gender identity and expression, and oppressive experiences, Black girls' survival techniques become degraded and punished.

As Ricks (2014) asserted:

> Although Black girls have adopted coping and defense mechanisms to deal with gendered racism, these methods are often misinterpreted by teachers and school personnel as personality and/or cultural characteristics instead of responses to living with daily microaggressions (e.g., administrators, counselors, assessment personnel). (p.11)

Moreover, both teachers and administrators hold the potential and power to create connections that increase the positive educational experiences of Black girls (Rick, 2014) and eliminate the racial discipline gap (Gregory et al., 2016). However, such approaches must be addressed "through an emancipatory theoretical orientation," (Ricks, 2014, p. 15).

Impact of Exclusionary Discipline Practices on Black girls

Due to the assertive, independent, and emotionally resilient nature of Black girls, they are often perceived by teachers and peers as exhibiting elevated levels of relational and physical aggression (Putallaz et al., 2007), often resulting in more discipline sanctions among their peer group (Blake et al., 2011). Additionally, Crenshaw et al., (2015) argued that although Black boys and girls both experience racially disparate discipline measures, "Black girls face a statistically greater chance of suspension and expulsion compared to other students of the same gender," (p. 23). This perpetuates the criminalization of Black girls in and out of school settings (Morris, 2016). As Morris (2016) contended, "Black girls are 16 percent of the female student population, but nearly one-third of all girls referred to law enforcement and more than one-third of all female

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school-based arrests," (p. 3). Black girls are held to unreasonably high disciplinary standards and expectations for being perceived as more adult-like when compared to their white counterparts (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2017).

As mentioned earlier, this places Black girls in a vulnerable position to become targeted for simply engaging in behavior that is unique to their Blackness and girlhood. This notion coupled with the reality of harsh discipline policies enacted upon Black girls, reveal an "inconvenient truth" about schools, and demonstrate the way schools push Black girls out "psychologically and physically," (Evans-Winters, 2019, p.115). However, opportunities to empower and affirm Black girls in school spaces as opposed to relying on punitive measures do exist. However, they require educators to "honor the humanity and childhood of Black children," (McKinney de Royston et al., 2021, p. 72). Moreover, historical analysis of Black teachers revealed that these teachers excelled in attending to the developmental and emotional needs of Black students (Milner, 2020), and were committed to creating a caring climate for their students (Siddle-Walker, 2019). In this next section, particular attention is given to how Black women teachers have historically and contemporarily created a caring climate for their students.

Black Women Teachers

To fully grasp an understanding of Black women teachers, we must first situate and contextualize their educational experiences and paths to teaching within a historical context. Historically, Black teachers have been politically involved in the quest for equality and justice on behalf of the Black community (Dixson, 2003). During slavery, African Americans who were in pursuit of an education faced dangerous, life-threatening ramifications and were viewed as a threat to white slave owners and the existing plantation slavery (Webb, 2006). Despite their violent and inhumane circumstances, enslaved African Americans prevailed and made education fit their lives both within and outside of school, taking a 'hidden approach' to education

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(Gundaker, 2007). This literally meant learning in hidden, secret places, and within coded languages concealed within interactions of everyday life (Gundaker, 2007). Many Black women teachers during this time also identified as abolitionists and were deeply committed to the anti-slavery movement (Neal and Dunn, 2020).

Neal and Dunn (2020) maintained that historic Black women abolitionist teachers like Lily Ann Granderson, Mary Smith Blake, and Charlotte Forten, risked their lives for the advancement and wellness of Black children. In the same breath, Neal and Dunn (2020) also maintained that Black women have always "embodied a Black radical imagination," (p. 60). Keeping this in mind, Neal and Dunn (2020) maintained that we must lean on the works of revolutionary Black women abolitionists and ascribe to an abolitionist ethos and praxis that involves: "resolve, creativity, imagination, refusal, and liberation all rooted in radical love," (p.70).

This radical love and commitment to Black advancement was demonstrated in other early Black women educators. For instance, in the years following the Civil War, there was widespread opposition to African American children attending Southern schools, so notable African American women began to pave the way for African American children to receive a quality education. African American women such as Nannie Helen Burroughs, Mary McLeod Bethune, Anna Julia Cooper, and Lucy Diggs Slowe, all played pivotal roles in creating educational avenues for African American girls and women. Furthermore, these women also believed that a Black woman's receipt of a quality education elevated her position in society, and in turn, uplifted the entire African American community (Thomas & Jackson, 2007).

Moreover, since the post-Antebellum and Civil War era, African Americans have exuded a multidimensional approach to fighting and resisting various forms of racial oppression that involved persistent radical thought and action (Cha-Jua & Weems, 1994). Siddle Walker (2013)

also revealed that in the decades before *Brown,* Black educators were "visionaries and advocates for Black education in the years before the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)," (p. 208). Additionally, Black teachers' pedagogical styles mimicked the sociopolitical climate at that time, which meant teaching Black students self-advocacy strategies as a method of confronting and resisting oppression (Siddle Walker, 2013). Moreover, Siddle Walker's (2013) research documents the important historical characteristics of Black women teachers, as most of the research concerning Black women teachers is centered on their pre- and post-segregated schooling experiences (Foster, 1991; James-Galloway & Harris;Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014; Milner 2016; Oakley, Stowell, & Logan, 2009;Patterson, Mickelson, Hester, & Wyrick, 2011;Walker, 2001).

This line of inquiry is significant because it offers an understanding as to how the prevalence of racism and racial segregation in our society and schools shaped the ways in which Black women teachers have historically described and perceived their roles as teachers (Dingus, 2006). As George (2021) asserted, "segregated schooling is a particularly profound and timely demonstration of the persistence of systemic racism in education" (para. 10). This line of inquiry is also critical as it documents the historic pushout of Black teachers post-Brown, which has led to a continuing racial divide and gap within the teacher force (Milner, 2020). Moreover, research capturing the historical analyses of African American women teachers during Jim Crow de jure segregation, provides early demonstrations of culturally relevant pedagogy (James-Galloway & Harris, 2021).

As Roberts (2010) stated:

>Many of these teachers were noted for bringing unique culturally relevant pedagogical approaches to their classrooms in which they held unrelentingly high expectations, introduced socio-political critique, participated and lived in the surrounding community

and served as role models, intercessors, 'other mothers' and philanthropists for their

students. (p. 453)

Within culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP)-which emerged from Critical Race Theory (CRT), - a teachers' ability to connect with their students on a culturally, humanizing, and empowering level is emphasized (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1995) asserted that culturally relevant pedagogy involves three criteria: "(a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order," (p. 160). In culturally relevant teaching practices, the concept of care is also an important element. For instance, Howard's (2001) study found that African American students reported that a teachers' willingness to care and bond with them created an environment that was optimal for learning. Lastly, scholars have argued that Black women's history of culturally relevant teaching is informed by their race and gendered identity and is linked to Black women's political and emotional framework for teaching (Lane, 2018).

Black Women Teachers and their Discipline Practices

Milner (2020) revealed that during the immediate years pre-and post-Brown, discipline was conceptualized by Black teachers as a tool to support Black student learning and development as opposed to current discipline practices which are used as methods to punish and exclude students. For instance, in Michele Foster's (1997) book, *Black Teachers on Teaching,* her research participant Bernadine B. Morris, an elder Black woman teacher, who shared her early experiences with white teachers during the initial years of school integration in Virginia, stated:

Several times I had students who were acting up in the cafeteria, doing childlike things.

These teachers wanted to make a federal case of it. They would say something like, "He's

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still talking when I told him not to talk." Well, this is what children do. I would always

intervene and tell the teachers that I would take care of the problem. I had to do this,

otherwise the teachers would make a big case out of nothing and then the children would

get into trouble, be suspended, or expelled. (p. 59)

Ms. Bernadine Morris' observation of Black children being targeted and disciplined for simply

engaging in childlike behaviors, is consistent with more recent research that has documented

how Black women teachers often assume the responsibility of caring for and protecting Black

children from *racialized harm*, which "refers to the perpetual racism Black children encounter as

their Black bodies get racially perceived and interacted with in their day-to-day lives in and out

school" (McKinney de Royston et al., 2021, p. 70). In addition, Milner (2020) argued that

teachers during this time believed classroom discipline to be a necessary, collective part of

learning and that it was also a form of what Ladson-Billings (1995) has referred to as "good

teaching." Using Milner's (2020) examination of Black teachers' classroom discipline practices

to conceptualize discipline, discipline is then assumed to be an integral part of Black women

teachers' teaching and pedagogical practices.

Dixson (2003) contended that because African American women have been historically

involved in the political pursuit and struggle for equality and justice on behalf of their students

and community, African American women teachers often feel a sense of responsibility and

commitment towards African American children. Additionally, Dixson (2003) argued that there

is an implicit and explicit political aspect to African American women's teaching praxis. Using

Black Feminist Theory as a framework, Dixson's (2003) qualitative case study examined the life

histories of two African American women teachers, to understand how their raced, classed, and

gendered identities informed their pedagogical practices. Dixson (2003) identified five key

themes: *Teaching as a Lifestyle and a Public Service, Discipline as Expectations for Excellence, Teaching as Othermothering, Relationship Building, and Race, Class, and Gender Awareness.* Dixson (2003) argued that the fourth theme, *Relationship Building,* was a critical element within the two women's described pedagogy and revealed that it was an important element in creating a sense of trust and demonstrating a level of care among students, which made their discipline and expectations more effective (Dixon, 2003).

The concept of care among Black women teachers is also connected to more recent studies. Williams' (2018) study opens with the brief story of an African American teen girl, named Shakura, who was violently thrown from her classroom chair by a SRO, for refusing to put away her cell phone. Situating her story within the context of how Black students are over disciplined and criminalized in schools, Williams (2018) proposed that by gaining various understandings as to how a classroom culture of care is created, the strategies and techniques revealed by her participants could disrupt children from being violently mistreated and/or racially stereotyped. Williams (2018) examined the life histories of four African American middle-school level (grades 6th-8th) teachers, to gain insight as to how their familial and community experiences shaped their development and approach to creating caring classrooms for African American students. Findings revealed six themes, which offered a distinct framework of caring. The culmination of the themes suggested that the African American women teachers described caring for Black students as the process as serving as other-parenting or fictive kin, which involves demonstrating a classroom culture of care that extends beyond the classroom, and prioritizes community, relationship building, and racial pride and equity.

In addition, McKinney de Royston et al., (2021) drew upon theories of care, culturally relevant teaching, Black Feminist Thought, and employed a politicized care framework, which

involved four dimensions: political clarity, communal bonds, potential affirming, and developmentally appropriate. McKinney de Royston et al., (2021) focused specifically on the dimension of political clarity to examine its influence on Black teachers' development of care or caring with Black students. Within the dimension of politicized clarity, the definition and practice of caring extends beyond notions related to nurturing and involves Black teachers' sociopolitical consciousness and commitment to protecting Black children from racialized harm, linking together notions of nurturing and protecting (McKinney de Royston et al., 2021). Based on their interviews with eight Black teachers across four school sites, which were all comprised of a predominantly Black student body, McKinney de Royston et al. (2021) contended that the Black teachers demonstrated a consciousness of political clarity located around the themes: *Worthy of Protection via Caring Relationships, Alternative Disciplinary Views and Practices as Protection, and Other Interpersonal and Institutional mechanisms.* The theme *Alternative Disciplinary Views and Practices as Protection*, offered descriptions of alternative discipline policies and provided instances in which both Black teachers and administrators in their focal schools, demonstrated and described their efforts to protect and not penalize their Black students for (mis)behaving. For example, one Black woman teacher described how when one of her students misbehaves, she avoids using chastising or belittling language and instead chooses to foreground her response in her belief and potential for them to behave better- demonstrating a conscious protection of her Black students.

Lastly, Bartell (2011) maintained that an effective teacher-student relationship is demonstrative of a caring teacher that cares with awareness regarding the racial, cultural, political, and academic lives of their students. Additionally, Bartell (2011) contended that "caring teachers must also work to confront unequal power relations *within* their classrooms, working to

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neutralize status differences so that all students can achieve," (p. 63). However, Black women teachers face racism and sexism in the context of schooling that positions them to contend with power relations within their profession, in addition to the classroom. For example, Nyachae (2016) contended that although newer generations of Black women teachers may embody a Black consciousness, and may use that knowledge to guide their instruction, "their childhood schooling experiences, teacher preparation programmes, the school climate in which they teach, and competing neo-liberal educational agendas effect what curriculum they create for Black girls in contradictory ways," (p.787). Meaning, Black women teachers who choose to embrace their Afro-centric identities have to also navigate the constraints and challenges of gendered racism experienced in spaces dominated by whiteness.

Theoretical Frameworks

Black Feminist Thought (Black feminism)

Collins (1996) applied the concept of Pearl Cleage's (1993) definition of feminism to evoke her own interpretation of what feminism constitutes, which Collins (1996) described as "both an ideology and a global political movement that confronts sexism, a social relationship in which males as a group have authority over females as a group," (p. 12). When examining the experiences of Black women teachers, it is important to employ a critical theoretical framework that is designed specifically by and for Black women, that confronts both racism and sexism. According to Patricia Hill-Collins, Black feminist thought specializes in creating and rearticulating the distinctive, self-defined standpoints of African American women that reflect special perspectives on the self, family, and society (Collins, 1989; Collins, 1986). Additionally, Few (2007) asserted, "Black feminism is a framework deeply rooted in history and culture to inform a collective knowledge, a Black consciousness," (p.467).

Collins (1986) outlined three elements that characterize Black feminist thought: (a) the

importance of self-definition and self-valuation, which both work to challenge and reframe externally defined stereotypes of Black womanhood, respectively; (b) the ability to bring attention to the political reality of Black women, by acknowledging the interlocking systems of race, class, and gender oppression; and (c) the significance of African American women's culture, which is guided by socially-constructed frames of reference and historically-specific political economies. Therefore, Black Feminist Thought is a form of resistance to the center's way of knowing and thinking, and an epistemological standpoint that allows African American women to develop an African-centered worldview or paradigm that resonates spiritually, culturally, and intellectually with one's work (Dillard, 2006).

As examined by Pratt-Clarke (2012), Black feminist thought originated from Black grassroots activism, social sciences, and the humanities. Revolutionary Black women activists and abolitionists such as, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frances E. W. Harper, Ida B. Wells Barnett, and Mary Church Terrell, are early representations of a Black feminist presence, as they demonstrated the necessity of acknowledging both the racism and sexism inherent in Black women's lives (Combahee River Collective, 1983). Due to the sociohistorical and political realities of Black women's lives, race, class, and gender oppression serves as a constant existence in our lives (Combahee River Collective, 1983). Although the concept of feminism had been an inevitable part of our lives as Black women, Hudson-Weems (2019) maintained that feminism emerged from the Women's Suffrage Movement and was designed specifically for and by liberal white women. This is because mainstream feminist epistemologies are essentialist in nature and fail to account for the socio-historical and political experiences and narratives of Black women (Rodgers, 2017).

However, Collins (1996) maintained that "inserting the adjective "Black" challenges the assumed whiteness of feminism and disrupts the false universal of this term for both white and

Black women," (p. 13). Moreover, it is critical that Black women have an analytical frame that views their experiences as normative, and not as a variation of white women's behavior (Collins, 1990), which is how traditional feminist epistemologies are positioned. Thus, Black feminist thought offers a distinct standpoint of Black women who occupy an outsider-within status, particularly within academic settings, as this marginal status provides a distinct analysis of race, class, and gender.

Womanism

Black feminism is also used interchangeably with the term womanism (Collins, 1996). Womanism derived from Alice Walker's (1983) term 'womanist,' as Collins (1996) insisted that it is used to represent the "cultural, historical, and political positionality of African American women, a group that has experienced slavery, segregation, sexism, and classism for most of its history in the U.S" (p. 72). In addition, Walker's (1983) term originated from the dialect of Southern Black women who used the term 'womanish' to refer to Black girls who were attending to grown women business (Collins, 1996). As a Southern Black woman, I can attest to hearing womanish or different variations of the term, which included '-omish' or '-oman.' My maternal great grandmother Ms. Mary Emma Thomas (b. 1926) and Grandmother Mrs. Maxine Williams (b. 1950) have used and continue to use those terms to refer to young Black girls who exemplify womanhood or engage in behaviors that are deemed too womanly or 'grown' for their age. I, myself, was even referred to as being womanish, -omish, or -oman a few times during my childhood.

Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) identified three central points that support womanism: (a) oppression as an interlocking system; (b) the significance of individual empowerment in combination with collective action; and (c) the aspect of humanism. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) also used Walker's (1983) womanist concept to examine the pedagogy of Black women teachers.

Due to Black women teachers' cultural and historical legacies, Beauboeuf-Lafontant's (2002) study suggested that their form of care is demonstrative of a womanist model of caring, which is defined by three characteristics (a) an embrace of the maternal, (b) political clarity, and (c) an ethic of risk.

Critical Race Feminism

Critical race feminism's (CRF) disciplinary birthplace emerged from critical race theory (CRT) and critical legal studies (CLS). Critical race theory is characterized by a few specific insights and observations or tenets, such as racism being constituted as normal/notions of color evasiveness, interest convergence theories, critiques of liberalism, and the art of storytelling within historical contexts (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Taylor et al., 2009). CRF incorporates the same tenets as CRT, however, it is centralized in feminist theory.

As Berry (2014) asserted:

> Critical Race Feminism (CRF) is a feminist perspective of critical race theory. As an outgrowth of critical legal studies and critical race theory, CRF acknowledges, accepts and addresses my Black experiences as different from those of my brothers (critical race theory) and my womanhood as different from those of my sisters (feminist theory). (p. 6)

Therefore, anti-essentialism/intersectionality, normalization and ordinariness of race and racism, and counter-storytelling are key elements in CRF (Berry, 2014).

1. *Anti-essentialism/Intersectionality*: This element of CRF works to dismantle the belief that all women's experiences are monolithic and advocates for the application of intersectionality. Essentialism is the notion that a single experience can be extracted from any member of a group as a stable identity, not accounting for time, space, and different historical, social, political, and personal contexts. This separable perspective of identity disregards the importance that multiple identities such as race, class, gender, and sexual

orientation play in oppressive experiences of People of Color, and more specifically

Women of Color (Grillo,1995).

2. *Normalization and Ordinariness of Race and Racism/Notions of Color-Evasiveness*:

    Within this element, race and racism are all-encompassing and omnipresent, resulting in

    the normalization or ordinariness of oppressive systems that affect Black and People of

    Color in many ways. This allows for various forms of 'white privilege' located in the

    forms of political, economic, and educational advantages to become invisible and

    incomprehensible for white members of society (Taylor et al., 2009).

3. *Counter- Storytelling/Counter-Narratives*: This element refers to the importance of

    giving Black and People of Color a platform and opportunity to use storytelling as a

    method and tool to 'name their own reality' by exposing dominant, white perspectives

    that perpetuate racial stereotypes and white, normative ways of being (Decuir & Dixson,

    2004).

Moreover, mainstream feminist epistemologies tend to focus on the education of white girls and

women and raced-based epistemologies tend to be consumed with the educational barriers

negatively effecting Black boys, leaving the educational needs of Black girls neglected (Evans-

Winters, 2005). Employing CRF as a framework for understanding school discipline

experiences among girls of color also addresses the intersecting nature of race, class, and gender,

as well as other marginal identities, to reveal discriminatory discipline practices (Hines-Datiri &

Carter Andrews, 2017).

In addition, Hines-Datiri and Carter and Andrews (2017) posited:

> Given the ways in which Black girls have been subjected to punitive school policies and
>
> the distinctly gendered dynamics of zero tolerance environments, CRF proves useful as a
>
> tool for examining Black girls' schooling experiences and identity development and

performance in the school world. (p.11)

This study incorporated the usage of Black feminist thought (Black feminism) and womanism as theoretical frameworks to help contextualize and situate the experiences and practices of Black women teachers, and critical race feminism (CRF) to frame the school discipline experiences of Black girls. There are other related theoretical frameworks that are also appropriate for this study. Africana womanism, a term coined by Clenora Hudson-Weems, uses the term *Africana* to emphasize the distinct land-based ancestral, and cultural identity of the Africana/African American woman, and *womanism,* in opposition to the term feminism or female, to clarify that the woman is a member of the human race, and not a member of any other animal or plant kingdom, (Hudson-Weems, 2019). Intersectionality would also be considered an appropriate theoretical framework, in that it centralizes how the experiences of Women of Color are created by interlocking systems of racism and sexism (Crenshaw, 1991). However, since the narratives of this study focused on that of Black women teachers, I chose to use Black feminism and womanism, because as Collins (1996) stated, "both support a common agenda of Black women's self-definition and self-determination," (p. 10).

Black feminism and Black Women Teachers

As a critical social theory, Black feminist thought (BFT) prioritizes the emancipatory function of knowledge (Collins, 1990; Leonardo, 2004), meaning, the knowledge and consciousness of Black women operates as a platform to challenge intersecting systems of power and domination which are driven by race, gender, and social class constructs (Collins, 2013). Therefore, Black feminist thought offers a distinct standpoint of Black women who occupy an outsider-within status, particularly within academic settings, as this marginal status provides a distinct analysis of race, class, and gender. Because this study focused on the schooling and educational experiences of Black women and girls, I knew that it would be necessary to apply

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Black feminism-womanism as a theoretical construct to demonstrate how we come to define and describe our experiences. In addition, as a Black woman who was conducting research with other Black women, it was critical that I employed a paradigm that was rooted in the distinctive, self-defined standpoints of African American women (Collins, 1986;1989) and that resonated spiritually, culturally, and intellectually with my work (Dillard, 2006).

Originating from grassroots activism (Pratt-Clarke, 2012), Black feminism is regarded as a political movement and when applied as a methodology, it highlights a particular focus on the economic, political, and social injustices experienced by Black women (Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005). Black feminist thought is also viewed as an Afrocentric feminist epistemology (Collins, 2003). Epistemology can be described as the way we construct and understand our system of beliefs or worldview and how we communicate that with others. Because of Black women's collective and social location of occupying the edges of society, our worldview and means of sharing our experiences and stories are built upon our desire to (re) frame, and resist against dominantly held narratives (Collins, 1986).

For instance, the importance of self-definition and self-valuation was explored in Gines' (2015) study, in which she maintained that a Black feminist standpoint epistemology, as it relates to Black women's self-definition holds power and supports the agency of Black women. Gines (2015) further contended that through her knowledge of self-definition, she was able to recognize:

Controlling images like the mammy (the Black mother figure in white homes), the matriarch (the Black mother figure in Black homes), the welfare mother (poor, working-class Black women) and the Black Lady (a middle-class image informed by Black respectability), and finally the jezebel (the hypersexualized Black woman). (p. 2343)

Therefore, this study was rooted in BFT's first and primary component, which is characterized as Black women's importance of self-definition and self-valuation, which both work to challenge and

reframe externally defined stereotypes of Black womanhood, respectively, (Collins, 1986). Additionally, Black women's self-defined standpoint reflects an alternative, subjugated form of knowledge, which is often expressed in alternative ways, either through creative expression, dialogue, and/or behavior (Collins, 2003). So, music, song lyrics, poetry, dance, and oral narratives stemming from Black culture all tell a story and can be used as a vehicle for understanding the ways in which Black women create and express our various forms of knowledge and experiences (Evans-Winters, 2019).

It is within this element of Black feminist thought that I was led to utilize narrative inquiry or storytelling as a methodological approach for this study. This method of inquiry is not only culturally aligned with Black women's ways of sharing their knowledge and experiences (Evans-Winters, 2019), but it is methodologically aligned with critical theory paradigms, as Guba and Lincoln (1994) posited that within critical theory paradigms, methods of inquiry or techniques used to understand the perspectives and experiences of participants are dialogical/dialectical. Furthermore, by examining how Black women teachers defined and described themselves, I was able to examine how their self-defined identity influenced their interactions with Black girls.

I also focused upon Black feminism's concept of African American culture, and how it influenced the practices of Black women teachers. Within the element of African American women's culture, an ethic of caring is central to the knowledge validation process (Collins, 2003). An ethic of caring is highlighted by three components: (a) individual uniqueness or African humanism; (b) an appreciation for emotions and personal expression in all forms of dialogue and communication, and (c) developing the capacity for empathy. Furthermore, an ethic and expression of caring is witnessed throughout every aspect of African American culture, and is evident within Black churches, music, and other social interactions (Collins, 2003). Thus, this element of Black feminism helped me to understand how the Black women teachers in this study culturally

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connected and communicated with their Black girls from a place of empathy and care.

Lastly, in using womanism as an additional framework to explore the school discipline practices of Black women teachers, I was able to emphasize the emancipatory and liberatory power of Black women's narrative voice. For instance, each teacher-participants' narrative also includes a title that speaks to their unique personality or individuality as Black women teachers. However, their individual narratives and names are also representative of the collective. Womanism was also a necessary and relevant framework to exploring my research questions on womanist ethic of caring, due to an ethic of caring being central to the knowledge validation process of African Americans (Collins, 2003). Moreover, as a Black woman researcher examining the narratives of Black women teachers, it was critical that I used a framework that allowed for the appreciation of emotion and empathy throughout the inquiry process (Collins, 2003). As Evans-Winters (2019) maintained, "Scholars who embrace the tenets of Black feminism have also embraced this intellectual challenge of keeping a strong presence of emotional investment visible" (p. 23).

Chapter Summary

Since the 1970s it has been documented that suspension rates have doubled for all racial and ethnic groups and is particularly evident as it relates to the schooling experiences of Black students. A brief historical analysis on the history of school discipline revealed that policies and codes of conduct were created to reflect white, normative assumptions regarding behavior, resulting in a profound racial discipline gap between Black and white students. This racial discipline gap has been explored extensively as it relates to the school discipline outcomes of Black boys, and in doing so, the experiences of Black girls have become hidden and neglected. As we look to the many Black women academics and scholars whose research centers the discipline experiences of Black girls, an unfortunate portrait is revealed that demonstrates the

ways in which Black girls are pushed out of schools both psychologically and physically.

However, as we look to the practices of Black teachers, and in particular Black women teachers, their discipline practices become recognized as a tool to nurture and support the learning experiences of Black girls and students. Additionally, Black feminism-womanism provides the theoretical frame to support and validate Black women's self-defined knowledge standpoints. This theoretical framework was critical to this study, as it centralized the importance in understanding the ways in which Black women story their lives and experiences. Black feminism-womanism serves as a powerful theoretical framework in exploring Black women teachers' discipline practices, in that it values the presence of empathy and emotions. In the next chapter, I will discuss the overall purpose and research design of this study, and how I intend to center the narratives and perspectives of Black women teachers.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Purpose

Dear Black woman:

I know how exhausted you may feel from having to code-switch and make adjustments to who you are to make everyone else around you feel comfortable. I know how frustrating and infuriating it feels to have your tone of voice, behavior, dress, hair, etc. picked apart and scrutinized, while white women continuously express themselves freely and walk away unscathed.

The world may gaslight us and try to push the narrative that we're too much to consume, but that's because they don't care to understand our story or our history which is filled with both struggles and triumphs. They don't care to understand how we use the same energy that was used to push us to the margins, as fuel to reclaim the center and other spaces we rightfully belong in. And they definitely don't care to understand the double fight and fire that we as Black women must have in order to reclaim those very same spaces. However, we do. And in order to continue reclaiming those spaces, we must not 'water down' or hide who we are but make everyone else see that WE are the force to be reckoned with. Remember, we have a whole legacy of warriors and fighters supporting us. So, let's affirm that we will be fearless and unapologetic when it comes to expressing who we are. #Nomorewaterinourcoffee. (Jas, 2022)

This excerpt was from my Instagram account, which is a personal blog that was created to empower and affirm Black women and women of Color as we navigate and experience various facets of life. This message above was posted to encourage and affirm to Black women that our culture, and ways of being *matter*. And that although we have been taught to assimilate and 'tone-down' parts of ourselves to make others feel comfortable, our unique way of expressing and communicating ourselves is essential to who we are as a people and community. #Nomorewaterinourcoffee was a call to action for Black women to own our stories and the parts of ourselves we have been taught to conceal. Therefore, I decided to bring those same sentiments to this study, meaning that it was critical that I combined theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches that were culturally authentic and relevant to the way Black girlhood and womanhood are experienced and expressed. In addition, #nomorewaterinourcoffee was a frame of reference to indicate that 'water' or white, normative

frames of being and seeing, do not belong in our 'coffee' or Black ways of communicating and expressing ourselves as Black women. No other race of women has experienced the gendered racism and dehumanization that Black women historically and contemporarily face, so our knowledge and ways of being are often misunderstood and dismissed. This positions our stories as subjugated forms of knowledge (Collins, 1986) or knowledge that is met with disbelief and disapproval by those outside of our culture. In addition, the knowledge of Black women is considered a subjugated form of knowledge because we as a subordinated and marginalized group, have always had to use alternative ways to articulate and validate our own self-definitions and self-evaluations, which are divergent from traditional, white male epistemologies (Collins, 1990). Due to this, we must fight twice as hard for our stories and realities to be privileged and recognized.

Phillips and McCaskill (1995) maintained that:

> White men have had the luxury of knowing that they are making history. All the history books-the histories of every discipline-attest to this. Black women, on the other hand, have had to construct this knowledge outside the traditional locale of knowledge validation, that is, outside the academy. (p.1008)

In this excerpt, authors Phillips and McCaskill (1995), bring attention to how Black women, due to our socio-historical and cultural situatedness, have had to generate our own interpretive framework that is counter to white, traditional knowledge standpoints. In addition, the field of teaching has become a highly feminized profession, characterized by racial and gendered norms of what good women/teachers should demonstrate (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005). My goal was to provide a counter to that narrative by centering Black women teachers as orchestrators of their own narratives and experiences, by revealing the creative and unique ways we story our lives and experiences.

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to employ Toliver's (2021) Endarkened Storywork as a methodology to honor and center the way Black women teachers self-define and describe their discipline practices with Black girls. The secondary purpose of this study was to also add to the minimal research written by and for Black women that centers the narratives of Black women's teaching and discipline practices with Black girls. To do so, I employed Beauboeuf-Lafontant's (2002) definition of womanist caring (embrace the maternal/othermothering, political clarity, and an ethic of risk) informed by the tenets of Black feminism-womanism to mobilize the experiences and disciplinary perspectives of Black women teachers.. The following research questions guided my narrative inquiry process:

1. In what ways do Black women teachers embody a Womanist Ethic of Care as it relates to their described discipline practices? Specifically, how do Black women teachers embrace the maternal/othermothering, express political clarity, and engage in an ethic of risk in their discipline practices with Black girls?

2. How does Black women teachers' embodiment of a womanist ethic of care contribute to discipline strategies and practices that are beneficial to Black girls' learning and development? (Milner, 2020).

Conceptual Framework

The concept of care within Black women teachers' discipline practices struck me as an intriguing concept to explore due to my own experiences with Black women teachers. I attended a predominantly white school district, in which most of my teachers were white; however, I can attest to having quite a few Black women teachers who demonstrated a level of care and compassion within their teaching and disciplining practices. For instance, my experiences with Black women teachers were characterized by women who were authoritative and firm, yet indicative of the pedagogical style that Ware (2006) referred to as the 'warm demander.'

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Moreover, it was my past experiences with Black women teachers during my K-12 schooling years, coupled with the tenets of Black feminism, that led me discover the concept of care and how it is foundational in the way Black women teachers academically othermother their Black girl students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Greene, 2020). This aspect of Black women's pedagogy was central to this study, as it is aligned with Black women's self-defined Afrocentric perceptions of care (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002) and effective classroom discipline practices (Dixson, 2003). Therefore, Beauboeuf-Lafontant's (2002) definition of womanist caring informed by the tenets of Black feminist thought and womanism, shaped the foundation of my study.

Beauboeuf-Lafontant's (2002) definition of womanist caring is characterized by:

1. *Embrace of the Maternal*. Case (1997) defined othermothering/community mothering as "African American women's maternal assistance offered to the children of blood mothers within the African American community," (p. 25). Othermothering activities include attending to the psychoeducational needs of African American children and enacting clear-sighted attachment via compassion and empathy (Case, 1997). Actions demonstrative of empathy are also critical within the mother-daughter relationship (Case, 1997). Daughtering is also an important element of care, as it will influence the way I, and Black women teachers will begin to contextualize and share our experiences as prior Black girl students and with current Black girl students (Evans-Winters, 2019).

2. *Political Clarity*. Political clarity is another important characteristic of womanist caring and also deeply intertwined with embracing the maternal (Cozart & Gordon, 2006). Political clarity is one of four dimensions of politicized care, which is a framework that is rooted in an educators' ability to enact a form of care that centers the sociopolitical contexts of their students (Watson, 2018). McKinney de Royston et al. (2020) defined

political clarity as "an educator's sociopolitical consciousness about the historical and institutional nature of oppression-from systemic acts of racialized violence to microaggressions that frequently shape Black students' lived experiences in and out of school," (p. 75). This component of womanist caring is important because it represents the importance of love, spirituality, and humanism in the teacher-student relationship (Watson, 2018).

3. *Ethic of Risk.* Within this element, Cozart and Gordon (2006) contended that "an ethic of risk is about understanding the obligation to change schools even when there is no guarantee of success," (p.13). In addition, an ethic of risk is important because it encourages teachers to view issues at a public/politicized level and to maintain their efforts even amid frustration (Cozart & Gordon, 2006). Therefore, Black women teachers who are committed to engaging in an ethic of risk, believe that maintaining racial and social justice within schools is a collective and collaborative commitment, and that all educators should assume mutual authority or responsibility for all children, no matter how "difficult" or "easy" of a student you perceive them to be (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). Lastly, Black women teachers who engage in an ethic of risk "view teaching and change as an internal process," (p. 82) and emphasize the importance of self-change and humility (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002).

It was important to utilize a womanist ethic of care, because of its roots and linkages to Black/Afrocentric traditions, as traditional, dominant theories of caring fail to acknowledge the inherent whiteness of their political and cultural assumptions (Thompson, 1998). Thus, an ethic of care rooted in Black feminist-womanist traditions has historically acknowledged the moral relevance of the situation, a pragmatic orientation toward survival, a Black standpoint, and the moral power of narrative (Thompson, 1998). Thus, a womanist ethic of caring is deeply

intertwined and connected to BFT and womanism and is methodologically congruent with

Black cultural ways of being and knowing (Toliver, 2021).

The Importance of Storytelling

Carter-Black (2007) maintained, "storytelling is a universal experience shared by every

social group," (p. 32). In addition, narratives or stories are evidenced in everyday life contexts,

and critical to how we and particularly those of us of African descent communicate with each

other. And as it relates to research, the process of depicting or structuring our experiences into

stories is central to qualitative research (Banks-Wallace, 2002). Storytelling also provides the

foundation for intercultural exchanges and learning experiences to take place (Carter-Black,

2007). For instance, Lawrence and Paige (2016) asserted that storytelling is a natural way to tap

into and connect theory to the real-life experiences of adult learners. For example, a Black

student or student of Color sharing their personal experiences and encounters with racial

stereotypes with their peers can lead to more of a transformational and active understanding of

racial stereotypes, as opposed to passively absorbing the information from texts (Lawrence &

Paige, 2016).

When it comes to the language and cultural practices of Black and Indigenous people, our

narrative, or the sharing of our knowledge and experiences through stories, is regarded as an

important legacy and practice within our communities (Banks-Wallace, 2002). In fact, Lawrence

and Paige (2016) contended, "storytelling has been a part of all Indigenous cultures since the first

humans inhabited the earth," (p.64). Within Indigenous cultures, storytelling serves as a means

and method to passing along and promoting communal connectedness and empowerment

(Lawrence & Paige, 2016). Lawrence and Paige (2016) also revealed that Native traditions of

storytelling privileged the timing and season that storytelling takes place and promoted the belief

that stories were to only be shared during winter months or "between the first and last frost," (p.

64). This was also done to preserve and protect human and earthly life (Lawrence & Paige, 2016).

This preservation and protection of life is also evident within African American traditions of storytelling, as Banks-Wallace (2002) maintained that "stories have played a critical role in the survival of African Americans," (p. 412). According to Baker-Bell (2017), as it relates to the literary practices of African American women, "storytelling reflects Black women's multiple consciousness and is one of the most powerful language and literacy practices that Black women possess," (p. 532). In addition, Black feminist-womanist stories privilege the way Black women exist and resist within this world (Baker-Bell, 2017). For example, the power of Black feminist-womanist storytelling is evident within Black women's literary works and documentary films such as former First Lady Michelle Obama's (2020) memoir *Becoming* and Ava DuVernay's documentary film and adaptation of Alice Walker's *In Our Mothers' Gardens* (2021). It is through these documented and visual representations that we gain further insight as to how Black women story our lives. As both aforementioned documentaries highlight and centralize the complex experiences of Black women, with topics ranging from the triumphs and trials experienced during the girlhood and womanhood of a former first lady to global perspectives and self-definitions of motherhood and self-care, respectively.

Thus, storytelling for Black and Indigenous cultures is also a method of resisting and opposing dominant narratives that can be told and shared as counter-stories, or within visual and embodied ways, such as dramatizations, dance, autoethnographic monologues, and visual art and sculptures (Lawrence & Paige, 2016). Stories can also be shared digitally and via technology (Lawrence & Paige, 2016). It is evident that stories can be told through many different mediums, however, no matter the method or expression that stories are told, "storytelling is a holistic process that engages the heart, body, and spirit along with the mind," (Lawrence &Paige, 2016,

p. 65). Thus, storytelling is regarded as sacred work, and is about promoting healing and nurturing (Banks-Wallace, 2002). Moreover, the narrative voice or the art of storytelling is viewed as a creative and divine act within African and African American traditions and should be the preferred method within Black feminist research (Evans-Winters, 2019).

Endarkened Storywork as Methodology

Toliver (2021) maintained that Black centered research should "honor the storied traditions of Black people," (p. xv), and proposed Endarkened Storywork as a novel method to honoring the epistemological stances of Black people. When it comes to honoring the knowledge of Black women, stories that are rooted in a Black feminist-womanist standpoint are necessary to understanding the positioning and conditioning of Black women, as they signify the importance of affirming and asserting the voice and narratives of Black women and girls (Gibbs Grey & Harrison, 2020). According to Toliver (2021), Endarkened Storywork is derived from an endarkened feminist epistemology (EFE), Indigenous Storywork (ISW), and Afrofuturism. An endarkened feminist epistemology, as defined by Okpalaoka and Dillard (2003), "articulates how reality is known when based in the historical roots of global Black feminist thought and when understood within the context of reciprocity and relationship," (p. 65). In using an endarkened feminist epistemology as a frame for understanding the context of wisdom, Okpalaoka and Dillard (2003) identified four components of wisdom: (1) naming, which emphasizes the need to self-define and articulate your reality; (2) telling healing stories, by showing up and being fully present in every space you occupy; (3) listening and connecting with spirit, which means giving voice to the things you feel via emotions and spirit; and (4) relating within and beyond a cultural community, which signifies the importance of surviving psychic assaults through relationship building and dialogues about race and beyond, respectively.

Thus, the process of sharing lessons and experiences itself becomes a form of collective

wisdom shared among Black women (Okpalaoka & Dillard's, 2003). In addition to Okpalaoka and Dillard's (2003) definition, Toliver (2021) posited that EFE refuses objectivity and prioritizes subjectivity, responsibility, and spirit, and allows for alternative ways of knowing that are missing in "hegemonic norms of reporting," (p. xvii). Moreover, an endarkened feminist epistemology is a modernist approach to understanding the stories of Black women- that honors our fragmented or subjugated standpoints as a method to constructing multidimensional and multilayered forms of knowledge (Hurtado, 2003).

Indigenous Storywork (ISW) is the next element within Endarkened Storywork and is regarded as a methodology that centers the practices of Indigenous or Native storytelling, and prioritizes research that allows space for the spiritual, communal, and self-work to enter the storying process. Within this regard, ISW privileges the use of pronouns we and our to denote the collective is part of the storying and research process (Toliver, 2021), and that the telling of stories are a method of providing teachable and learning moments (Lawrence & Paige, 2016). This positions ISW as sacred work, and as a method of connecting the past and present with the future (Toliver, 2021). The third component of Toliver's (2021) Endarkened Storywork methodology involves Afrofuturism.

Toliver (2021) defined Afrofuturism as:

> A cultural aesthetic in which Black authors create speculative texts that center Black characters in an effort to reclaim and recover the past, counter negative and elevate positive realities that exist in the present, and create new possibilities for the future. (p. xxi)

Afrofuturism also involves the incorporation of Afrofuturistic technologies. For instance, Toliver (2021) uses the story of Anansi to demonstrate how practices such as "literacy, spirituality, language, trickery, coding, communal connection, intergenerational links, dance, hope,

imagination, and joy," can all be classified as Afrofuturistic practices (xxii). Thus, Afrofuturism can be used by Black women and girls as a technique to (re)define our past and present lives, and also as a method to (re)imagine our hopeful futures (Toliver & Gilliam, 2021). Moreover, Toliver's (2021) Endarkened Storywork is a methodology informed by Black feminist-womanist epistemologies, which is central to Black feminist-womanist forms of storytelling (Baker-Bell, 2017).

In conclusion, Endarkened Storywork was an appropriate and fitting methodology for this study because it was culturally relevant and authentic to how Black women story our lives and experiences. It was also appropriate for this study, because as Black women, we have indeed experienced varying forms of racist, sexist, classist, and anti-Black encounters, but Endarkened Storywork "doesn't require us to focus upon it," (Toliver, 2021, p. xix). I was also drawn to this narrative approach because it "does not embrace the rigidity of a fixed set of principles or beliefs," (Toliver, 2021, p. xxx). Instead, it honors the multiple voices and storying formats of Black people and makes space for multiple forms of creative storytelling practices to take place.

Therefore, Endarkened Storywork allowed me to take on my own form of storytelling that was informed by Black feminist-womanist methods which "weaves together autoethnography, the African American female language and literacy tradition, Black feminist/womanist theories, and storytelling," (Baker-Bell, 2017, p. 531). Moreover, Endarkened Storywork as a methodology was critical to this study because it emphasized the importance of (re)membering within the research process (Toliver, 2021). (Re)membering involves a) Black women who (re)search (re)member, even if others do not, b) Black women who (re)search also (re)cognize divine purpose, c) Black women who (re)search also make room for the spirit, and d) Black women who (re)search help others begin their own (re)search (Dillard and Neal, 2021). Lastly, the process of (re)membering was not only critical to my methodological choice, but it was also essential to my positionality and

data representation regarding this study.

Positionality Statement

I identify as a Black/ African American woman. I am also a Christian affiliated, cisgender woman who was raised in the Southern U.S., from which the term womanish originated from. Although I self-define as being affiliated with Christianity, when I mention the word prayer, I pray from a place of spirituality. Within my study, spirituality is conceptualized as, "1) connection to self, 2) connection to others, and 3) connection to nature and a Higher Power," (Fields-Smith, 2020, p. 31). Meaning, I am open to multiple truths, and understand spirituality as "religiously untethered," (Zang, 2012, as cited in Fields-Smith, 2020, p. 31).

Additionally, I stem from a lineage of Southern Black women, who value education, as well as the role of mother-wit, or the spiritual wisdom and knowledge that African American women have developed overtime due to our sociopolitical, historical, and cultural positioning. Or as Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) maintained "a group that has experienced slavery, segregation, sexism, and classism for most of its history in the U.S.," (p.72). I also identify as a doctoral student who attends a predominantly white institution (PWI) and an emerging educational psychologist and scholar. I believe that my race, gender, and social positioning is central to my overall identity and experiences. Thus, this research served as a coping mechanism from the racial battle fatigue I've experienced as a Black woman at a PWI as well as in K-12 spaces. As Collins (1990) contended, "For Black women who are agents of knowledge within academia, the marginality that accompanies outsider-within status can be the source of both frustration and creativity," (p. 332-333).

Therefore, I approached this study with both a sense of frustration and creativity. I had the need and want to be revitalized through the narratives and experiences of Black women teachers. Their narratives in and of themselves conducted the racial uplift work that myself and

other Black women and Black girls are continuously seeking. I also approached the research process as both the researcher and student, seeking both inspiration and new perspectives that my informants and I co-created. As a Black feminist researcher, I privileged the multiple forms of Black womanhood and girlhood that existed and used "Black women's lived experiences and reflections of those socially constructed experiences, as legitimate subjects of research and analysis," (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 23).

As demonstrated throughout my methodological framework, my epistemological belief is rooted in an endarkened feminist epistemology (EFE), which honors the ways in which Black women generate and express their knowledge standpoints. EFE was critical to this study because it provided a frame for how I and other Black women shared and communicated wisdom derived from our lived experiences (Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2003). So, as I engaged in the narrative inquiry process of this study, I employed the methods and techniques identified in Endarkened Storywork and Black feminist-womanist perspectives, which allowed me to utilize my natural tendency to write in first person, or from the perspective of a storyteller. Moreover, I approached this research from the vantage point of a prior Black girl student and current Black woman doctoral student who aimed to use narrative or the power of the voice as a method to heal, create, and empower all involved in the study.

Recruitment Process and Selection of Participants

The recruitment process for this study involved purposeful sampling, as I targeted Black women who were current secondary public-school teachers in a predominantly Black/African American student school setting located in the Southern U.S. Secondary school settings were of particular interest, as researchers have indicated that Black girls at the middle and high school grade-levels are at an increased risk for being suspended and receiving office discipline referrals based on teachers' subjective examination of their behavior (Townsend-Walker, 2020; Morris &

Perry, 2017). I also chose to focus on Black women teachers who taught in schools that consisted of mostly a Black student body due to Farinde-Wu's (2018) notion of the *urban factor,* or the "pull or desire to work and/or live in urban spaces" (p.251) which she used to describe Black women teachers' who find satisfaction from teaching in urban settings. Urban spaces or settings is defined as, "1) schools nested in dense, populous areas; 2) schools possessing student diversity; and 3) resource availability," (Milner & Lomotey 2013 as cited in Farinde-Wu, 2018. p. 251). Moreover, I also intuitively believed that because of the urban factor, the Black women interested in this study would hold a mindset relevant to that of a womanist ethic of care regarding their beliefs on school discipline.

I began recruiting in March of 2022, and this process consisted of sending recruitment flyers via my personal/social media contacts, and to public university Black Alumni Association groups for teachers located in the Southern U.S. Due to the nature of this study, I also employed the use of snowball sampling or the process of community nomination (Foster, 1997. Ladson-Billings, 2013) by asking interested participants, teachers, professors, and members from the surrounding community to refer or nominate Black women teachers who they believed to be an exemplary teacher, or a teacher who does not rely heavily on office discipline referrals or traditional methods of discipline. I believed this was a necessary approach due the nature and focus of this study. In addition, before the initial interview phase began, I asked those who were interested in participating to complete a pre-selection criteria questionnaire via Auburn University's Qualtrics site.

The pre-selection criteria questionnaire was a 10-item survey that asked participants to confirm if they were at least 19 years of age, and their racial, gender, and social class/professional identity as Black women teachers and to provide their philosophy of student discipline. The questionnaire also asked questions specific to each respondent such as: grade

level and content/subject area taught, school name, content/subject, and years of teaching experience. Once respondents completed the questionnaire, I scanned to ensure that they met the demographic criteria, and I also looked for affirming words within their discipline philosophy, such as consistency, care, connection, fairness, and any other descriptors that were absent of punitive measures or language. The recruitment process lasted for about two weeks.

Participants

A total of six Black women teachers completed the pre-selection criteria questionnaire, and out of the six, four of the women met the criteria specific to this study and were invited to participate. As I mentioned before, it was imperative that the women met not only the school demographic and setting requirements, but that their philosophy of student discipline was reflective of a caring relationship. Out of the four women who met the criteria for this study, two were referred to the study via a community nomination process. I also invited one of the participants that I knew personally to the study. Narrative projects often focus closely on a few participants and their stories (Toliver, 2021), so, I aimed from the very beginning of this study to recruit between 3-6 eligible Black women teachers. However, I also want to make it known that I prayed for Black women teachers who would not only meet the criteria for this study, but who would also be willing and eager participants. So, at first, having *only* six Black women who completed my questionnaire was quite alarming and I was a little worried at first. Yet, one day I was reminded to act within faith, and to remember that when I feel as though my resources are lacking, God will provide beyond my expectations. Meaning, we (people) may sometimes feel like we need more, but when we act within faith, what we already have can be doubled either in the physical or spiritual form. And that was exactly what I received. I honestly believe the four Black women teachers I interviewed for this study provided me with double the quality and

content, consistent to that of dynamic teachers. In addition, all participants provided their Black girls and students with double the protection and care I spoke of in my introductory poem, "We Want Double."

Due to the public health crisis/COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom. Therefore, participants were able to conveniently Zoom-in from the location in which they lived and worked as teachers. Two of my participants taught in the state of Georgia, and Two taught in the state of Alabama. All four women either already held or were in the pursuit of a graduate level degree at the time of this study. The Black women teachers in this study had a total of 50-years teaching experience combined. All of the Black women taught at schools that were predominantly Black, and three out the four taught at schools that were deemed Title 1 schools, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 2020-2021 school-year data. In addition, two of the women received teaching certification via an alternative teacher education program, and two women obtained their certification the traditional college or university route. Below, I provide a brief description of each participant. (Participants are presented in the order they came to the study).

Table 1

Participants' demographic information

Participant	Age	Years of Experience Teaching	Grade Level Taught	Subject Area	Location	School Type
Mrs. Olivia Pope	38	6	8th	Social Studies	GA	Title 1
Mrs. Lola Lee	44	10	6th	Social Studies	AL	Title 1
Ms. Greenli Brown	49	24	12th	English	AL	non-Title 1
Ms. Trina Evans	35	10	8th	Math	GA	Title 1

Participants and Ethical Issues

As an Auburn University- IRB approved study, I followed the proper procedures and guidelines as it relates to research with human subjects throughout the duration of this study. This means following the proper institutional IRB protocol rules and guidelines in order to address and minimize potential risks to participants. To develop a sense of trust with my participants, as well as with future readers of my research, I demonstrated my commitment to establishing trust, and by engaging in sincere practices throughout the duration of this study. Moreover, this reinforced the importance of developing a relationship with participants and practicing self-reflexivity throughout the study.

In addition, I ascribed to Few et al.'s (2007, p. 208) five suggestions, which are also informed by the tenets of Black feminist theory when interviewing Black women:

1. contextualizing research-by understanding the history and culture of your Black women informants.

2. contextualizing self in the process by engaging in the process of self-reflexivity via subjectivity.

3. monitoring symbolic power in the research process by remaining aware of how you present and express yourself as the researcher (language, class, appearance).

4. triangulating multiple sources which increases the dependability and credibility of your research.

5. and caring for our informants by encouraging active processing and self-reflection.

Data Collection

I employed Endarkened Storywork as a methodological technique to centralize the personal narratives and experiences of Black women teachers. As the storyteller, I engaged in the process of Endarkened Storywork by weaving together influential pieces from Black/African American culture such as song lyrics, quotes from social media or other public platforms, and literary works. I also incorporated my own poetry creations that I constructed from either my individual experiences and/or my research participants' interview data to communicate and portray to story listeners a deeper level of meaning. Thus, there will be particular instances during certain participants' narratives that I chose to engage poetically with the data being presented. I decided to engage in poetical inquiry during moments that evoked emotion and a rhythmic opportunity. For example, Mrs. Lee described an instance in which one of her Black girl students was having a hard time emotionally. Moved by Mrs. Lee's description of what took place with her student, I felt guided and moved to write the following:

*I know you have feelings of **inadequacies**,*

*and **seas** of emotions that causes an inner **disruption***

*to the **functions** of who you truly want to be.*

*But trust me…**I got you.***

The method of Endarkened Storywork within my study showed up as a story categorized as creative nonfiction, which interplayed between my past experiences with school discipline as a Black girl, my experiences as a doctoral student, and the stories of my Black women teacher-participants and their disciplinary practices. By taking on the genre of creative nonfiction, I was able to bring forth a story created by "real-life experiences, research, and reflections," (Hart, 2008, p. 64), generated from my personal narrative and the narratives of the Black women teacher informants. Therefore, my Endarkened Storywork navigated between the past, present and future while connecting story and research to create a collective form of wisdom shared between my participants and myself (Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2003).

To create this narrative, I conducted three semi-structured, in-depth 60–90-minute interviews that used a questioning inquiry constructed around themes of: othermothering/parenting in the classroom, care, community, self-definition as a Black woman teacher, Black/African American culture, education, Black girls, racial/gender discipline disparities, and social justice. Additional data collection methods for this study involved: a pre-selection criteria questionnaire confirming- their racial, gender, and social class/professional identity as Black women teachers and for a description of their teacher-student relationships.

Individual Interviews. Josselson (2013) maintained that "the best interviews have the fewest questions," (p. 65). I developed an interview protocol with specific, structural questions that are geared towards answering this study's research questions, however, in referencing Josselson's (2013) assertion, all interviews (the initial, follow-up, and final phase of interviews) operated as

semi-structured, which created the space and opportunity for participants to guide and story their own lives as Black women teachers. I developed the protocol for individual interviews based on the influential works of Beauboeuf-Lafontant; 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2013; McClish-Boyd and Bhattacharya 2020; Milner, 2020; Morris, 2016; Toliver, 2021; and Williams & Lewis, 2021. My inquiry process was also informed by the tenets of Collin's (1990) Black feminist thought.

My interview protocol was also influenced by a pilot interview that I conducted with a relative of mine who identified as a Black woman teacher, and who had 43 years of public-school teaching experience as a Special Education instructor. This helped me to narrow my focus on Black women teachers who taught in general education. In addition, once the actual interviews began, I added questions to the interview protocol after my initial interview rounds with each teacher, in order to capture genuine and relevant topics that appeared during those initial conversations. Each participant in this study held extremely busy and demanding lives, therefore most interviews took place during their planning periods, or later in the evening while in the comfort of their homes or vehicle. Sometimes interviews took place during planning periods in which the teachers had a moment of downtime and at others, the teachers may have had a class to supervise, or students may have walked in and out. All interviews were audio and video recorded via Auburn University's Zoom recording device. To protect the privacy of participants, I asked them to pick pseudonyms during the final interview phase. In addition, I created pseudonyms for towns, schools, and any other potentially identifying information. I also kept recordings and transcriptions in secure folders within Auburn University's Box.

Journaling. After each individual interview, I completed a journal entry log to capture my thoughts regarding the interview process. Specifically, I prefaced each journal entry with prompts like "How do I engage in a womanist ethic of care as a Black woman researcher?" and "What's my ethic and how does it show itself in my work and relationship with my

participants?" I also used the journal entries as an opportunity to describe and capture non-verbal impressions and other actions that took place during the actual interview on the behalf of the participants and myself.

Artifacts. In addition to the interviews and personal journaling, I also collected any artifacts or documents the participants were willing to share, such as class assignments, rituals, chants, or documentation of certain practices they enacted. What constitutes artifacts is not limited to the aforementioned list. Two of the women emailed me artifacts such as classroom rituals and/or information regarding an afterschool program. Even if participants did not physically send me artifacts, they made mention of them in their interviews. I chose to collect artifacts as a way to contextualize how their disciplinary practices were presented in their pedagogical practices.

Data Analysis

As mentioned earlier, Endarkened Storywork "does not embrace the rigidity of a fixed set of principles or beliefs," (Toliver, 2021, p. xxx). Instead, Toliver (2021) encourages employers of the Endarkened Storywork method to understand Black life as a quilt, or as life "without uniform, without strict regulation, and without confinement," (p.xxvii). Therefore, the goal within Endarkened Storywork requires storytellers to not focus so intently on finding themes-only to use those themes as a method of fitting stories within strict lines or boxes-however, the aim is to look for synergy and connection within the stories and experiences being shared (Toliver, 2021). In using the concept of a Black quilt, the data or patterns derived from my narrative and the Black women teachers' narratives took on the form of seams or the process of piecing together our narratives to connect them to a larger picture.

Therefore, this analytic process required me to focus upon the transcript, audio, and other pieces of data to better understand how storytellers add texture, sound, and emotion to the storying process, as well as paying particular attention to their speech and personality (Toliver,

2021). Moreover, I looked for seams that were connected to Beauboeuf-Lafontant's definition of womanist caring and the theoretical tenets of Black feminist thought to inform the data analysis process. Although Zoom provided an option that automatically transcribed each participant's interview data, it did not translate their information accurately and correctly from beginning to end. Therefore, I revisited each participant's interview data multiple times to both correct Zoom's transcription and to also pull pieces of data that were relevant to my theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

Since Endarkened Storywork does not apply rigid or procedural steps to the data analysis process, I did not have any generic or routine steps to follow, however, I did organize my interview data in a way that would help me to 'piece' together the seams of participants' narratives. Specifically, my organization strategies consisted of highlighting and categorizing chunks of words and/or phrases that were reflective of the characteristics identified in Beauboeuf-Lafontant's (20020 womanist ethic of caring. Therefore, the analytic process of this study involved a deductive approach, or a priori method with predetermined codes (definitions), (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022). Moreover, the reviewing and analysis of my interview data was premised upon my conceptual framework, which helped to provide structure and focus in order to find salient connections within the teacher-participants' narratives. In addition, I also engaged in what Bhattacharya (2020) referred to as spirit- and ancestral driven work. Meaning, analytic material or moments of insight regarding my data would come to me during moments of stillness or being in a state of relaxation, and not in moments of actual physical stillness, but mentally/figuratively. So, I would often get *spiritual downloads* of information during my dreams, early in the morning, while exercising, or sometimes while in the midst of prayer. This was critical to my engagement with participants and their narratives, as spirituality is deeply intertwined with the lived experiences of Black women (Dillard, 2021) and is also a "central

tenet of endarkened feminist epistemology and womanism," (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2020, p. 5). When this would happen, I would immediately grab a notebook or my phone and quickly write out what information flowed to me during those moments. So, if it was at 4am or 12pm, I would get up and jot down the spiritual downloads I would receive.

Along with being spiritually connected and invested with my research data, I spent a large amount of time reviewing the transcripts visually, while at the same time listening to the audio of the interviews in order to familiarize myself with each women's voice/narrative and to make connections to the concepts relevant to Beauboeuf-Lafontant's (2002) womanist caring and BFT. For instance, the concept of othermothering showed up within the women's narrative as "somebody has to be there to kinda be their crutch," "I'm in constant mama mode" and "I like to be able to be her safe place." This led to othermothering being conceptualized by the Black women teachers in this study as demonstrating a maternal sensibility of being a safe harbor for Black girls, by protecting and encouraging their healthy social, emotional, and identity development. Within this definition, the role of mentorship and being a positive form of representation for Black girls was also a critical element to othermothering. Additionally, by making the culturally and ethnically sound choice to use BFT as a lens to understand the lived experiences of Black women teachers, I was able to identify constraints and challenges voiced within their narratives that were a result of the gendered racism they faced within the context of their schools. For example, Mrs. Pope described her challenges as a Black woman teacher, in which she revealed:

> It's like we always have to prove ourselves. We have to prove our education. I have three
> degrees, why do I have to prove that? The papers speak for itself, you know.

Lastly, my theoretical and methodological choices helped to deepen my understanding of the many nuances the Black women teachers in this study had to contend with in their residing schools.

Endarkened Storywork at Play (Staging the Narratives)

Black women who (re)search (re)cognize divine purpose

Growing up, I would often hear how God can use the cruel and harmful intentions of others, as a gateway and opportunity to produce good in our lives. In other words, sometimes bad things happen to us at the hands of others who (un)intentionally caused us some form of mental, spiritual, or physical harm. And although those circumstances may have resulted in deep pain, confusion, and hurt, that left behind scars and bruises for us to have to heal on our own terms, somehow- someway, those situations can be used as teachable moments at different points in our lives, that ultimately serve a higher purpose. And as frustrating as it may sound, sometimes the experiences that caused us to feel the most shame, guilt, self-doubt, hurt, or any amount of physical, psychological pain, God uses those moments to show us how our **detriment** can be turned into our **victory.**

My maternal Granny (Mrs. Maxine Williams) and great grandma, (Mrs. Mary Emma Thomas), often reiterated that sometimes bad things happen to us that we do not understand momentarily, but through maturity, growth, and wisdom, we will look back on certain instances in our lives and see the good works of a Higher Power being done. As a 17-year-old high school senior, I didn't understand or know how to respond to the incident that took place with my white teacher and SRO. However, as an adult woman, I now understand how the actions of people that were intended to disrupt or deter me from my future goals as a Black girl student, have become part of my life's story that I was able to revisit during my dissertation as a Black woman doctoral candidate. Ain't God good?

I can attest that I indeed feel the good works of God being done, and I can now look back on this incident with pride. However, not all stories have good endings. Although my incident, coupled with many other incidents throughout my K-12 journey did not ruin my joy and love for

school, I know that Black girls' experiences with school discipline range from differing levels of severity in which Black girls are left to cope with the current and future impact of those practices. Meaning, many times Black girls are expelled, suspended and removed from the school environment and are left to deal with the long-term consequences of their disposal from schools. I have always loved school and the process of school as a form of structure in my life. School was a safe place for me, or should I say an escape for me. Unfortunately, this does not hold true for every Black girl. Schools are not safe, stable environments for us Black girls to escape to, especially if we continuously experience violence, punishment, and many differing forms of gendered racism at the hands of those who profess to be committed to our successful futures.

There are many Black girls who have experienced disparate and disproportionate punishment in our schools, and the intended and unintended consequences of those actions have instead pushed many Black girls out of school spaces and onto a pathway to experiencing school dropout, justice involvement, and/or limited employment and economic opportunities (Morris, 2016). Just having to read these types of findings and statistics can be disheartening to our spirit and can operate as a method to communicate to us that we as Black girls are disposable. So, I wanted to share my story as a means to disrupt subjective, and anti-Black forms of school discipline, that ultimately work to ruin the self-perception, hopes, and dreams of Black girl students. I also centered and highlighted the disciplinary practices of four Black women teachers, and how we can look to them as 'guiding lights' on how to honor the learning and development of Black girls in K-12 spaces and beyond.

Arrested Imagination

In the introduction of this study, I presented a coming-of-age story that is all too common among Black girls. That is, being punished for our behavior, tone, style of dress, hair, and

sometimes imagination, has become a rites-of-passage that many Black girls have become familiarized with. Having to navigate white, K-12 spaces that cause harm to our sense of self and belonging is a destructive deterrent to our imaginative and hopeful futures. And as I reflect back on that moment with Mrs. Peters and the SRO, I was indeed deeply enraged in that moment, however, I did not know how to properly respond to the situation. But, if I could revisit that moment, in the spirit of Brittney Cooper (2018), I would 'make my rage count' and would have proceeded to tell Mrs. Peters the following:

Oh, so you think I'm gang related, gang affiliated huh.

The only thing I'm throwing up is dance moves and college applications, duh.

You haven't even taken the time to get to know me ma'am.

But yet you've managed to connect me to a gang out in Cali?...Damn.

So, I guess you've never heard of having an imagination or doodling?

'Cause I draw of couple of crowns, and you get to Googling.

Eager, and anticipating to connect my drawings of crowns to something bigger.

You see my Black skin, and automatically think, "oh there's more to this picture."

But see if you would've taken the time to ask me, "what do those crowns represent?"

I would've told you that "my ancestors were kings and queens before yours caused their descent."

I would've told you that after watching a Princess Diana documentary at age 7, something just clicked.

And I told myself if she could be princess, then I could too, and I've referred to myself as that ever since.

But nah, it made more sense to you that my drawings of crowns meant I was throwing up my set,

And not my way of potentially honoring a past version of myself I've never met.

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You see, I have big dreams and big goals-like I really plan to be dope!

I have hopes and desires that extend far beyond your minor scope.

But no matter what I say, your mind has already been made.

Damn … I wonder when things will ever change?

Black women who (re)search make room for the spirit

Everything in life comes full circle. On March 9, 2022, I attended S.R. Toliver's virtual talk titled: "Endarkened Storywork, or The Act of Critical (Re)membering in Qualitative Research." And during her talk, she encouraged those of us who were interested in this area of methodology to engage in creative writing literature, arts-based literature, and fictional works in order to truly align yourself with this type of work. Her talk indeed sparked a reflective moment and encouraged me to explore how and why I align myself with this type of work. When I was in the 3rd grade I would write short stories and keep a journal, and I kind of lost that part of myself as life happened and as I began to grow older. However, it was during my 10th grade year of high school that I reconnected with my love of creative writing and the humanities. It was during that time that I took a creative writing class for the first time and when I realized my gift and love of storytelling and poetical writing and thinking.

So, now fast forward 15-plus years later, I am being guided and instructed to revisit those same roots. I love how what I enjoyed during my childhood, and what ultimately is a critical element of who I am, can now be used as a method that drives the flow and creation of my dissertation study. This is the spiritual part, in which I believe it was fated that God gave me the gift and interest in creative writing, poetry, and storytelling for it to be used in my adulthood to provide the space and opportunity for other Black women and girls to heal and be heard. This is why narrative inquiry called to me. It's who I've been all along.

Black women who (re)search (re)member

I remember being given detention for the first time during my K-12 experience for whispering in the bathroom with two other Black girls. It was fall 2001, and it was the first week of my 6th grade school year. This was during a time when 11-year-olds weren't walking around with iPhone or Androids, so our only means of communication was either the house phone or in-person. So, you can imagine after going an entire summer without seeing your friends, how exciting it is to be back at school, and eager to share with each other how your summers went.

The first class that I had on my first day of returning to school after a long hot summer, was with Mrs. Callaway, a white woman, who was assigned as my English teacher. She had instructed the class that during bathroom break time, there should be no talking. "Okay, yeah right," I thought to myself. I've gone two months without seeing my friends, and bathroom time is our time to catch up. Some of you reading this may think to yourself, "well that is quite a defiant attitude to have." However, you must remember, we were kids who hadn't seen each other all summer-plus we had already given each other that look, that signaled "we'll just whisper," to avoid getting into trouble.

Once myself and my two other Black girlfriends made it to the restroom, we began whispering intently to each other. While in the midst of whispering to one another, in walks Mrs. Callaway, projecting with a stern and alarming voice, "I thought I said no talking!?" We all replied at once, "We were just whispering." She continued, "Well, that is *still* talking. So, I'm giving you all in-school detention." Mind you, we were not interrupting class instruction or talking during a test, but during our bathroom break. Even at the tender age of 11, I can remember thinking to myself, "would she have had the same reaction if we were all white girls?" It is instances like this that make me wonder when do white teachers begin to look at Black students as not just kids being kids? When I think back on the dynamics of her class instruction, there was never any talking-except for when she was doing it, and when she permitted us to do

so. As an adult, I now realize that her class was absent of student-to-student interaction, and of course, any cultural relevance. Moreover, her classroom experiences served as a **silencing moment.**

I can also remember another instance that took place with Mrs. Howard, who was a white woman that served as my 7th grade math teacher and always had a stressed look on her face. I remember every morning, and when I say *every morning*- **I. Mean. Every Morning-** she would take a Goody powder before even opening her mouth to teach. So, one day as a class, we collectively asked her, "Mrs. Howard, why do you take a Goody powder every day?" Without hesitation she stated, "I know you all are going to work my nerves, so I take this to keep my headache away." We all slightly giggled at that moment, but as a 12-year-old, I can recall thinking to myself, "wow, she must really hate us!" It also communicated to me that we as her students must *really* be annoying, so then of course, our questions will also be viewed as annoying. So, then the next reasonable thought as a 12-year-old is to monitor how many questions you ask, or to not ask any at all. **Another silencing moment.**

However, the Black women teachers I encountered during those years had a significant impact on my life. Specifically, my 6th grade teacher Ms. Shipman. I truly admired Ms. Shipman-she had pretty, deep pecan Brown skin *just like me*, and even had braces- *just like me*. I wrote a poem for her that I was supposed to give to her after our 6th grade graduation concluded, however I never seized the moment, so I still have it 'til this day. If I were able to locate it and give it to her today, it would communicate how much I admired her because of her sense of humor, and her no-nonsense attitude, but a no-nonsense attitude that was rooted in care and love for her students. And then, there was her realness and authenticity. Ms. Shipman kept it real with us, and especially us Black students/girls. Authenticity and realness rooted in a genuine care and concern for our overall well-being, is what Black students respect.

For example, during my 8th grade schoolyear, a few Black kids had created this secret/coded language that could be used as a strategy for asking other students sexually charged questions. I know, innovative right? Well, two Black women teachers, Ms. Jones and Ms. Cooper, who were 8th grade teachers in our pod did not think so. During this time, our school was operating on learning pod systems, which basically meant that a certain number of students would be grouped with other teachers, who were also assigned to that learning pod. These two Black women teachers were among the small group of 8th grade teachers assigned to my pod, so I had been either instructed by or in communication with both of them in some manner. So, when they caught wind of what was happening they scheduled to have a talk during the school day with all of the Black 8th grade students assigned to their pod (I went to a mostly white school, so there weren't many of us). Although I never used the secret/coded language, I was called into the meeting as well.

Once we were all in the classroom, they revealed to us they knew about the secret language and proceeded to give us a history lesson on how Black people have been historically viewed and perceived in this society. They talked to us about how much our ancestors fought to rectify those negative, hateful images, and how we were letting our ancestors down by sexually objectifying ourselves. That was our punishment. As my great grandmother would say, "they spoke to our minds." They then concluded the meeting by informing us that they would be watching us intently and would take action if we continued with the inappropriate secret language. See the difference between this incident and the first with Mrs. Callaway? The Black women teachers in this description were of course disappointed in our behavior, but they cared enough to not just simply punish us but decided to use their disappointment in our behavior as fuel to express their concern and as an opportunity to (re)mind us of our historical legacies as a Black people.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have described the purpose, conceptual framework, and methodological design of this study. A womanist ethic of care as a conceptual framework was also relevant to this study as it was essential to the knowledge validation process of Black women and was also culturally aligned with Black women's pedagogy. In addition, Endarkened Storywork as a methodology served to honor the multiple perspectives and techniques that the Black women teachers in this study brought to their storying process. Therefore, Endarkened Storywork as a research technique provided the space and opportunity for me to bring creativity, spirituality, and imagination into the narrative process. Lastly, my personal narrative, individual interviews, journaling, and participant artifacts, all constituted as data and were used to generate a story that takes on the genre of creative nonfiction, in which real-life, research, and reflection was used to convey a story. In addition, I engaged in the process of storytelling by revealing my personal narrative, which was informed by the research and concepts connected to my theoretical and conceptual frameworks. In doing so, I was able to 'set the stage' for the presentation and narratives of each participant, which are revealed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Black Women Teachers (Re)member

The Black women teachers in the previous section, exemplified exactly what Cynthia Dillard (2021), expressed in her book, *The Spirit of Our Work: Black Women Teachers (Re) Member.* As Dillard (2021) stated, "(Re)membering Black thought traditions, stories, and peoples are prerequisites to helping our students engage in similar processes for themselves," (p. 176). In addition, Dillard's (2021) further maintained, "the prefix (re) in parentheses is my way of reminding all of us that Black people have inherently and always existed as brilliant holders of knowledge, culture, and humanity (p. xv). Moreover, Black women teachers like Ms. Jones and Ms. Cooper 'understood the assignment'. They understood that they would not be doing their due diligence if they just simply punished us, or silenced us in that moment, but that it was their spiritual duty and responsibility as Black women, and as a Black people, to use their discretion in that moment to encourage us to (re)member the historical trials and triumphs of our people. The key word here is discretion. You see, it is a 'simple' act to punish a student, either through in-school or out-of-school suspension, or afterschool detention, but it requires a *deeper* level of spirit and humanity to take a step a back and use behavioral disappointments as an opportunity to provide the proper care and attention that is required in that moment.

In what follows, are the narratives of Mrs. Olivia Pope, Mrs. Lola Lee, Ms. Greenli Brown, and Mrs. Trina Evans, respectively. As you will begin to see, the title of each woman's story spoke to their own unique character and personality traits, and experiences as a teacher, as well as how their collective story was also representative of the concepts identified in Beauboeuf-Lafontant's (2002) womanist caring- othermothering, political clarity, and an ethic of risk- in deeper context. Behavioral Strategies that benefit the learning and development of Black girls was also revealed. Lastly, in an effort to direct the reader's attention to participants'

intellectual and pedagogical descriptions that were of significance, I chose to italicize and/or

bold certain words and phrases.

Mrs. Olivia Pope: "To be Real"

Nobody's transparent. Nobody's keeping it real with them anymore. And so, if I just had a say, I just wanna be real with 'em. I'm just a real person. I wanna be real with them: have real expectations, have real goals, obtainable goals, and real flaws. 'Cause I gotta be real for me and I'm gonna be real for you too.

-Mrs. Pope

To be real. Mrs. Pope was the first Black woman I interviewed, and the immediate

observation I received upon our first meeting was her genuine openness and realness. I also

noticed the peaceful and relaxed demeanor she was able to maintain while watching a highly

active class during her planning period. As she explained to me at one point, **"we have**

organized chaos sometimes in the classroom." Mrs. Pope was led to my study via a

community nomination process, and as we say in popular Black culture, her nominee "gave

what was supposed to be given." Our first virtual meeting took place during Mrs. Pope's

planning period, and within the first fifteen minutes of our interview, I was able to discern how

her confidence, passion, and empathy mirrored her actions and demeanor, and overall love and

commitment for the field of education. When asked to describe her philosophy of student

discipline during the pre-selection criteria questionnaire phase, a key part of Mrs. Pope's

response stated, "to promote consistency in the classroom." So, once we initially met, I asked

her to describe how she modeled consistency with her class, and she described an instructional

technique called, "The Five P's." In Using the 'Five P's', Mrs. Pope was able to express her

expectations and the importance of being a student: "Prompt, Prepared, Positive participant,

Productive, and Problem solver." Once she shared this piece of information with me, I

immediately thought of 'Five P's' or additional character traits that were reflective of her

identity as a Black woman teacher. Identity characteristics such as, **P**urposeful, **P**assionate,

Parental figure, **P**olitically relevant and **P**rotective, were all personal attributes that reflected her spirit and personality as a Black woman and teacher.

Purposeful

Mrs. Pope is a native and current resident of Mahogany, GA, where she has taught 8th grade Social Studies at the middle school level for the past six years. She attended a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) located in Georgia and majored in political science. As a political science major, Mrs. Pope stated that she led a few campaigns for local politicians and revealed that she had original intentions on becoming a lawyer and not a teacher. It was during this time that one of her professors, a Black man, encouraged her to consider the field of teaching, as he realized her potential for teaching. As she explained:

> So, he just saw that leadership quality in me and that ability to, you know, gain people's attention and keep them engaged, and train, and just in essence, just teach.

Once Mrs. Pope graduated from college, she revealed she got married and soon after started a family and decided to take a job in the medical field as a medical coder. However, she revealed she wasn't being fulfilled in the medical field, and instead, she felt that it was time to reconsider teaching, and she began looking into taking the English basic skills test. After failing the English portion, she revealed that she looked to God for guidance: **"I was just like, "Okay, Lord, well what is it? What am I supposed to do?"** While in waiting, Mrs. Pope chose not to stay idle, and being the true lover of education that she is, decided to pursue an advanced degree in medical coding. However, she never lost hope, and referenced her late grandmother, who passed away in 2015, as being the defining catalyst that reignited her fire to take the alternative education route to becoming a certified teacher. Once she completed her alternative education

program, she chose to take the Social Studies basic skills test and passed, which permitted her to be interviewed and hired on the spot in fall 2016.

Passionate

Mrs. Pope was a multifaceted woman indeed. In just the six years that she has taught her middle school, she has held the title of 'Teacher of the Year,' she also held multiple leadership positions, ranging from serving on her school's leadership team as the chairperson for the Social Studies Department, being a member of the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) team (which include both Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) and Response to Intervention (RTI) frameworks). She also provided mentorship to new, incoming teachers, and was a dance coach at one point in time. At the time of our interviews, Mrs. Pope was working towards her Master's in Educational Leadership, demonstrating her leadership qualities. Those same leadership qualities also extended to her surrounding community, as she also managed and invested in properties, showcasing her real estate knowledge and experience. Mrs. Pope is deeply connected to the community in which she serves, as both a teacher and business owner, and communicated those same principles to her Black girls and boys as evidenced below:

> **I'm for the culture**. I'm all about the movement of excelling, you know, our culture. I want to instill in our young Black girls and our Black boys, you know, that education is number one. **Education is the key**. And so, me coming from like corporate America and entering the education field, it was about my **passion,** and I want to instill that passion in them. Because no matter what you wanna be in life, or where you're gonna go, whatever dreams that you wanna pursue, you can't be successful without first being educated.

As noted above, you can witness Mrs. Pope's belief in the transformative power of education and the positive role that it plays in the lives of Black children, and how she as their teacher has the

influence to do so. She continued by describing her philosophy as a teacher and her reason for choosing secondary education:

> So, if I had to say what my philosophy was, it would be **knowledge is power**. Knowledge is power and being knowledgeable will open doors that, you know, no man can open for you, just having that knowledge. So, and then I would just add to this... I chose like secondary education because I feel like too many times our children fall in a gap at that age range. They're struggling, number one, they're struggling. Their bodies are changing, you know, their mental health is at stake. The gangs are pulling them, you know. You know, they're trying to just figure out who they are or whatever, so they're at a most sensitive time in their lives and **somebody has to** be there to kinda ***be their crutch*** for them and **I wanted to be that person.**

Mrs. Pope's motivations for choosing secondary education are connected to Farinde-Wu's (2018) notion, the *urban factor*, which she used as a term to describe Black women teachers who find satisfaction and purpose in working and/or living in urban spaces. Moreover, Black women teachers who gravitate towards urban schools, express concerns and intentions of wanting to pour into the children and community from which they view as home, in order to meet the various needs of students in urban schools (Farinde-Wu, 2018). Therefore, as a native of the community in which she teaches and as a Black woman, Mrs. Pope expressed an overall commitment and responsibility to the Black girls and students in her school, further revealing how her identity and pedagogy is connected to Black feminist traditions and "Black women teacher's sense of political commitment," (Dixson, 2003, p. 219). It is within Mrs. Pope's purpose and passions for becoming a teacher, that we can begin to see how this sets the stage for how she responds and approaches her Black girls from a behavioral standpoint. However, as

Dillard (2021) maintained, "being a Black woman on purpose for a purpose and (re) presenting oneself in line with the weight of our legacy as Black women is not always easy," (p. 129).

> You know, for instance in my class, I sing. I dance. I rap. You know, we have a good time and they're learning…[but] the other teachers are looking at me, like, "Why's she so loud?" Or even, you know, "she's ghetto because she is loud." And, you know, **it's like we always have to prove ourselves**. We have to prove our education. I have three degrees, why do I have to prove that? The papers speak for itself, you know. My numbers are moving. I don't have that many failures. The numbers speak for itself because I'm doing my job. It's not 'cause I'm a Black woman. It is, but it isn't…. You know, when they look at me they see loud, short, boisterous lady, but I'm so much more than that, than what you see, you know. And... I don't feel like they see me, you know what I mean? And so, because of that, **if they don't see me, they don't see my students.**

This is representative of the uneasiness and emotionally taxing labor that Black women teachers experience; having to fight for your Black girls and students, while simultaneously having to fight for and prove yourself as a Black woman and teacher, feels like a never-ending task. I could also hear the tension of Mrs. Pope grappling with the assertion that her identity as a Black woman isn't the only reason she is successful with her students. And she's right- it isn't.

During our meetings she would express the generational differences between her and her students and how she's "an overachiever" and her own "biggest critic" and as she stated, "trying to be better than I was last year." So, her hip hop and other culturally relevant methods of instruction, that she applies to promote learning and keep her students engaged, requires work beyond race and gender. Meaning, Mrs. Pope doesn't attribute her success with her Black girls to her Blackness and womanness alone, but to her investment in herself as a teacher and her willingness to be a lifelong learner. However, even with the work it requires to stay culturally

relevant and create lesson plans that mimic the changes and innovations eminent in Black culture, Mrs. Pope often found herself having to resort to a more "mainstream" curriculum.

> "I'm gonna **be obedient**, you know, and I'm gonna do my job at the best of ability. But if anything, you know, I just have to have conversations with my students, just like, "Hey y'all, we got visitors today, so, you know we can't rap today or whatever." So, you know... I have to **alter my "lesson plans"** sometimes, you know, because we don't wanna **show our slip** when other people are around."

I could tell Mrs. Pope was a bit irritated by the rigid, generic lesson plans her state implemented, because she used finger quotes when stating the word lesson plan. I also know that it has to be frustrating to be an educated, adult Black woman who has to struggle with the realities of being "obedient" and being told to "**tone it down when we have visitors,**" as she stated, in order to resort to a more palatable white, curriculum. Despite such constraints, Mrs. Pope didn't allow restrictions to her curriculum planning and development to interfere with creating solid and authentic relationships with her Black girls.

Parental Figure (Othermothering)

Like me, Mrs. Pope described herself as a certified Granny's girl and attributed her success and ways of being to the defining role her Granny played in her life, as she was one of the people who influenced her to take up teaching in the first place. Mrs. Pope also referred to her Granny as "my everything," "my best friend," and "my nurturer," and as an honest person. She also credited her grandmother for being the reason she was able to embrace her identity and life experiences, in turn, contributing to her ability to keep it real with herself and her Black girls. In addition, her Granny's mothering style inspired the way she parents and mothers her own two children and students. When asked to describe what does being 'a crutch' for her Black girls mean, Mrs. Pope shared:

I go beyond teacher. I'm not just Mrs. Pope to them, **I become Mama Pope** to them. So, **I'm their mom, and I'm also their counselor and their mentor.** And, you know, at times, I have to just be their friend as well, but just setting those boundaries of our friendship up front- if that makes sense. That crutch is just being that **support system** that they don't have at home, in their communities, at church. You know, at the rec center, at the Y, you know, they just don't have that support. So, that's what the crutch looks like for me. That's who I become for them.

Othermothering in Mrs. Pope's world, meant being Black girls' crutch, counselor, and mentor, ultimately providing various systems of support. One way Mrs. Pope showed her support was by having 'mini conferences' with her Black girls when she noticed their disengagement from class.

I had one student, for instance, she had a breakdown. She lives with her aunt and her mom works out of town like nine hours away. And so, one day she just had a breakdown. She was crying, she was hysterical because she missed her mom or whatever. So, I [said to myself] "I need to **fix** whatever's wrong with her at that moment." So, we had to have like a little **mini conference** where we were able to discuss what was going on, and how she felt. I called her mom so she could speak with her about it and then once she kinda got herself together, you know, after about 10 minutes or so, she was able to come back to the classroom. But if I had not spent the time with the classroom rules, the rituals and routines, and the **building a relationship** initially- then that could of went a whole different way, you know.

When I asked Mrs. Pope to give me a description of the primary behaviors or actions that she believed to be leading Black girls to get into trouble, and she revealed that her leading discipline issue is defiance, and that many of her Black girls come from single parent homes, are going through bodily and developmental changes, and/or are dealing with societal pressures, which all

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impact the way they express themselves behaviorally. She also noted that a couple of her Black

girls have experienced teen pregnancy, and that also contributed to some of her defiance issues.

For instance, I had a student… she didn't get any sleep. Her baby didn't sleep that night.

She was up all night. Up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down. And so,

her mom still made her come to school or whatever and so that day she just was defiant.

"I'm not… I'm not going to turn my stuff in to you. I'm not gonna do any work," or

whatever. And so, I was just like I could either, I have a choice. Either I can check you

because I'm the king of this castle or I can try to figure out what's going on with you. And

so, it was as simple as... 'Cause I **never wanna embarrass them** in front of other people,

especially, you know, outside of our culture. So, I pulled her to the side and had a

conversation. "Hey, first of all, you gone have some respect. That's part of my classroom

rules. We gone be polite and positive." I do the five P's. "So polite and positive participant

and you're not being either one of those right now." So, let me figure out what's going on

with you. And it's just…it's just **getting on their level**.

Mama Pope Getting on Their Level:

Meditation: I started this process of breathing techniques. So, we did a little breathing

technique. You know, in through the nose, out through the mouth, and we do that a couple

of times to try to get her to calm down. The disrespect went away. The attitude went away.

I still did not get her to maximize learning on that day, but at least I got her, you know, to

be okay for that day. And to me, that was a greater accomplishment than her completing

her assignment today, that day. Mastering the learning target.

Time-Out: We also have a time out system where if we just have somebody being defiant

where they have an issue with another student. Timeout to another teacher on the team and

then, you know, we time 'em out for like 15 minutes. They have a form that they have to

complete. Hey, why did, why are you feeling this behavior today? You know, what took place? And you know, a strategy. They have to come up with their own strategy. They have to list, how they can, you know, get themselves together so they can return to class.

Politically Relevant Teaching (Political Clarity)

The more I got to know Mrs. Pope, the more I began to come to the realization that her relational and intergenerational ways of knowing (McKinney de Royston, 2020) was deeply intertwined with her pedagogical approaches. As she voiced in later meetings how she believed that in knowing who she was and being confident in her identity as a Black woman, she was also able to model that to her Black girls-in hopes that they would find her qualities and characteristics inspiring and achievable.

> Of course, in any situation as a teacher, as a Black woman, as a wife, as a mother, as a friend, as a sister, etcetera...**I can't be anything for anybody if I don't know who I am**. So, determining who I was would be the biggest task I had to do. And then also understanding and realizing that at different stages of my life, that Black woman is gonna change and that's okay, you know. So, having that self-identity first, assisted in that process. Because then, you know, I can be relatable. **I can be a role model to my** Black students, to my **Black female students.** Oh...you know, I wear braids...Like today I'm wearing my hair natural, or whatever. So, for them to be able to see, "Okay, okay, I see her. She's rocking her natural hair today. She has on some Crocs. She's-she's cool. She's okay. She's a down to earth person."

Mrs. Pope further shared, **"Because I know who I am, I can be a role model for them."** For Mrs. Pope, it was important for her to model to her Black girls that we as Black women and girls are always evolving, always changing. She also felt that it was important to showcase her natural hair and show Black girls that who you are naturally is enough, despite what society says about

Black beauty. This is significant, because Black womanist educators understand teaching and learning as identity centric (McKinney de Royston, 2020, p.). Political clarity for Mrs. Pope also involved having "mini-conferences" or creating 'Intimate Conversation Spaces' in order to honor the feelings and emotions of Black girls. For instance, during one segment of our interview, Mrs. Pope stated that gang activity, and gun violence was a major issue, and that many of her Black girls are **"just hurting"** and may be dealing with the grief of losing a friend. For example:

> I had a conversation with a group of girls after school one day. We lost a student this year to gang violence…..And, um... that was hard on them. They're used to seeing, you know, guns and drugs and... It's in that community. It's in our community…. So anyway, had a conversation with a group of girls. This one girl, she was a Black girl... She was having a hard time because he had been dead for three months and so, she was really struggling. She was like, "I don't wanna be here. I don't wanna come to school anymore. You know, all the things that me and him said we were gonna do, we can't do 'em anymore 'cause he's not here." And so, I kept them out. We stayed waiting on buses, you know, probably
>
> about 20 minutes or whatever. And I said to her, "What goals did you and him have that you wanted to accomplish together?" "Well, we been in school all our life or whatever. We wanted to go to high school together and then, you know, go to the prom." "Well, you can still do those things. He's not here but what is? He died for nothing if you let the dreams die, and the goals that you all had set together die, then he died for nothing."

By creating an Intimate Conversation Space, Mrs. Pope allowed her Black girls to feel safe enough to share their pain and hurt. Meaning, these spaces must also be rooted in spirituality, love, empathy, concern, and pure authenticity. Mrs. Pope also expressed that teachers must be willing to share parts of their journey as well. For instance:

> After me sharing who I was and some of my journey, she was able to you know, kinda

see that there's life beyond obstacles that you face. There's life beyond somebody dying. There's life beyond, you know, the fight you had with your mom.

Proactive (Ethic of Risk)

Throughout all of our meetings, it was quite evident that Mrs. Pope engaged in an ethic of risk in many different ways. And as we continued to meet, her ethic of risk became particularly revealed through her proactive practices and mindset as a teacher. For instance:

Consistency is the biggest thing. We practice consistency. So, it was again, a lot of upfront work. Teaching them what the word means, giving them some examples. We kinda did a little simulation in class. You know, um, like sharpening your pencil every day before you come to the classroom, or at the beginning of class putting your phone in the basket. You know, doing that on a consistent basis and then in the simulation some of the students didn't do it consistently so-so we can understand the difference or whatever. But, at the beginning of each month, I put the words on the board, consistency.

For Mrs. Pope, she assumed a mutual responsibility for her Black girl students by modeling the importance of consistency, which formed the basis of her disciplinary style and approach. As a Black woman teacher who self-defined as being culturally tapped-in or 'in the know' of what her Black students and girls needed, Mrs. Pope explained that by modeling something as simple as consistency, she was able to eliminate many classroom discipline problems. For example, Mrs. Pope revealed at one point that, "Discipline it's just not about punishment, it's a learning process as well." Mrs. Pope's ethic of risk was also revealed within her view of teaching as a process that should be centered upon constant self-improvement and reflection (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002).

I want to be able to teach somebody else, because when I came into this there was nobody there who could teach me, it was a lot of people who knew teachers and stuff like that, but it was nobody who had already walked in my shoes, change careers middle year. I started

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teaching in November, like that's not normal. So, if I could take my experiences and share it with somebody else, and they can be a better teacher, they can see, "hey, it is possible for you to change careers and be successful and do all things I've accomplished," then great, that's why I want to do it.

In addition, Mrs. Pope's proactive mindset extended to those around her, and she believed that all teachers should be willing and eager to stretch beyond their limitations and should always strive to be the best version of themselves in order to best serve their students. As she shared:

I want to eat professionally, So I'm not gonna let anybody or anything stop me from being the best teacher that I can be. Like you, better ask them questions, you better go eat, fill up that plate and go eat because you know you want to be here. Because nobody comes to education for the money for real you know not starting off, you got to get to that point. But you come here, because **you want to make a difference in these students lives** you're passionate about helping the next generation, so therefore go fill your plate, be proactive.

As we concluded our third and final interview session, my analysis and description of Mrs. Pope's final words for her Black girls and others came together as:

What do you see when you see me?

Yeah I'm HBCU educated, and hold multiple degrees,

but that's not all to me.

You see, I have big dreams, big goals.

I'm trying to teach Black girls that they can have it all, and still not fold.

Yes, the husband, the house, the success-it could all be yours.

You can even be professional rockin' a suit or

J's, just remember this world is yours baby girl.

Don't mind people who look at us and see loud, belligerent, and an angry Black woman.

They just haven't taken the time to feel and understand our level of passion and resilience, and

why we've had to be every woman.

So, no matter what, remember your Black is beautiful and that we as Black women and girls are

indeed magical.

And that you can accomplish whatever goals you've set for yourself-even if they seem

unattainable.

Mrs. Lola Lee: "A Servant's Heart"

And I saw how all kinds of doors just began opening for me. I knew that I had the same thrill and the same love and the same passion I had when I was taking care of patients.
<div align="right">-Mrs. Lee</div>

Mrs. Lee was the only participant that I had a personal relationship with prior to this study. Mrs. Lee has a warm and inviting spirit, that is honest and sincere. Mrs. Lee is someone who has always been warm-hearted, loving, and direct, and so, it was to no avail that those same traits would be communicative of how she would present as a teacher. During our initial interview, Mrs. Lee revealed that teaching was not her first go-to, but that it was always there. She revealed that others saw her gift of teaching and encouraged her to become a teacher, as she explained:

> I had a very, very good kind of case manager that was helping me or whatever, and I never forget, she asked me, she said, "is there anything that you could see yourself doing, is there anything else that you find joining?" "And I said, "Well, I've been helping at my kids' school, and I really like it. I said I go in every day, and I help the kids write their name and their numbers and colors and whatnot." And I remember she looked at me and she said, "you have **a servant's heart**." She said, "Healthcare workers and educators, they have the same type of servant's heart, and I think you will be a wonderful teacher."

Teaching from the Heart

Mrs. Lee originally had intentions on obtaining her nursing degree and was only a few credits shy of completing her degree, when she unexpectedly injured herself during one of her military assignments. That injury also unfortunately brought her seven-year military career to an end. "I was devastated with that because, in my mind, I thought that my purpose on this earth was to care for people, you know, in the healthcare industry," said Mrs. Lee. It was evident in that moment that I knew Mrs. Lee had the heart to serve, and that she would showcase the type

of "political and ethical commitments," relevant within Black womanist pedagogies (McKinney de Royston, 2020, p. 385). Mrs. Lee didn't let her injury interfere with her purpose here on earth, and after a sincere conversation with her military case manager, she decided to change majors, and thankfully most of her classes transferred over into her teacher education program, at the local university she was attending. Fast forward ten years later, Mrs. Lee stated that teaching 6th grade social studies has brought her the same passion and excitement she felt during her nursing days, and that she takes her role as a teacher serious:

> I just wish that people coming into education had **my heart,** you know. I didn't become a teacher because I want to be rich and famous, or because I want to ball out, you know. You have to have a certain mindset and a certain type of heart to deal with children, **all children**. And to be able to connect with all children, not just [the] ones that look like you and have the same as you and come from the same background, but to really be able to **connect** and **identify** with all children. I think that takes something extra, a little something special, and I just wish that everybody that came in education, you know had that and saw kids or see kids the way I see them.

It indeed takes heart, and the right kind of heart to adequately respond to the needs of children in school settings. In fact, you can't spell teacher without heart. And as trivial and silly as it may sound, it is true. In both a literal and figurative sense, h-e-a-r-t are the letters that produce most of the word teacher, and majority of what it takes to be an exceptional one. And Mrs. Lee can be described as an exceptional teacher indeed. All our interviews took place while Mrs. Lee was in the comfort of her home, which I believe also helped set the stage for her to reveal the inner workings of her identity and on her perceptions of what it meant to be a Black woman teacher.

I don't take it lightly. It means a lot, because I know that oftentimes **Black women** are **stereotyped** and **categorized** as less attractive. So, I **pride** myself in the way I carry myself, the way I present myself at school, and basically on campus and off campus. I try to make sure that you know, wherever I am, if any student, any co-worker saw me, that I wouldn't necessarily be ashamed of anything that I was doing. I guess again being a Black woman, I just try to make sure that everything that I do, I bring **positivity** to the fact that **I am Black**.

Mrs. Lee further explained that she was aware of how much children pay attention to what adults say and do, and that as their teacher, she holds herself to a high set of standards when it comes to being a form of representation for them. When asked to describe the feeling that is produced from having all eyes on her (from both co-workers and students) Mrs. Lee disclosed:

It doesn't allow me to **act out of character**, you know, so I actually appreciate it. I feel like this keeps me on my game, on top of my game, as far as striving to be the best that I can be, and just constantly wanting to be a lifelong learner and just constantly wanting to move forward, set higher goals and do different things. Because I got these **little Brown girls** that look like me or will one day look like me, I want to give them **something to look forward to strive to**, so it keeps me constantly trying to strive as well.

As indicated above, being a form of representation for Black girls is also a huge part of how Mrs. Lee defined her role as a Black woman teacher. Being a positive form of representation for Black girls is indeed critical, however the words, "act out of character," stung me with frustration at this white, Euro-centric world, and with an immediate understanding of what she meant by her statement. The fear of being perceived as acting "out of character" or acting "unwomanly", is a damaging cultural trope that many of us Black women and girls often fall into. Also known as

respectability politics, or "the belief that Black people can overcome many of the everyday, acute impacts of racism by dressing properly and having education and social comportment," (Cooper, 2018, p. 147) is oftentimes an ideology that becomes intertwined with our sense and perception of Black pride. Black pride and integrity are both necessary and critical components in the way we survive and thrive as a community. However, Stephanie Ike (2022), a Nigerian American and Christian-based speaker, stated in her YouTube talk titled, *Exposing Deception*, "pride keeps you a prisoner to your offense."

As Black women, in our everyday lives we are not always deeply conscious of all the ways in which white supremacist ideologies have deceived or disillusioned our sense of self-worth and value in this world, which in turn, work to keep us imprisoned or held hostage to whiteness and white supremacists' depictions of what it means to be a civilized people. Our hair, facial features, skin complexion, language, style of dress, behavior, etc. have historically and contemporarily fallen under scrutiny and been used as tactics to publicly offend us. Yet, as a way to survive the harmful impacts of racism and sexism, we have all acted in dysconscious ways (King, 1991) that simultaneously confine us to our own offenses. There is absolutely nothing wrong with taking pride in our appearance and actions as Black women, however, Dillard (2021) (re)minded us that we must do so in a way that honors and (re)members *our* authentic lived experiences and spiritual sense of self or "our politics, our spiritual consciousness, and our creativity," as Black women (p. 3), and not the oppressive perceptions of others.

However, schools are also known to devalue and oppress Black women teachers' sense of Black consciousness, and often operate as spaces that create additional barriers and burdens for those who are seeking to connect with Black girls in culturally authentic ways (Nyachae, 2016). Nevertheless, we as Black women also know that there's beauty in our burden, and that our

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offenses have also equipped us with the ability to navigate a triple consciousness (Welang, 2018) that can operate to benefit everyone. An example of Black women's triple consciousness was reflected in Mrs. Lee's account below regarding the importance her identity as Black woman plays in her profession:

> I feel like it plays a huge role, but I do pride myself in being able to reach and appeal and connect with all of my babies. Like not bragging, but **I have that natural knack** because my white babies love me, they connect with me, they feel me, you know. It's crazy because me being a Black woman and me appealing to and being able to operate around my Black kids doesn't separate me. Like I never feel like my white kids are looking at me like, "I just can't relate to her." They like they get it; you know. You know, like I told you, the first thing is I'm a mama first, and so a lot of what I say is just coming **straight from the heart**."

Mama Mode (Othermothering)

As previously described, Mrs. Lee's role and identity as a Black woman teacher was deeply intertwined with her identity as a mother, which only deepened her ability to connect with her students and see them as her own. For example, Mrs. Lee additionally shared that as a mother to three boys, she was a "mama first" and that she could not just turn that off when at school.

> I'm a mama first, because I'm constantly surrounded every day, day in and day out by children that never turns off. I'm in constant **mama mode**. So, when I'm dealing with these kids especially my young ladies, you know I'm thinking, what if this was **my daughter**?

In the last line, it was clear that Mrs. Lee's sense of othermothering was rooted in a genuine concern and care for her Black girls, which are also characteristic of a mother-daughter relationship (Case, 1997). Mrs. Lee also described a mentoring program she created as a way to provide her Black girls and other girls within her school, a safe space to talk about issues that are concerning them. Topics would range from how to handle peer pressure, bullying,

healthy relationships, and other social issues. She also stated that she would sometimes invite guest speakers, but due to the current pandemic and COVID-19 restrictions, her mentorship program had not been as active as she would like. Other descriptions of what "mama mode" consisted of with Mrs. Lee included, "being firm but fair," "a buffer," and building relationships built on consistency and care. For example, during one of our conversations she stated, **"kids period, don't care what you know, until they first of all know how much you care."** Another way Mrs. Lee described what going into 'mama mode' entailed, involved an interaction with one of her Black girl students who had been placed in the foster care system and was moving from home to home. As she shared,

> She needs something. She's missing something. And once I saw like "Dang, I haven't even known this baby a full year and she is now in just this short time that I''ve known her, with her third set of parents." That can't be a good feeling. That can't be a good feeling [and] that has to be frustrating because she has no stability, you know.

Here, Mrs. Lee explained how having an awareness and concern of the home environment of one of her Black girl students, was important when making disciplinary decisions. So, contrary to negative beliefs regarding Black girls' behavior, Mrs. Lee knew that her Black girl student was not being angry or aggressive, just for the 'sake' of being angry or aggressive, but that her behavior was rooted in pain and other life stressors experienced at the time. Mrs. Lee further continued:

> And I felt her energy today. I felt her. I felt it today. And so, I wouldn't let her go in my classroom because you know she was already starting at the kids. And I was like, "Lord, I don't need this baby to get in a fight." And so, I pulled her out and I looked at her, and I said, **"I'm on your side, it's okay. It's okay."**

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*I know you have feelings of **inadequacies**,*

*and **seas** of emotions that causes an inner **disruption***

*to the **functions** of who you truly want to be.*

*But trust me…**I got you.***

"I got you." That was the message that went through my mind as Mrs. Lee described her intimate interactions and conversations with one of her Black girl students. She also described how she knows how to connect with and affirm her Black girls in moments they are feeling emotionally conflicted. It is also important to note, that those intimate and affirming connections involved creating the space and opportunity for Black girls to express their emotions without ridicule, however Mrs. Lee informed me that not every teacher and/or administrator will protect her Black girls like she does.

> So, I let her get it out to a certain extent. But when I feel like she's gonna do something that could possibly get her in trouble with somebody else I talked to her and I'm like "baby girl, you're gonna have to reel this back in." And **that's my fear**, "I know how to talk to her, I know how to deal with her, I know how to get her to calm down." But I'm trying to work with her to get her to understand, you're gonna have to exhibit a little bit of self-control, because "what if you're acting like this and **I'm nowhere around**?.... There's not a Mrs. Lee to calm you down and they're just looking at you acting belligerent and carrying on like this" …. I'm like they're gonna be ready to write you up, they're gonna be ready to send you to ISS, or going to be ready to suspend you.

In Mrs. Lee's description of othermothering, she articulated the importance of shielding and guiding Black girls from harm in the form of discipline consequences. Mrs. Lee also took it upon herself to shield the girls from academic harm. Which was evident in her response when asked to describe the behaviors or actions that she believed contributed to Black girls getting into trouble:

And mine is a lot of times academic. I hate putting in zeros and so I'll just make them stay after school and get the work done…. I could just put the zero in and write the child up for defiance, but I choose not to. I say because number one, it hurts the child's record and number two, they're failing, and I don't necessarily think they're failing because they're dumb.

This is a prime example of what having a non-deficit view of your Black girls looks like. Mrs. Lee concluded by stating that she thinks they are failing due to a lack of internal motivation, and that she sometimes suggests for the girls to stay after school, in order to get their past-due work completed, and as an opportunity **"to have very candid conversations with them"** as she explained. She also revealed in other segments of our conversations that, **"I pray for their safety and that I pray for their success,"** and that her spiritual side is what keeps her connected and invested in her students. As a native of Maple, AL, which is the presiding town of her school, Mrs. Lee believed it was also of equal importance to connect with her Black girls and students on a cultural and political level.

No Child Left Behind (Political Clarity)

As indicated in the previous section, Mrs. Lee used her identity as a method to connect to not only her Black girls, but to all students, no matter their race. This is of political significance to Mrs. Lee's pedagogical approach because she used her embodied and relational experiences to dispel discriminatory and harmful narratives about Black culture and believed that it was important for white students to be able to see and understand that too.

My African American Brown babies when they look at me and they hear me, there is something they're going to be able to relate to me. You know it's going to be something that I say, the way I say it, you know, a joke that I made that's gonna make them connect with me and be like "okay, you know, I can relate to Mrs. Lee." Same way with my

Caucasian babies. I know how to relate to them, say things that make them feel included, make them feel safe, make them feel like "hey I understand your culture, I understand you know." So, I try to use my culture as a benefit because again it's who I am. I am African American, but I feel like it allows me to connect and relate, make my kids in the classroom you know feel safe, make them also know that "hey Mrs. Lee is a real person." Like she real, you know. **I feel like a lot of times kids feel like teachers are untouchable or not relatable or not real**. They know Mrs. Lee is very, very much real you know. And I share real-life stories and real-life testimonies and I let them in on little pieces of my real life, you know daily things that I do.

Mrs. Lee also used her appearance as a testimony and as a method to defeat negative stereotypes and beliefs regarding textured, kinky-curly hair.

I've seen some of my chocolate girls, dark skinned girls are the ones whose hair was natural, and we're being slighted or being treated differently. And address I it. And that was kind of one of the reasons why I even went natural myself. I keep some type of protective style on my hair, but during that time I said, you know what, "I'm going to let my brown babies see their teacher, who is a really dark woman with natural hair, see that this is okay. Like don't let nobody to make you feel bad because your skin is dark and because your hair is natural.

In the above account, Mrs. Lee's political clarity extended beyond the white, normative school curriculum, into Afro-centric conceptions of her identity, such as her natural hair, in order to nurture her Black girl students' sense of belonging. This is consistent with McKinney de Royston's (2020) assertion that, "Black womanist educators choose to support the personal and social emancipation of Black youth," (p. 384).

The majority of the kids at my school are on free or reduced lunch and so that right there

lets us kind of know the socio-economic status of the range of kids we have. A lot of the kids that I teach still live in the projects. A lot of the kids that I teach their parents received snap or EBT. And me being a history teacher, I always try to assess their prior knowledge or whatever we're talking about in history, you know, make it fit into their time or just make it relatable. So, where I'm going at it with this is, I let them know that at one point in time, Mrs. Lee lived in the projects. And I named the one that I lived in.…. I tell them the apartment number and everything…..But I let them know you use it as a as a steppingstone, it's okay. And it's nothing to be you know ashamed of.

As Mrs. Lee disclosed, she also expressed political clarity by understanding the significance of connecting with your students and letting them in on who you are as their teacher. Mrs. Lee's political clarity also involved what Emdin (2016) defined as *reality pedagogy* or "meeting each student on his or her own cultural and emotional turf," (p. 27). In addition, Mrs. Lee's account revealed how important it is for all teachers to be aware of their Black girls and students' background, as it is critical in developing a meaningful relationship. As she further revealed how white teachers are more concerned with their data, and not the actual children sitting before them. For instance, in a matter-of-fact way Mrs. Lee stated, **"you know, kids die academically because you're so busy worried about this data."** When asked to describe one of the ways she builds and strengthens her relationship with her Black girl students:

I'm calling the parents because I'm like I need help. I need you to help me. And typically, the parents are kind of at the same point too. So, they're like you know I'm struggling at the house with her. [I] always kind of end our conversation and let them know I say, well look we have a common goal, I said the common goal is, and whatever the child's name. As long as we're on the same page and we're working together, as long as you support me, **I'll go to the ends of the earth for your child.** And when they hear that you know it's just

like "okay." They appreciate that they feel they got a little bit of help or a little bit of support.

Going to the Ends of the Earth (Ethic of Risk)

By doing the work on the front-end and taking the time and effort to build relationships with not only her students, but with the parents as well, Mrs. Lee explained that when that relationship remained reciprocal, she would go to the 'ends of the earth' for her Black girls and students.

> Well, when I say go to the ends of the earth, it looks like this right here. "Your child is coming to school and is giving me his or her absolute best. Whatever that looks like, okay not saying that's straight A's. [It's] his or her absolute best. You as the parent are supporting me, when I call you answer my calls, if I tell you they got detention, you're supporting me and you're saying yes ma'am I back you up, I'll be there to pick them up. Okay, if that child at the end of school year is teetering, needing 10th of a point or a point to go to the next grade, I got you because you've given me your best and everybody don't test well.

However, even amid frustration and when there may be 'no guarantee of success' (Cozart & Gordon, 2006, p. 13), Mrs. Lee maintained her efforts and continued to engage in an ethic of risk, regardless of how 'easy' or 'difficult' her students are presumed to be. For example,

> I just don't see a lot of people teaching like their hair's on fire, like their pants is on fire just. You know, coming and just you know, having that internal desire. I'm gonna look out for that baby, looking for **the ones that are most oftentimes pushed to the side** because they are difficult or pushed to the side because you just don't want to deal with them. **I go looking for them,** you know**.** How can I pull you up or how can I help you? And I just feel like everybody wants the easy class, you know where the kids just all behave, and they just do what they're supposed to do, and the parents are so supportive. Everybody want them classes.

As we began to conclude our meetings, I started to see that discipline for Mrs. Lee was conceptualized as having a caring and collaborative spirit that involved advocating for her Black girls beyond the traditional views of advocacy, but in an embodied and identity-centric way (McKinney de Royston, 2020). As a self-described spirit-led, and spirit-fed Black woman, Mrs. Lee's approach to discipline was also based on matters of the heart. Meaning, she voiced and believed that when you are truly called to do this work, you will approach your Black girls with a certain level of love and care. In addition, Mrs. Lee's approach to discipline was about pouring into her Black girls' social and emotional well-being in nurturing and inspiring ways.

Ms. Greenli Brown: "Ms. Rise to the Occasion"

Whenever I retire, I've always felt in whatever capacity I can work with teenagers, especially Black kids, that's what I plan to do.

-Ms. Brown

Commitment Beyond the School Walls

Quiet as it's kept, I did a little snooping before meeting Ms. Brown. And I'll admit, I couldn't help it. When responding to the pre-selection questionnaire regarding her philosophy on student discipline, she stated, "Those in charge of implementing disciplinary measures need to abide by said measures." So, at the time I wasn't too sure what was meant by her statement. However, having 24 years of teaching experience, Ms. Brown was the veteran of the group and so, I just knew that there had to be more to her story, and decided to do some pre-investigating before any interview took place. And I'm so glad I followed my instincts. Once I found her social media account, I noticed how she once used her birthday as an opportunity to raise money for a social justice organization. After seeing that, I thought of Dixon's (2003) assertion, in which she maintained there is an implicit and explicit political aspect to African American women's teaching praxis. Ms. Brown explicitly demonstrated her political and ethical commitments beyond the school walls through her public support of a social justice organization. I also believed the same sentiments and personal traits that drove her to selflessly collect money on her birthday for an organization as opposed for herself, would inevitably show up in her style of teaching and discipline. And it did indeed. During our initial interview, Ms. Brown immediately expressed pure excitement and admiration for my study and for making it this far in my doctoral journey. As she explained at one point, "I love [what] you're doing in regard to Black females, Black female teachers, I think our voice needs to be heard more." In sharing her story, Ms. Brown revealed that she was originally from a small Midwestern city and moved

down South at the age of 18 to attend a prominent HBCU, which she stated was a "family thing." When asked who or what led her to the field of teaching, she stated:

> I've always felt that just simply helping people has been my calling, it's still my calling. Even though my time is almost up in the classroom I would be looking forward to another realm of helping people…. But like I said, I've always felt that and education to me, is a calling. Everyone can't teach at all. They may want to, but if you've not been called to do it, I wouldn't want you to go into it at all, because it is not for the weary at heart at all.

I agreed wholeheartedly with Ms. Brown. Within service-oriented fields, and especially within any helping profession, to justly serve others, there must be an initial desire within someone's heart and spirit that is also divinely affirmed and reinforced. And often, the gifts or callings on our lives are affirmed by those around us who have witnessed our calling, meaning, it always seems as though everyone else can 'see' the gift, except us. And that doesn't imply that others know us better than we know ourselves. However, it does imply that oftentimes we as humans operate from the mindset of following this 'plan' of what we think we are 'supposed to do', and yet there's a gift lying dormant within us that is connected to our life's purpose. So, as our conversation continued, Ms. Brown explained that she had an initial desire to attend medical school and that she didn't consider teacher education until an older Aunt affirmed that she had the gift of teaching. Having grown up in a predominantly Black town and having mostly Black teachers during her K-12 schooling, Ms. Brown also attributed her decision for going into teaching to a couple of amazing Black women teachers that have instructed her along the way. For instance, she revealed that both her high school English teacher, and another Black woman who served as her history professor (and eventually became a fellow sorority sister) during her tenure as an HBCU student, played prominent and defining roles in her identity as a teacher. At one point, as her eyes glistened with tears, she disclosed, "That's who I have become pretty much. They're all deceased now [but] I'm

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hoping I've made them all proud."And I certainly believe they are. As a respected 12th grade English teacher of 24 years, Ms. Brown stands on the shoulders of outstanding Black women educators who came before her and considers herself to "be a mentor to those who trust me," as she explained. Regarding her identity as a Black woman teacher, she further continued:

> I think it is very **honorable** for me to be in this position, so that any child be it Black or white, or be they Black or white, I should say. As long as I have reached one child, I've done my job, in whatever capacity I can reach them, I have done my job.

Getting the Job Done (Othermothering)

As a self-described mentor, Ms. Brown revealed that although she did not have any children of her own, as a teacher, the primary capacity she operates in is that of a mother.

> When I get in "mama mode" I step outside of myself. Out of that professional teacher mode. And most kids will tell me "Ms. Brown you sound, just like my mama saying that" and I said, "I need to do that okay, to set you back on the right track." And nine times out of ten, it'll work, it'll work…. And I'm not ashamed to get in that mode. And I will tell the parents-when we have parent night beginning of the year- **"I'm the mama while they're here.** They know to come see me if they have some issues. But I'm assuring you I'm the mama while they're here." And it doesn't matter what color, the mother is like "Oh, I, like you, I don't have anything to worry about at all." So, and that's how it is.

When I asked Ms. Brown to describe what going into 'mama mode' entailed, in her soft-spoken tone of voice, she explained:

> Most need that extra mentorship, that's just my way of mentoring them. Most need that mentoring, and naturally there are very different levels of mentoring. Some needed a mother…. Others, they just needed some assurance. You know, it could be just something small like needing assurance that they can do this project, or they can give this speech, or

their scholarship essay sounds dynamic. Others they need a mother and so, depending on what they need, **that's the level that I'm going to give them.**

For Ms. Brown, being in full 'mama mode' consisted of meeting her kids at their level of need and shaping her mode of mothering to match the child's needs. Ms. Brown also announced that when she's in this mode, it's important to just simply *listen* to what Black girls are saying they are in need of, as she expressed, "listening to them shows respect." Ms. Brown mentioned that when her Black girls share their stories, she leans on the advice and wisdom her own mother has instilled in her over the years, as she stated, "I'm trying to keep them from having certain pitfalls in life, just giving them advice."

Having taught a total of 24 years, and 22 years within her current school located in Chestnut, AL, Ms. Brown had a notable reputation for being known as a mother away-from-home to her Black girl students, and to those she had never met. For instance:

> But the Black girls are going to let you know something, something's up and they know exactly who to go to. Some of the girls I don't even know, I don't even know their name, but someone has told them, "You need to go and tell Ms. Brown this, because she'll help you through that. Or she'll know the right people to direct you to." Why me, I don't know. Maybe that's my calling, who knows, but I'm here. That's why I love having fourth block planning. They always come to see me, I can't have two minutes of peace to save my life sometimes (laughs) but, a lot of times it's worth it though. It really is worth it.

Sometimes the duty of othermothering called upon Ms. Brown beyond her planning period and being the woman that she is, she always answered the call.

> I just had a girl in here third block, she's technically in my first block class, but I told her to come see me third block, because I had to help her finish up a job application and we had a couple of minutes free time, so I could do that. She just informed me her mom had

kicked her out of the house as soon as she turned 18. This is not 1924, this is 2022, so why are we still kicking Black kids out, even kids in general at 18 years old? What skills do they have? To throw them to the wolves…and she's literally been thrown to the wolves. And so, I myself, if I had an 18-year-old, I'm trying to help her through like, if I had an 18-year-old, you know. You know, and so, from that point forward she latched on even more to me that way.

As referenced in the above account, Ms. Brown's actions were indicative of the 'mama love' that Jenkins and Anderson (2022) presented, which is a philosophical understanding of love that requires teachers to see and treat their students in ways that may call for some compromising and adjusting on their behalf. In addition, the Black girls under Ms. Brown's care trusted her insight and wisdom and felt safe enough to reveal their deepest problems to her. When asked to describe other issues concerning Black girls within her in school, specifically regarding disciplinary issues, Ms. Brown explained:

Dress code has been a huge issue here for several years. Two girls, one white, one Black, could have on the same outfit. The Black girl would get reprimanded because of the way that she's shaped. Her outfit, especially if it's a dress or skirt of some sort, or even some shorts, look shorter because of her build, rather than on the white girl. It's the same outfit, they could be the same number size, but she will get reprimanded before the white girl will, because of her size and so that's been a huge thing.

However, as our conversation flowed, Ms. Brown also revealed that not only were Black girl students being reprimanded disproportionately in her school, but the Black teachers as well.

I've seen worse things happen to like Black teachers over trivial things that they're being reprimanded for, rather than the white teachers, when it could be something serious or major, and they're just getting a slap on the wrist you know what I'm saying. So, it is "very

clear, it's very clear.

The last line referenced Ms. Brown's acknowledgement that the discrimination, both race and gender discrimination, was very clear and apparent within her school. Ms. Brown continued by explaining:

> And it's almost as if they **lump us in one category.** It's almost as if whatever stereotypes they have about Black people, are played out. It's almost as if, if I'm passing you in the hallway and I know this is what you're doing to someone, it's almost as if I'm thinking, well when is it my turn? When are you're going to come at me? So, it almost puts me at edge, to a point where **I've got to defend myself almost.**

When asked if there had ever been a time when Black teachers in the school had been given the opportunity to voice their concerns and feelings, Ms. Brown replied, "no, because overall we're seen as angry people, we're seen as angry people with attitudes." Ms. Brown further noted that her school's administration team "designed the faculty meetings to where we really don't have a voice, or people are too afraid to voice their opinions", as she revealed. In spaces dominated by whiteness, having to choose silence or become "culturally invisible" (Fordham, 1993) in an attempt to avoid further conviction and isolation as Black women and girls, is a narrative we've come to know all too well. When asked what her administration could do to better support the voices and concerns of Black women teachers:

> Sometimes we're not allowed to be heard, because they don't want to hear us "go off", or they don't really want the truth to be known when we're pretty good at looking in between the lines and reading between the lines, and things of that nature. We can see the bigger picture, we're not stupid people at all, you know…..But I think we as **Black women**, we have that **extra sense** that something's going on, something's not right. And so, we need to be able to have that ability to voice whatever is wrong, without you know, any

reprimandation behind that.

As indicated in the above quote, Ms. Brown was speaking of the multidimensional aspects of knowledge that we have acquired due to the multiple, marginal spaces we occupy as Black women, also known as the outsider within status (Collins, 1990). As outsiders within, we bring a necessary lens and perspective to our profession and to those around us, that must be respected and reciprocated. As Jenkins and Anderson (2022) maintained, "Black women and girls have a much more nuanced understanding of the white educational environment than white educators might have of the Black cultural and community experience," (p. 279).

Representation Matters (Political Clarity)

As noted within the previous section, as a Black woman and teacher, Ms. Brown has a more nuanced understanding of the gendered racism and other discriminatory acts that are taking place within her school, than her white counterparts. As we continued to meet during her planning period, Ms. Brown revealed she also recognized her school was not open to diversity and believed that they were intentionally pushing Black teachers to the alternative school setting.

> They want their schools to look a certain way, they want their faculty to look a certain way, they want their students even to look a certain way, you know what I'm saying. Instead of shoving them to some alternative school or placing all of the Black teachers in an alternative setting because, believe it or not, that's what happens at our alternative school. There are mostly Black teachers that are over there, and I'm like we only have like 10 here. And the majority of the kids that are here, 60%, 70% of them are Black. And what's the likelihood of them having more than one Black teacher each day?

Due to the lack of Black representation for Black girls, Ms. Brown additionally explained, "and because there's very little representation, **the kids can't see what they can be**, put it that way." Having that in mind, I then asked Ms. Brown what the white teachers should-who comprise a

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majority of her school's teaching faculty-work towards in order to form and create better relationships with Black girls in particular.

> Let them know some of the trials and tribulations you had to deal with, you know what I'm saying. Find out what their interests are early on, so you can kind of guide them, you know be another say, for instance, in-house guidance counselor. And you know, try and guide them some type of way. I love getting off track in my classroom and having these types of conversations with them.

As the conversation proceeded, Ms. Brown revealed that when she would have off-track conversations with her students, she was able to teach them things about her, and in turn learn more about their background. Ms. Brown also explained she would engage in off-track conversations in an attempt to help her Black girls and students **"see a way out,"** of whatever issues they were facing at the time. When asked to explain one of the ways she helped her Black girls see a way out, in a heartfelt manner, she noted:

> I pray for my kids…I pray for my faculty, I pray for my building, I pray for my administrators, **I pray for my kids.** There have been times when students will come to me before school starts, I'll shut the window and we'll just have a prayer session. I used to keep a prayer journal. I need to start it back up again, [but] I used to keep a prayer journal and there's one that I buried with my grandmother that's full of my kids' names, and the prayers that I've prayed for with them, and the results of those prayers. Because they'll come back and tell me "Ms. Brown, such and such has happened" or "I got in such and such." So, yeah it's deep like-its deep like that.

It occurred to me at that moment that Ms. Brown's political commitments also involved an element of risk by praying for her kids. This is a risk because we all know that in U.S. public schools, there is a separation of church and state. However, within Black communities, our spiritual lives are

congruent with everything we do, not separate. Thus, for Black families and communities, asking children to isolate themselves from their spiritual selves or whole-being, constitutes a disembodied educational experience (Fields-Smith, 2020). Another way Ms. Brown displayed her political commitments was through her curriculum. With the state having made recent changes to the secondary English Literature requirements, Ms. Brown expressed that it then granted her the opportunity to include more African American Literature and Black authors, which was important to her as a Black woman teacher. When asked to describe what piece of literary work she would recommend for her Black girls, she explained:

> I would have to start with *Still I Rise*. I would have to start with that. I don't know what I would do with it because I've not taught it in years, but it would have to be something that's related to a goal that they have or an ambition that they have…. Whatever I could use to help make their goals come to fruition, that's really what I want to do for these next
>
> five semesters. **I want to be able to bring out the best of them.** So really any piece, that I find that I can use that is key to helping them overcome whatever trauma they may have overcome, whatever they think that no one else has ever dealt with before.

Culturally relevant teaching is a form of political clarity because Black women teachers realize the crucial influence and impact that Black writers such as Maya Angelou and Zora Neale Hurston, can have on the trajectory of Black girls' lives. Moreover, the inclusion of culturally based literature that is relatable, healing, and insightful can help Black girls actualize their dreams and potential. Therefore, culturally relevant teaching is more than just about representation, it's a form of recovery. It provides a bridge for Black girls to tap into and unlock their imaginative futures.

Rising to the Occasion (Ethic of Risk)

As Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) posited, teachers that engage in an ethic of risk, do so by maintaining a collective and collaborative commitment to the *students*, and not just the school,

no matter how 'difficult' or 'easy' students are presumed to be. For instance, Ms. Brown noted,

> Form a relationship with them, even the ones that's really hard to deal with. A lot of the discipline that we encounter are from children who have experienced all forms of trauma. So, I think just forming a relationship simply. And that's with all teachers as well, and administrators also you know. **Let's form relationships with these kids, let's find out, you know, what their story is.** Let's find out from that [their story], what are ways we can assist them in some type of way. What can we do to at least allow these seven, eight hours that they're here, allow those to be safe times for them? You know because school should be a safe place anyway. So, what can we do to assist them to make their lives much better at least within those seven and eight hours a day, five days a week?

Based on our interview sessions, it was evident that Ms. Brown's approach to discipline was conceptualized as simply 'rising to the occasion' of what was required of her as a Black woman teacher, or as Ladson-Billings (1995) referred to as 'good teaching.' Ms. Brown's disciplinary actions consisted of providing a caring relationship via her spirituality, mentorship, and guidance. She also believed in listening to the stories of her Black girls and using it as a means to honor and respect what they were in need of. Lastly, as a culmination of her interview responses and descriptions, my analysis of Ms. Brown's ethic of risk and political commitments to her Black girls and students, is further described below:

How do I rise to the occasion you ask?

Well, I rise to the level depending on what my Black girls need.

'Cause I know all too well

You can't be what you can't see.

What's the occasion?

The occasion is education, and I believe education is a calling and that everyone can't teach.

So, I find it honorable to be in the position to show Black girls

that everything they want is within reach.

See, my family instilled in me at an early age

that I had the 'gift.'

So, me being HBCU trained and educated, I use my wisdom and intellect to not only teach,

but to uplift.

I don't mind being a mentor or in-house guidance counselor to my Black girls,

It's my spiritual task.

So, when I step into 'mama mode,' I'm being fully discerning,

and trying to figure out what they're trying to mask.

I just wish every teacher understood their assignment,

*and rose to **their** occasion.*

Because you must be willing to mold and shape the minds of these young people,

which requires internal motivation.

I also pray for my kids, and oftentimes share with them my favorite biblical scripture,

Romans 8:28.

I've even buried a prayer journal with my deceased grandmother, full of my kids' names and

their prayers, which are still coming true 'till this date.

Yes, so when I rise to the occasion it's deep like that.

As a Black woman, I bring my full embodied ways of knowing and being to the profession.

So, when I see other teachers mistreating Black girls,

I'm not afraid to call them out on their indiscretions.

Even amid racism and sexism,

I rise to the occasion.

When privileged others play victim,

I rise to the occasion.

Because I am the dream of my ancestor's past,

I also know that trouble won't always last.

So, I rise,

I rise,

And will always rise to the occasion.

Ms. Trina Evans: "The Common Denominator"

I think, even as a teacher, like it's a village. Like, I can't benefit from anything just working by myself, we all have to work together, because at the end of the day, we're there for all the kids. Even if I don't teach you, I'm still your teacher.

-Ms. Evans

Although at 35 years of age Ms. Evans represented the youngest of the Black women teachers in this study, she reflected the wisdom and spirit of someone twice her age. Ms. Evans shared that she is originally from Louisiana, but relocated to Mahogany, GA with her then husband at the time due to his military orders. She also disclosed that she has a background in accounting, but that she did not pursue it as a profession because there were not any entry level positions available to her at the time of her arrival in Georgia. She additionally stated that she always "wanted to be a teacher, pediatrician, or lawyer," but due to having two small kids when she first arrived in GA, she noted that becoming a pediatrician or lawyer wasn't an option. However, Ms. Evans revealed upon her arrival, someone introduced her to an alternative teacher education program that was prominent in her area at the time. Being a self-described lover of math and having a background in accounting, Ms. Evans stated that it only made sense to go into the area of math education. As such, the rest was history. Having completed her alternative teaching program 10 years ago, Ms. Evans explained that she was hired on the spot at her current middle school and has served as an 8th grade math teacher ever since.

Ms. Evans was the last teacher I interviewed and was recommended to this study via a community nomination process through Mrs. Pope. Our initial interview had to be rescheduled due to a school fight that took place, and being the multi-school leader that she is, she had to remain after school that day to write-up a report following the incident. At the time of our interviews, Ms. Evans was not only a math teacher, but also held multiple leadership roles, such

as math department chair and 8th grade team leader, and she had also won a couple of awards based on her qualities as a teacher. As a multi-leader within her school, Ms. Evans happened to be in the right place at the right time the day the school fight took place. She further revealed that the fight had taken place between two Black girls during bus dismissal, and that due to the nature of the incident, administration suspended both girls. Although the two girls in that incident ended up being suspended, Ms. Evans disclosed that at the classroom level she did not have any behavioral issues, "because they know I don't play in the classroom," she laughingly noted. However, Ms. Evans did reveal that she and other Black women teachers in her school would oftentimes take preventive measures if they ever noticed any type of relational tension or conflict among their Black girls. For instance,

> If we ever do see them having issues we always let one another know, or will send a text or email, "So and so, you know they're not getting along today, maybe we need to pull them aside and talk with them first. Or we need to send them to [the counselor], so they can have a **mediation** session."

Once Ms. Evans revealed that piece of information, it became quite evident that mediation or playing the role of the mediator would also be a large part of her identity. When asked to further describe her identity as a teacher, Ms. Evans explained that she is known as a "mentor and leader, and not only to the kids, but to the teachers as well." She further shared,

> I'm a go-to person, so if you ever need help with anything, whether it's classroom management, understanding something, finding resources, like that go-to person. So, if you don't know the answer, everybody say, "go to Evans!"

For Ms. Evans, being the go-to person or being viewed as "the common denominator" within her school was a badge of honor, and I could tell she took her role seriously. It was also apparent that

consistency was a critical element within her teaching style. For example, on the pre-selection questionnaire, Ms. Evans wrote, "Be stern but fair. Consistency is key!" as her philosophy on student discipline. During our initial interview, I asked her to go into further detail about her philosophy and she further explained:

> The key word and the key thing I've found, is being **consistent.** As long as I'm consistent with them, they are way more receptive than if, "one day I'm here, and one day I'm here, and they next day I'm left, and the other day I'm right." So being consistent with them has shown to be a really good way to build relationships with them. And then also just having somebody that they can trust.

Being a Safe Place (Othermothering)

Therefore, consistency for Ms. Evans formed the basis of how she built relationships and created a sense of trust with her Black girls. Setting high expectations and keeping them "above" norm, was also an important element, as she stated, "I just set the bar high to where I know that they can reach that bar." Once the relationship and bond had been created, Ms. Evans disclosed that her Black girls viewed her in a motherly way and would even playfully 'fight' over who she belonged to.

> They call me mama a lot, or "I'm mama or aunty," and "no you can't be her child, I'm her child." They like to fight over you. Like I said, I have two kids of my own, so I know it's that nurturing piece because that's the piece that a lot of them are missing. So, knowing like at home, "Well, my mama might fuss at me at home, and then she might not speak to me for like a day or two," or however long they go without talking. Yeah we'll get into it, but you'll come back and I'm still gonna love you, like **I'm still gonna be here for you.** Just because we got into this day, doesn't mean I'm gonna stop caring about you.

Ms. Evans' description of her relationship with her Black girls, was reflective of my previous analysis of Williams' (2018) study with African American women teachers, who described caring for Black students as the process of serving as other-parenting or fictive kin. Moreover, Ms. Evans' demonstration of her care and love for her Black girls was the driving force within her othermothering style. For instance, during one of our conversations Ms. Evans lovingly explained, **"that caring, stern, and nurturing piece of me is what the girls gravitate to,"** and **"they need more of that affection and that kind of love and discipline."** She also described how being the person that her Black girls gravitate to in their times of need is rewarding.

> It's nice that they have somebody that they can get what they're missing, from at school. So, if they do have any issues, you know problems things like that, they will come and talk to me freely and don't feel like they have to like hold it in all the time. Because I know us as Black women we're always told you know, to "suppress your feelings, suck it up you'll be okay." But no, because sucking it up you're not always going to be okay. **And at what point in time are we able to express how we feel without having to hold it in?** And then the littlest thing make us [go] overboard. So, it's a nice feeling. So, I can say it's very rewarding.

As described in the excerpt above, Ms. Evans' feelings of reward for being a trusted source for her Black girls, was also interlaced with her acute understanding of the stereotypical Sapphire or "angry Black woman" trope (West, 1995). She also provided a counter to the "angry Black woman" narrative, by vocalizing the urgent necessity of Black women and girls being provided a safe opportunity and space to release their thoughts and emotions. Additionally, as a Black woman, Ms. Evans understood the oppressive ways we as Black women and girls are told to handle our issues and chose to honor the complexities of Black girlhood by being a safe place for

her girls. At other points during our conversation, she also shared how she taught one of her Black girls how to countdown during a panic attack, and that she even used some of her downtime to answer any questions her Black girls may have regarding important life skills, such as hygiene, natural hair-care tips, and relationship concerns. Regarding her relationship with a particular Black girl student, Ms. Evans noted,

> And just knowing that school is her safe place, I like that, and **I like to be able to be her safe place,** because sometimes home isn't always the safest place for a lot of our kids. And just them being able to come to school and have that small little breather from home, it's like, "okay, I'm making a difference somewhere."

Ms. Evans believed that being a safe place for her Black girls was critical, because it created the space and opportunity for them to experience some type of respite from their world outside of school. Therefore, Ms. Evans' sense of othermothering, was also displayed through her deep understanding of her Black girl students' home environment. She also explained the importance of teachers working to understand and respect the individual display of emotions of their Black girls. As she shared,

> Sometimes it could just be like an issue that's at home and because they don't know how to deal with it or know how to verbalize it or express that something is wrong with them, they take it out on everybody else, and then also **giving them that space.** Because, just like how when we get upset, we're mad you know, we need time and space. So, allowing them to have that. And I always tell them like if you don't want to talk and you're mad, just let me know, say, "Ms. Evans, I don't want to talk right now, just let me be" …. But just kind of allowing them just that **time to process.** Because I tell them a lot of the time you know, whatever is bothering you write it out, and get it out, you know. And then, if

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you're done, if you want to tear it up- tear it up, you know. Whatever you need to do with it. If you need to go talk to the counselor or talk to whoever you feel comfortable talking to, do that.

As referenced in the last few lines above, Ms. Evans believed in responding to the individual needs of her Black girls, by looking not only at the behavior being displayed, but by trying to understand the emotional undercurrent of the situation. Lastly, and most importantly, Ms. Evans disclosed that even when she had disagreements or disappointments related to the classroom behavior of her Black girls, she knew that it was important to demonstrate forgiveness and the offering of a 'clean slate.' As she explained, "at the end of the day, I mean what happened yesterday, was yesterday, today is a new day." Ms. Evans continued by sharing that kids are going to be kids, and that it's important for teachers to stress accountability, and to remain consistent with their care and support of Black girl students, even amid disappointment.

Contributing Factors (Political Clarity)

By embracing her awareness of Black girlhood, and the unique complexities that were specific to each Black girl under her care, Ms. Evans' style of othermothering was also rooted in her ability to understand the sociopolitical context of her students (Watson, 2018). In addition, Ms. Evans also brought her personal experiences to the classroom, and used it as leverage to empower and uplift her Black girls.

> So, just the way I was raised, and knowing how much my mom did for us, and knowing a lot of these kids are in similar situations, I feel like I can help them through certain situations, better than others can. And I think that's another reason why I can relate to them, [because] it's not like I'm just saying, "well I don't know what to tell you, because I've never had to experience that." So, I think just with that and my experiences

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throughout life, **I'm able to help them get through the stuff they're going through,** and to let them see, "Look, I was where you were, even worse sometimes, but look where I'm at now. Like I'm in my career of teaching and my 10th year at that. And even though it was a situation, it wasn't a permanent situation. Like everything is temporary, even though it doesn't feel like it at that time, it's just temporary."

Having come from a single-parent home, and having experienced pregnancy herself as a teenager, Ms. Evans used her identity and experiences as a form of representation for her Black girls who might've come from similar backgrounds, and as a chance to help them see beyond their current circumstances. Additionally, Ms. Evans stated that as a teacher, whether you come from a similar background or not "you have to set aside how you were raised, and you have to take a look and build those relationships with your students to see how they're being raised."
She continued,

So don't come in there with these expectations of, "well they should know how to do this, they should know how to do that." Because they're not necessarily going to know those things. Again, you don't necessarily know what's going on inside their home, you don't know if they're being mentally, physically, emotionally, sexually abused. So, you kind of **have to be like an open book** and just know that they have been through way worse things than what we've been through even as an adult and just kind of prepare yourself for things like that.

As Ms. Evans expressed, her political clarity involved her ability to see beyond the behavior, by taking into account the often hidden or underlying factors that may be leading to the behavioral issues being outwardly presented. It is important that I provide emphasis on "take into account" and not assume. As Ms. Evans shared, get to know your students and where they come from and

prepare yourself for the unexpected. Don't just assume a deficit view and traumatized narrative of your Black girls but get to know the individual struggles and triumphs of your Black girls. Ms. Evans further noted that it is important to view behavioral issues as a necessary and natural part of Black girl's adolescent development.

> For now, the last couple months it has been sixth grade, because you know it's an adjustment coming from elementary school. And elementary school they don't really have ISS as much or suspend as much as they do. So, it's kind of like a rude awakening when they get to middle school…you know them coming from elementary school, being the head dogs, the big dogs, the leaders. So, now you're the babies in the building and you're not adjusted to having to deal with older kids, changing classes, and doing all of that. A lot of it is just ***contributing factors***.

Although Ms. Evans chose to view behavioral issues as a combination of factors that came with the developmental and social changes that are often experienced by Black girls transitioning from the elementary to secondary school setting, she noted that not all teachers in her school and beyond thought that way.

It Takes a Village (Ethic of Risk)

As discussed previously, Ms. Evans' response and approach to discipline with her Black girls consisted of honoring their emotions and understanding behavioral issues as a necessary part of their development and growth as children. However, Ms. Evans shared that due to the location in which her school is located, it held a reputation for being known as "that school" regarding behavioral issues, and that her Black girls and students were often stereotyped and categorized as being ghetto. For instance,

> Especially where I teach at a lot of people say that. Even when I go to like the district meetings, and you know they ask, "what school do you teach at?" I say, "[Mahogany] and

they say, "oh, they hood, they ghetto, all they do is want to be out in the streets and they all wind up pregnant." And "oh, they're not gonna be anything, they're just going to end up being pregnant," and I don't like that part. I really hate that piece. I hate when people say stuff like that. Because then I have to sit there and say, "well okay, I personally teach down there, I've been down there my whole career, whereas y'all have been up here on the North side, you know with the other kids who are not all Black." I said, "and a lot of these kids actually do grow up and they don't wind up pregnant, and on welfare, food stamps or anything like that. So, I've had plenty of kids who have been successful." But that's what I hear a lot of, and I don't like it.

During that moment, Ms. Evans was really frustrated, because her account was just another example of how Black girls who come from urban, and low-resourced communities are often marginalized and viewed in a deficit manner. However, Ms. Evans decided to take an ethic of risk in that moment by defending her Black girls' reputation by providing a counter to the narrative being spread. Ms. Evans also engaged in an ethic of risk by taking on a collective attitude and responsibility for her Black girls, and by communicating the importance of viewing Black girls with humility. As she explained,

I mean, I just I have to put my two cents in. And sometimes I do bite my tongue, because I do feel like I don't want to come off and be unprofessional. But then I will step in, and I will say something, "you know the information you're providing is incorrect." I said, "because not all of them end up like that." And then I have to give those examples where we have had kids go into the Air Force you know, who are nurses, who are this, who are that. I said, "so they're not all bad. So don't equivalate one or two that you see on the news to this is how they all act, because they don't."

Additionally, Ms. Evans engaged in an ethic of risk by not being afraid to speak out and against

the negative and harmful things being said about her Black girls and students. An ethic of risk was also expressed in her awareness of how amid having to speak out against the hateful narratives of her Black girls, she was also aware of how she could be perceived as a Black woman. However, as Dr. Courtney Rose (2022), maintained in one of her social media posts, "calling out the bad behaviors of teachers is a way to humanize the field." Along with bringing humility to the field of education, Ms. Evans also explained that as a teacher, she believed in approaching the field with a collective spirit and viewed all the children within her school as her own.

> I think, even as a teacher like **it's a village.** Like, I can't benefit from anything just working by myself, we all have to work together, because at the end of the day, we're there for all the kids. **Even if I don't teach you, I'm still your teacher.**

As we concluded the final interview, Ms. Evans noted that this study worked to reinforce the importance of self-reflection and the value it has in her life as a teacher. She also concluded by explaining that this study encouraged her to want to have conversations with fellow teachers in her school, as she stated:

> I'm just making sure that we take the time out to kind of **self-reflect** on what we're doing, because you know, sometimes it may be us. You know, it's something that we're doing that we don't necessarily notice that we're doing.

I interviewed Ms. Evans on 3 different occasions, and what remained clear every time was her unconditional care and concern for her Black girls and students. For Ms. Evans, discipline was viewed as the process of creating rituals and routines and as "what we [teachers] create within ourselves, our culture, our climate" and not as a set of "rules," (as seen within traditional practices). Therefore, discipline for Ms. Evans was expressed through showing a spirit of care and commitment beyond the school building, creating nurturing relationships, providing structure and

consistency, and being understanding and responsive to the socioemotional and developmental needs of her Black girls.

Analysis: Moral of the Story

Research Question 1: In what ways do Black women teachers embody a Womanist Ethic of Care as it relates to their described discipline practices? Specifically, how do Black women teachers embrace the maternal/othermothering, express political clarity, and engage in an ethic of risk in their discipline practices with Black girls?

In using Black feminist thought as the theoretical perspective for this study, I was able to gain insight as to how participants' disciplinary practices were deeply intertwined with their self-definition and self-valuation (Collins, 1986) as Black women teachers. Additionally, Beauboeuf-Lafontant's (2002) womanist ethic of care provided the conceptual framework and working definitions for how each element (othermothering, political clarity, and an ethic of risk) is generally demonstrated in Black women teachers' intellectual and pedagogical descriptions. Moreover, in adhering to the authentic guidelines relevant within Endarkened Storywork as methodology, as the researcher I was encouraged to avoid rigid or generic themes and was instead guided to think of the overall outcome of data as a Black quilt, in which patterns and seams are pieced together to create a collective and succinct narrative. Having that in mind, I focused on creating synergy and connection among the Black women teachers' narratives by viewing their stories as the 'fabric' and womanist ethic of care as the 'quilt pattern.' Moreover, in using womanist ethic of care as the overall design and layout, I was able to 'piece' together their collective narratives based on othermothering, political clarity, and an ethic of risk, which are described below.

Othermothering

The Black women teachers in this study embraced the maternal by identifying themselves

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as a "safe harbor", "crutch", or "buffer," meaning they valued taking ownership and assuming responsibility of creating relationships and a protective atmosphere centered on trust, love, and care, and being emotionally supportive and responsive to the needs of their Black girls. Within this definition, the role of mentorship and being a positive form of representation for Black girls was more impactful than any punitive form of discipline.

For example, all of the women described instances in which they valued playing the role of being a mother figure or academically othermothering (Greene, 2020) their Black girl students. The women also described this process as a state of going into 'mama mode' or becoming and adapting to what was required of them in a given moment. For instance, during our initial meeting, Mrs. Pope, who has children of her own, described othermothering as a process of becoming. Meaning, whether you have children of your own or not, mothering is a process of becoming. It requires becoming what your Black girls and students need. As Mrs. Pope stated early on in her initial interview,

> I go beyond teacher. I'm not just Mrs. Pope to them, I **become** Mama Pope to them. So,
> I'm their mom. I'm also their counselor and their mentor.

Mrs. Pope further explained that "they're at a most sensitive time in their lives and somebody has to be there to kinda be their crutch for them and I wanted to be that person." Therefore, Mrs. Pope considered herself to be a crutch or a support system for Black girls and assumed the role of being someone, they can lean on during difficult times. Similarly, Mrs. Lee, Ms. Brown, and Ms. Evans all described othermothering as their mutual responsibility and obligation as a teacher. As Mrs. Lee revealed, "I do my best to try to be a buffer and not just say, "well go see a counselor," and that "I'm a mama first, and so a lot of what I say is just coming straight from the heart." Additionally, Ms. Brown spoke of othermothering as being somewhat of an "in-house guidance counselor" or "mentor" and that "depending on what they need, that's the level that I'm

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going to give them." Like Mrs. Pope and Mrs. Lee, Ms. Evans also described othermothering as the process of creating a responsive and protective environment for her Black girls, as she explained regarding one of her Black girl students,

> I like to be able to be her safe place, because sometimes home isn't always the safest place for a lot of our kids. And just them being able to come to school and have that small little breather from home, it's like, "okay, I'm making a difference somewhere."

For all of the Black women teachers, othermothering was described as a 'natural' element to who they were, and that before making any disciplinary decision regarding their Black girls' behavior, they approached the situation from the perspective of a mother or as someone who was intimately connected and invested in their social and emotional needs. Therefore, as opposed to relying heavily on discipline referrals, all the women used their intimate or mothering relationship with their Black girls as a way to intercede or respond at the classroom level, and as a way to enact a level of care that responded to not only their Black girls' socioemotional needs, but to the sociopolitical context of their lives as well. That is why othermothering is also deeply intertwined with political clarity (Cozart & Gordon, 2006).

Political Clarity

Being deeply intertwined with notions of othermothering, political clarity involved micro and macro-level perspectives and understandings of the historical and contemporary sociopolitical, cultural, and economic oppressions shaping their lives as Black women teachers and lives of their Black girl students, respectively. One of the ways the teachers expressed this concept was by creating the space and opportunity for Black girls to express their thoughts and emotions without judgment. These spaces must also be rooted in spirituality, love, and empathy. Regarding this study, political clarity also involved Black women teachers' ability to use their embodied and identity-centric ways of knowing to affirm and impede the learning process of

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their Black girl students (McKinney de Royston, 2020). As a way to combat teasing and bullying of her darker-skinned Black girl students who wore their natural hair, Mrs. Lee took it upon herself to showcase her own natural hair as an act of solidarity and as a way to resist negative stereotypes regarding Black women and girls' beauty. As she shared,

> I'm going to let my brown babies see their teacher, who is a really dark woman with natural hair, see that this is okay. Like don't let nobody to make you feel bad because your skin is dark and because your hair is natural.

In a similar fashion, Mrs. Pope also stated that she likes to wear her hair in braids, or in its natural state sometimes, as a way to model confidence in having an Afro-centric identity for her Black girl students. As she revealed at one point, "I can't be anything for anybody if I don't know who I am." Mrs. Pope's political clarity also took form in her ability to have "mini-conferences" or one-on-one talks with her Black girls' students, in which she acted as their voice of reason, inspiration, and hope. It is within those conversation spaces that Mrs. Pope was able to understand and honor the emotional undercurrent of a particular behavior issue, as opposed to punishing the girls for 'acting out.' Moreover, political clarity for all of the women involved going *beyond* the textbook and including culturally relevant tasks and assignments, as Mrs. Pope shared, **"I go beyond just a textbook you know and we'll talk about some of those real-world issues, so it can be more relatable for them."**

Following the same sentiments of Mrs. Pope and Mrs. Lee, Ms. Brown and Ms. Evans' political clarity also involved going beyond the textbook and creating a judgment-free space that allowed Black girls to vent about their concerns and issues. This in turn created the opportunity for behavioral issues to be handled at the classroom level and through conversations centered on spirituality, empathy, and care. So, for Ms. Brown, her political clarity was rooted in her spirituality, which she knew was an important element in helping Black girls "see a way out" of

their current circumstances. As she stated, "I pray for my kids…I pray for my faculty, I pray for my building, I pray for my administrators, I pray for my kids."

At other times, the teachers created space for their Black girls to just simply vent and process their emotions, as Ms. Evans also noted:

> Sometimes it could just be like an issue that's at home and because they don't know how to deal with it or know how to verbalize it or express that something is wrong with them, they take it out on everybody else, and then also giving them that space. Because, just like how when we get upset, we're mad you know, we need time and space. So, allowing them to have that.

Thus, political clarity for all four teachers was highly dialogical and relational and was used as an opportunity to honor the social, emotional, and political needs of their Black girls. These spaces were also used as a method to mediate behavioral challenges at the classroom level, as opposed to the administrative level. Most importantly, the teachers chose to honor the raced and gendered forms of coping and survival techniques (Morris, 2016; Ricks, 2014) displayed by their Black girls, which simultaneously worked to increase the positive educational experiences of their Black girl students.

Ethic of Risk

Within this element, the teachers believed teaching to be a divine calling, and that teachers should always seek out ways to improve upon themselves-personally, spiritually, and professionally. Therefore, protecting the morale and quality of teachers within their school and profession was of equal importance. Lastly, the teachers enacted an ethic of risk by sharing a mutual obligation and responsibility to the educational advancement and achievement of their Black girl students and believed in calling out the bad behaviors of teachers and giving students a 'clean slate," each day.

For instance, Mrs. Pope, Mrs. Lee, and Ms. Brown explicitly stated that teaching was a calling, and therefore mirrored through their actions that regardless of how 'difficult' or 'easy' a student was presumed to be, teachers must always view that child "as worthy of care and protection, and as always educable," (McKinney de Royston, 2020, p. 385). An example of this was when Mrs. Lee was explaining what it meant to teach like your 'pants are on fire,' as she noted during her interview:

> You know, coming and just you know, having that internal desire, "I'm gonna look out for that baby." [I go] looking for the ones that are most oftentimes pushed to the side because they are difficult or pushed to the side because you just don't want to deal with them. I go looking for them, you know.

Here, Mrs. Lee demonstrated her "kindred investment in Black children's well-being and success" (McKinney de Royston, 2020, p. 97) by referring to them as her 'babies.' Other examples of engaging in an ethic of risk, by leaning into and looking out for Black girls who may be perceived as 'difficult' involved an instance described by Ms. Brown.

> There will be times when a new teacher is yelling at a kid. It could be a Black kid or Black girl. But there was one time, in particular, where this new teacher was just hollering at this young lady for being late. And I just came up to her and I'm like "you can talk to her with a little bit more dignity."

Similarly, Ms. Evans took it upon herself to engage in an ethic of risk by calling out teachers for spreading a deficit narrative of her Black girl students, and by deciding to provide a counter to that narrative by encouraging teachers from other districts to not **"equivalate one or two that you see on the news to this is how they all act, because they don't."** Ms. Evans also believed in providing a 'clean slate' each day for her Black girls and assumed responsibility for all students in her school, as she explained:

> Like, I can't benefit from anything just working by myself, we all have to work together, because at the end of the day, we're there for all the kids. Even if I don't teach you, I'm still your teacher.

It is evident that in order to engage in an ethic of risk, having a commitment and responsibility to the students and not the school alone, was also of utmost importance. With that being said, emphasizing the importance of self-change and humility (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002) was another critical element within this component, as Mrs. Pope passionately stated,

> I want to eat professionally, So I'm not gonna let anybody or anything stop me from being the best teacher that I can be. Like you better ask them questions, you better go eat, fill up that plate and go eat because you know you want to be here.

Although this element is regarded as having an *ethic of risk*, the women in this study all demonstrated that looking out for and showing up for their Black girl students was not necessarily a risk or a challenge, but their requirement as a teacher.

Research Question 2: How does Black women teachers' embodiment of a womanist ethic of care contribute to discipline strategies and practices that are beneficial to Black girls' learning and development? (Milner, 2020).

In using Milner's (2020) conceptualization of discipline from the historical and contemporary perspectives of Black teachers, discipline for this study was understood as strategies and practices that are beneficial to Black girls' learning and development. Therefore, within each element relevant to a womanist ethic of care, the Black women teachers in this study used various aspects of mothering, sociopolitical consciousness, spirituality and Afro-centric identity as a bridge to respect and honor the social-emotional needs of their Black girls. The women in this study truly garnered the ability to **"see beyond the behavior"** and opted to search for emotional undercurrents that may not have been as visible. However, through specific acts

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and practices, the women were able to discern and decipher what was needed of them in particular moments.

The primary way this was done was through the building of **(re)lationships.** As shared by Mrs. Pope, "It takes a lot of work up-front. There's a lot of up-front work building those relationships." Thus, all of the teachers took it upon themselves to build trusting connections with their Black girls from the very beginning of the school year. For example, Mrs. Pope talked of a survey she distributed at the beginning of the school year that assists in getting to know her students on a more personal level. Ms. Brown spoke of simply being a "listening ear," for Black girls and to be willing to provide proper mentorship and guidance. This is critical, because once a caring and genuine relationship has been formed, behavioral incidents became just that, an incident, and not a defining moment that could have resulted in their Black girls being punitively disciplined.

The teachers in this study were also highly focused on offering **(re)solutions** and worked to provide preventive measures in order to protect their Black girls from getting into trouble. For instance, Ms. Evans revealed that she and other Black women teachers in her school would lookout for tension among their Black girl students and seek opportunities to act as the mediator to a possible verbal or physical conflict. As she stated, "If we ever do see them having issues we always let one another know or will send a text or email." The important thing to note here is that Ms. Evans and the other Black women teachers were not anticipating or expecting 'bad' behavior, but they were on alert for behaviors that may indicate a bigger issue. Therefore, within this aspect, Ms. Evans' focus was different because her gaze was different. Meaning, she was not looking at her Black girls' students through a deficit lens, or from the perspective that they were inherently 'bad,' but from the perspective of care and love, and that she wanted to prevent them from being suspended or expelled. It is also important to have a (re)demptive and (re)storative

attitude, as Ms. Evans shared that she offered a 'clean slate' each day and did not believe in wrongfully labeling students for something they did in the past.

The idea of **(re)covery** was also another beneficial discipline strategy for Black girls, as described by the Black women teachers in this study. Dillard (2021) maintained, "For Black people, our work could be characterized as (re)covery, as being about repairing the spiritual, cultural, and material damages to ourselves and our communities through engagement with African heritage and culture," (p. 184). One of the ways the teachers engaged in the idea of (re)covery was through the development of Intimate Conversation Spaces. All of the teachers described instances that supported the notion that many situations of perceived defiance could be eliminated by engaging in empathic and caring conversations with Black girls. These spaces must also be judgment-free zones that allow Black girls to vent about their thoughts and emotions, without fear of being reprimanded. For example, Mrs. Lee and Ms. Evans both shared instances in which they created the space and opportunity for their Black girls to process what they were feeling, as Ms. Evans stated,

> Sometimes it could just be like an issue that's at home and because they don't know how to deal with it or know how to verbalize it or express that something is wrong with them, they take it out on everybody else, and then also giving them that space.

The Black women teachers also enacted in various forms of **(re)presentation**, by using their embodied or emotional/spiritual and physical ways of being and knowing as Black women. A critical element within the Black women teachers' form of (re)presentation, was their belief that their call to teaching was connected to a Higher Calling or divine calling. Dillard (2021) asserted, "Black people embody a spiritual knowing, a just knowing, a way of being in relationship with the full circle of life," (p.5). For instance, Ms. Brown revealed how a relative of hers informed her at an early age that she had the 'gift' of teaching. Ms. Brown insisted that

although she tried to fight it for many years, she just intuitively felt and believed that teaching was her calling. She also revealed that others must also be called to the field of teaching in order to adequately serve students:

Everyone can't teach at all. They may want to, but if you've not been called to do it, I wouldn't want you to go into it at all, because it is not for the weary at heart at all.

On a similar note, Mrs. Lee and Mrs. Pope also stated that they sought divine guidance when seeking clarity on what career path they should take. As Mrs. Pope explicitly stated that she asked the Lord, "What am I supposed to do?" when she felt at a crossroads within her career path. The teachers in this study also engaged in (re)presentation by modeling high expectations, being a positive role model, and by protecting Black girls and the teaching profession. Lastly, in using their identity-centric ways of knowing, the teachers were ultimately able to act as a physical form of (re)presentation for their Black girl students, which in turn, created a classroom atmosphere that was culturally affirming and fostered a sense of belonging. An example of (re)presenting through embodied and Afro-centric ways, was through appearance. This can be witnessed through some of the Black women teachers' decision to embrace their natural hair in spaces dominated by whiteness, as their decision to do so demonstrated an acceptance of Black beauty and an act of solidarity to their Black girls. Mrs. Pope and Mrs. Lee both shared their sentiments on this topic and believed their decision to embrace their natural hair provided a counter to the harmful narratives regarding Black women and girls' hair.

Overall, discipline was described as an immersive and spiritual experience that was deeply intertwined with their identity, culture, and experiences as Black women teachers. Most importantly, their described discipline practices and strategies responded to the divergent needs of their Black girl students in healing ways. For these women, being Black women and prior Black girl students themselves, was an asset and advantage to the ways in which they approached

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and responded to the behavior of their Black girl students. In using their embodied and Afro-centric identity as leverage, the teachers offered a Black womanist approach to discipline that was both methodical (routine-based) and improvisational (McKinney de Royston, 2020), and that was premised upon the socio-cultural political realities of their Black girl students. Thus, womanist caring as reflected within their discipline practices was highly political and was all about emancipating and liberating the lives of Black girls.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided the narratives of each of the participants and explained how their school discipline practices embodied a womanist ethic of care. In using womanist caring as a frame to understanding their collective narratives, patterns and seams arose in which othermothering, political clarity, and an ethic of risk was evident throughout their discipline approaches. Based on their narratives, discipline was conceptualized by the Black women teachers in this study as pedagogical and intellectual approaches that offered caring and healing forms of (re)lationship, (re)covery, (re)solution, and (re)presentation to their Black girl students. Overall, discipline was highly relational and dialogical, requiring participants to respond to Black girls' behaviors in culturally and emotionally responsive ways. In the following chapter, I explore the importance of being emotionally responsive to the needs of Black girls and provide recommendations and implications for future research and practice.

Chapter 5: Discussion

There's a rhythm to our method.

And no, you can't just simply 'catch' it.

It's an embodiment, an essence.

A full-bodied experience ripe with soul and a genuine love for Blackness.

There's a rhythm to our method.

Can you see it?

It's as sturdy and dependable as an oak tree.

With roots that run deep, steeped in recovery and transformation,

that must remain absent of whiteness and all of its contamination.

There's a rhythm to our method.

Can you feel it?

It feels like a calming breeze, or like an easy stream.

It's an endarkened, melanated flow and movement with life,

filled with strides of love and light.

There's a rhythm to our method.

If you pay attention and listen closely,

that inner voice will tell you where to begin.

But it requires you to see beyond the skin, and into the humanity within.

There's a rhythm to our method.

It's a style that's poetically bound and profound.

Meaning, it's emotionally, mentally, and spiritually sound.

There's a rhythm to our method.

It's connected and invested in finding innovative ways of (re)covering and protecting those of us who are dark,

which requires a revolutionary mindset and pure heart.

There's a rhythm to our method.

...Are you ready to tap in?

For the Black women teachers in this study, their described discipline strategies and practices were indeed rhythmic, methodical, and improvisational, all of which are reflective of Black womanist logics (McKinney de Royston, 2020). Mrs. Pope, Mrs. Lee, Ms. Brown, and Ms. Evans all went beyond the call of duty, and operated not only as teachers, but othermothers, counselors, healers, mentors, and social activists. For these women, their discipline practices reflected a womanist ethic of caring in that they chose to validate and protect the psychoeducational and socio-emotional, -cultural, -political experiences of their Black girls by providing multi-tiered systems of support that included academically mothering via mentorship, guidance, role-modeling, and Intimate Conversation Spaces. In addition, the women viewed teaching as a divine calling, and that all teachers should engage in constant self-reflection and partake in a collective and collaborative mindset that privileges the needs of Black girls and other students.

Moreover, womanist caring as reflected in the narratives of the four Black women teachers was not based on just a set of 'best practices' but their political and ethical missions, which was guided by their embodied and identity-centric ways of knowing that worked to nurture, honor, and protect the divergent needs of their Black girl students (McKinney de Royston, 2020). Although the Black women teachers in this study used Afro-centric notions of care and identity to respond to and approach behavioral situations with Black girls in ways that were healing and transformational, the white, normative culture of their schools also created many internal and external challenges and constraints for them in route to caring for their Black

girl students. As Hurtado (2003) argued, "Black women have to negotiate the external negative evaluations based on their group membership- race, gender, class, sexuality-with their internal sense of self," (p 220).

Navigating a Womanist Ethic of Care as Black Women Teachers

As noted earlier, "Being a Black woman on purpose for a purpose and (re)presenting oneself in line with the weight of our legacy as Black women is not always easy," (Dillard, 2021, p. 129). There were many times the teacher-participants revealed they felt burdened by the demands of their jobs, and often felt unseen, unheard, and outright disregarded for their knowledge and efforts as Black women and teachers. Therefore, evident within each of the teacher-participants' narrative, were the constraints and challenges created by the dominant school culture and climate. This is consistent with my previous analysis of Black women teachers and how schools operate to further silence and disempower their Afro-centric knowledge and perspectives, (Nyachae, 2016). For example, a couple of the women described instances in which they felt as though they had to 'prove' themselves or walk around on 'edge' to avoid being chastised or further marginalized within their schools. This was most evident in the way Mrs. Pope described her challenges as a Black woman teacher, in which she revealed,

> It's like we always have to prove ourselves. We have to prove our education. I have three degrees, why do I have to prove that? The papers speak for itself, you know.

Mrs. Pope further stated that she feels as though teachers in her school only view her as "loud" and "boisterous," and that she does not feel seen. In a deeply philosophical and revolutionary way, Mrs. Pope also shared that, "if they don't see me, they don't see my students." In a similar tone, Ms. Brown explained how she and other Black women teachers are "lumped into one category," and viewed as "angry people with attitudes." In having to contend with such harmful and negative perspectives regarding Black women teachers, Ms. Brown essentially noted,

It's almost as if whatever stereotypes they have about Black people are played out. It's almost as if, in passing, if I'm passing you in the hallway and I know this is what you're doing to someone…it's almost as if I'm thinking, well when is it my turn?

Additionally, Ms. Brown also revealed instances in which Black women teachers were being disproportionately reprimanded for minor behaviors in comparison to white teachers for more major violations. Mrs. Lee and Ms. Evans also spoke of the challenges as Black women teachers, such as having to bring positive aspects to being a Black woman, and correcting negative, and hateful narratives about Black girls, respectively. However, in spite of the racialized and gendered constraints faced by all of the women, they all consistently embodied the type of care that McKinney de Royston (2020) spoke of, which she described as,

Caring involves a view of teaching and learning that humanizes youth, that looks beyond stereotypes and instead teaches them in and through their embodied knowledges of self, family, and community (p. 383)

With that being said, we must ask ourselves, "How can teachers, administrators and other school officials work to create the space and opportunity for Black women teachers' embodied ways of teaching and knowing to be respected and reciprocated within and beyond school walls?" As reminiscent of the poem I posed in the beginning of this section, there is a rhythm to Black women teachers' method, and other teachers and school officials can also tap in, however, they must create the space and opportunities for Black women teachers' voices to be heard and prioritized. One way to do this is in not viewing Black women teachers as only being of service or labor, but as thought leaders and experts in their own right.

Recommendations

The first recommendation for this study is regarding the current conceptualization of school discipline in U.S. public K-12 schools. In using a womanist ethic of care as a framework

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to understanding Black women teachers' school discipline practices, it was quite evident early on that discipline was not thought of as reactionary methods resulting in punishment, but as caring and liberatory responses that provided structure and support. Participants also revealed through their narratives that discipline was not about creating generic rules, but about modeling rituals and routines and teaching the meaning behind those routines. As Mrs. Pope in particular, referred to discipline as a learning process. In addition, Ms. Evans recommended that teachers should think of discipline as the culture and climate you create within yourself and around you. Meaning, your classroom discipline should be specific to who you are as a teacher, and not based upon traditional, institutionalized methods. More importantly, participants all described discipline as building genuine, caring relationships that consisted of being "firm, but fair." Firm in a sense that has the best interest of the student in mind at all times.

As noted earlier, womanist caring as an approach and response to school discipline is not premised upon a set of 'best practices' but is based upon a political and ethical mission (mindset), that is deeply immersive and personal, and that protects the needs and outcomes of Black girls and students. And although these discipline strategies and practices are unique and specific to the Black women teachers in this study, professional development opportunities and workshops for teachers can certainly work towards helping teachers develop a Black womanist lens. Following the advice of Mrs. Pope, I also believe that professional development should be school specific and reflective of the location in which Black students and their schools are situated. This is critical as it helps teachers to reach students on their own cultural and emotional turf (Emdin, 2016) as referenced in Mrs. Lee's account.

Because the field of teaching is overwhelmingly comprised of white women, it is also important to teach 'meeting students where they are' from a critical and Black womanist perspective to help white teachers understand the significance of not operating from a white

savior complex, but from having a true genuine care and concern for your Black students. I believe the key to developing a caring relationship that is free of a white savior complex, is to not look at the students' circumstances or living conditions as permanent, or that you are their only source of elevation or mobility in life. Nor should your care and concern come from a place of guilt or pity. It should come from a place of love, authenticity, and realizing that you have the opportunity to serve as a *vessel* of hope and inspiration for your Black students, and not their *only* source of hope.

Emancipatory Possibilities

Another implication for this study involves the possibility of K-12 schools creating formal, designated spaces of emotional support for Black girl students. Participants all described instances in which they engaged in reality talks, or "mini-conferences" with their Black girl students that were judgment-free zones that did not patronize or ridicule Black girls for their behavior but honored and respected their emotions by allowing them time to process. Therefore, having an actual or formal Intimate Conversation Space for Black girls and students in schools could allow opportunities for the type of (re)covery that Dillard (2021) speaks of. In addition, providing these spaces could work to demonstrate one of the ways in which schools could make racial and gender responsive decisions that offer the idea of repair and healing from the trauma experienced via anti-Black school discipline practices (Baggett and Andrzejewski, 2021).

These implications also reinforce the importance as to why the recruitment and retainment of Black women teachers is necessary. For example, Mrs. Lee detailed many behavioral instances that could have resulted in a punitive consequence for her Black girl students, but that because she is a Black woman and was a prior Black girl herself, she understood certain behaviors of her Black girls in ways that white teachers did not. However, all teachers can work to provide judgment-free zones by not policing (Carter et al., 2019) or

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adultifying (Epstein et al., 2017) the behaviors and emotions of Black girls, but by viewing them as the adolescents that they are, and by attending to their socioemotional needs in both culturally and developmentally appropriate and affirming ways. This implication is also consistent with the work of Jacobs (2022, p. 73) who found that "emotional literacy development is a critical aspect of Black girl survival," and that schools should work to better support the emotional lives of Black girls by creating emotionally safe and protective spaces.

Application

Although mothering is a highly feminized and gendered term, this process as defined by the Black women teachers in this study is also regarded as a process of becoming. Therefore, regardless of a teacher's gender identity, the process of othermothering can be viewed as making a conscious and deliberate effort to attend to the psychosocial and developmental needs of your Black girls. Womanist caring also requires teachers to understand and value the "political nature of teaching," (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002, p. 83) and to view caring and mothering from a sociohistorical standpoint. Hence, there is also a vital need for more qualitative educational research that seeks to understand the intellectual and pedagogical contributions of Black women teachers in order to gain a deeper historical and contemporary aspect of their teaching practices with Black students.

A womanist ethic of caring can also be applied to the discipline decision-making process by looking at the beneficial strategies and practices that were revealed through the narratives of the Black women teachers in this study. Specifically, teachers can ask themselves how their response and approaches to the Black girls' behavior involve culturally healing aspects of (re)lationship, (re)solution, (re)covery, and (re)presentation. Teachers can also look to the personality traits and characteristics identified within each participants narrative, for instance:

- **To be real (Mrs. Pope):** develop the ability to be in 'for real love' (Lane, 2018)

with your Black girl students, and committed to their healing and thriving beyond the school walls.

- **A servant's heart (Mrs. Lee):** individuals should feel compelled and called to do the work of teaching and should seek divine guidance and inspiration. Protecting the morale of the teaching profession is also important.

- **Rise to the occasion (Ms. Brown):** rise to the level of what your Black girls need. Become a natural observer and respond in appropriate and affirming ways.

- **Common denominator (Ms. Evans):** have a collective and collaborative mindset. Show a mutual obligation and responsibility to *all* of the Black girls and students in your school, and not just those you teach. Believe in the potential of every student.

Lastly, to develop the skills that respond to the behaviors of Black girl students in ways that are reflective of a womanist ethic of care, requires teachers to become emotionally in-tune and attune to Black girls' display of emotions in ways that are nurturing and healing. This means that teachers must be willing to not only attend to the fieldwork that is required of them in their profession, but also to the *feelwork* of their profession. Teachers of all backgrounds must be willing to value and prioritize the affective life and knowledge (Brown, 2021) of their Black girls. Based on Brown's (2021) analysis, "affect is a material consequence of how Black girls *feel* in their social worlds and physical bodies," (p. 200).

So, as echoed within the narratives of the four teacher-participants, teachers must be willing to listen to Black girls' stories, but they must listen from a place that honors the "intellectual and cultural capital that Black girls bring to school," (Evans-Winters & Hines, 2022). In order to affirm and privilege the social capital that Black girls bring to school, educators and school personnel must be willing to strengthen and establish school-home-

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community partnerships by viewing parents and the surrounding community as educational partners (Yull et al., 2014). This is also reflective of Mrs. Pope and Ms. Evans' recommendations, in which they stated that school discipline should be context specific and reflective of the realities of your students' lives. Therefore, relationship-building and engagement with your Black girl students within and beyond the school walls are key elements to employing a womanist ethic of care.

Meaning for Teachers

You want our rhythm, but not our blues.

You want our physique, but not our hues.

You want to teach, but only to kids who look like you.

Remember, you must be right within,

before teaching other folks' kids.

I introduced this chapter by presenting a poem titled *There's a Rhythm to Our Method* to indicate that the discipline practices enacted by the Black women teachers in this study was more than just passive strategies and techniques void of any soulful interactions, but discipline for them was a deeply spiritual and embodied process that emanated from their hearts. That is why the first component of a womanist ethic of caring is the embrace of the maternal or othermothering. This element is critical because it emphasizes the importance of love, spirituality, and humanism. Therefore, in order to care for your Black girl students, you must first love your Black girl students. Meaning, you cannot authentically and genuinely embrace and support the concerns of your Black girls if you do not have that "for real love," that researcher Monique Lane (2018) references.

In order for teachers to become 'right within,' they must be willing to start a **R.I.O.T** within themselves in the name of love and care for their Black girls. Therefore, teachers must be

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willing to cause an inner disruption to who they are by being **R**eflective, **I**nterrogating, **O**bserving, and **T**ransformative. As mentioned in the previous section, teachers must be willing to engage in the *feels* of their work as teachers. Teachers must first embrace the emotional vulnerability and critical self-work that comes with dismantling their own biased and discriminatory beliefs about Black girls. Teachers and educators can trigger a R.I.O.T process by understanding that they have agency as teachers or the opportunity to effect school disciplinary change on both interpersonal and institutional levels by honoring the cultural distinctiveness and citizenship of their Black students (Gray et al., 2018). In order for this to become possible, teachers must also view their Black girls and Black students as agents of change and must use their narratives and experiential knowledge as a way to critique oppressive responses and approaches to school discipline.

However, in order to adequately acknowledge the oppressive barriers experienced by Black girls in schools, teachers must in a sense, go to 'battle' with themselves and the world around them. This must be done in an effort to counter the destructive and criminalizing images and beliefs about Black women and girls that have been perpetuated within society. In addition, constant self-work must be activated throughout the journey of protesting any prior belief systems built upon racism and anti-Blackness. Therefore, the R.I.O.T process is all about monitoring what occupies your mind and heart space when interacting with and educating Black girl students. The R.I.O.T process is described in further detail below.

1. **Reflective**. Teaching is a very intimate process that requires constant self-evaluation and reflection. Teachers can begin the reflective process by asking themselves a series of questions like: What do I need to change within myself? What hidden biases/prejudices do I have? How do I self-identify? In what ways does my identity privilege me, and/or also oppress me? How has this country (U.S.) historically (dis) honored and (un)

protected me as a person? Or has it? If I have more privileges than oppressions, how has that made me unaware and/or unconcerned with the oppressions of others (race, gender, class, sexual orientation)? How has it made me (un) intentionally silence others? Have I been dismissive of the thoughts, emotions, and overall presence of those who are different from me?

2. **Interrogating**. Interrogate your initial understanding of care. Be willing to have an intervention with your mindset by asking questions like: What paradigm shifts do I need to make. How do I show up for myself? How do I provide myself grace? In what ways do I nurture and care for myself? How can I show up in those very same ways for Black girls?

3. **Observing**. Be observing of the things around and within you. Protect the morale and quality of teachers by not being afraid to call out the bad behavior of teachers. Operate from the "See something, say something" mindset. Even if it's with you. If you notice Black women teachers and/or Black girls being reprimanded and ridiculed for behaviors or actions unfairly, in ways that other women and girls aren't-**say something**. Be willing to make a sacrifice in the name of justice. If you do not, you are being compliant in the injustices of those around you.

4. **Transformative**. Adjust your approaches, by asking yourself, How do I converse and interact with Black girls and women? What thoughts truly run through my mind when interacting with Black girls/women? How can I encourage my school and community to honor and embrace the socioemotional needs and political realities of Black girls? Although research focused on Black students written by and from the perspective of critical Black educational scholars is able to capture the nuances and intricate details of Black life, do not become reliant upon those findings as a replacement to learning about

the individual stories and experiences of your Black girls and students. Get to know your Black girls and students on a personal level, and Black people in general. You must also be willing to encourage others around you to change their discipline approaches as well. This is not an exhaustive list of reflective questions, nor does it represent a linear process. The R.I.O.T process should be cyclical and constant; you should always do check-ins with yourself. The R.I.O.T method should also become basic rules of engagement that you consider when interacting with Black women and girls both in and outside of school. Lastly, it is important to remember that it takes a collective and collaborative effort among teachers and school officials to support the ultimate well-being of Black girls, and the way to begin is to always start with ourselves first.

Visions

(For future research)

As mentioned in the methods section of this study, all but one of the Black women teachers taught in schools identified as operating in a Title 1 program. This offered significant insight as to how school and community funding is reminiscent of a much larger issue. One revealing piece of information that came up during data collection, was during Ms. Evans' interviews. She explained how teaching to the political realities of her Black students also meant educating other teachers of the poverty that was reflective of the infrastructure of their school-neighborhood. Ms. Evans further revealed that many of her Black students did not have access to city transportation services, or to access to healthy foods and positive youth development opportunities that are most often seen on the 'North-side' of town or in suburban areas that have more revenue and community resources. Furthermore, this revelation led me to ask the following questions: How does structural racism or redlining impact Black women teachers and their enactment of womanist caring? How does structural racism impede the

learning and development of Black girls?

Another future research topic that emerged from my engagement with the data, is the idea of using the body as activism, or the concept of embodied activism. The disciplinary process as described by participants in this study was based upon their embodied and relational ways of knowing, which ultimately created classroom and disciplinary experiences for Black girls that responded to them in culturally caring and emotionally literate ways. In addition, the teacher-participants allowed their intuition and intellect to guide their bodily response and approaches to their Black girl students. Thus, it is important for teachers to advocate for their Black girls on the micro-level and to look for interactive opportunities in which the mind and body can become sites of activism. This led to me to ask the additional question: How can teachers work to build their emotional literacy of Black girls' emotions through their use and exploration of embodied activism? What implications could embodied activism on behalf of teachers and educators have on the revisioning of school discipline policies?

Lastly, future research and practice should be built around the relational aspects of school discipline, and how teachers and school officials could work to use the elements of Endarkened Storywork and Black feminism to their advantage when revisioning professional development and school discipline practices. This implies that educators must view themselves and their Black students as change agents, which requires cultural engagement and collaboration at the institutional level. Teachers and educators must respect the particular knowledge standpoints of their Black girls and students. That said, educational practice and research should look for ways to utilize ideas stemming from Black women teachers, Black girls, and Black communities in order to address the context and school specific needs of their students. This is critical, as Evans-Winters and Hines (2022) maintained, "When schools take away Black girls' "ownership" of their bodies, they normalize the treatment and disciplinary punishment of Black female students

as Nobodies," (p. 107). Educators, educational researchers and policymakers, must place the rightful "ownership" of Black girls' experiences back in their hands, by creating opportunities for them to define and name on their own terms how systems and structures impact their schooling experiences. This can be done through the work of community-engaged research and practice. In addition, Assata Richards (2022) contended that employing the principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR) through a Black feminist lens, offers a value-oriented approach to eradicating injustices and inequities in our work and practice. Furthermore, using CBPR in alignment with Black feminism encourages the "alertness needed for oppositional knowledge projects," (p. 218).

Conclusion

As story listeners, we have a responsibility to do something with the stories that have been shared with us. In using Black Feminist Thought and womanist ethic of caring, we are able to understand the characteristics, and intellectual and pedagogical styles that are most beneficial to the development and learning of Black girls. In addition, the four Black women teachers in this study embodied the type of politicized love and care (McKinney de Royston, 2020) that is required to demonstrate the level of empathy and emotion Black girls desire. As Morris (2016) maintained, "Love is too rare a commodity for Black girls in classrooms," (p. xv). By looking to Black women teachers' pedagogical and intellectual contributions, teacher education and professional development programs have the ability to transform and liberate the way discipline is conceptualized. Emancipatory possibilities include schools working to provide their Black girl students with emotionally safe and healing spaces. Other applicatory methods include teachers willingness and ability to engage in constant and critical self-reflection, in order to respect and understand the cultural capital Black girls possess within and outside of school. Lastly, it is important that future research and practice work to eliminate anti-Black school discipline

practices by taking on Afro-centric community-engaged approaches when restructuring

discipline policies and procedures.

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(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

INFORMATION LETTER
for a Research Study entitled

"A Narrative Inquiry of Black Women Teacher's School Discipline Practices"

      You are invited to participate in a research study to explore and understand how your experiences as a Black woman teacher informs your decisions regarding school discipline practices with Black girls. This study is being conducted by Educational Psychology Ph.D. student Jasmine S. Betties, M.S., under the direction of Associate Professor Dr. Kamden Strunk, P in Auburn University's Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology. You are invited to participate because you identify as a Black woman teacher, and currently teach in a public-secondary, with a predominately Black student body. This study will be conducted virtually through Zoom.

      What will be involved if you participate? Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to complete a 10-15 minute pre-selection questionnaire provided by Auburn University's Qualtrics site. You will be asked questions regarding your name, gender, race, age, current grade level taught and school name, years of teaching experience, description of your student-discipline philosophy, and contact information (email and phone number). If selected to participate, you will be contacted based on the contact information you provide and asked to participate in 3 rounds of 60-90-minute interviews. You may also be asked to clarify your responses. Your total time commitment will be approximately 4.75 hours.

      Are there any risks or discomforts? The risks associated with participating in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life. The questionnaire and interview questions involved in this study will elicit responses from you as a teacher regarding your school discipline beliefs, and how your identity as a Black woman informs those decisions. Therefore, this study poses no risks above the normal school discipline decisions that you must make or will make daily as a Black woman teacher. The primary risk is loss of confidentiality; however, this study will protect your identifying information by using pseudonyms, which minimizes that risk.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? If you participate in this study, you may enhance the body of literature that contributes to school discipline and educational practices. However, you will not directly benefit from this contribution. I cannot promise you that you will receive any or all of the benefits described.

Will you receive compensation for participating? To thank you for your time you will be offered a $30 digital VISA gift card upon completion of all 3-interview rounds.

Are there any costs? There are no known direct costs to participate in this study.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn any time before the end of the third interview, after which point the data will not be identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University, the Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology.

Your privacy will be protected. Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Information collected from this study will be used towards the development of research, which will take the form of dissertation research, presentations, or in future academic journal manuscripts/publications.

Your participation is completely confidential. Pseudonyms will be used in place of your personal identity, so your identity will not be known. All recordings and transcripts will be stored on an encrypted storage server with Box. Your data will be protected.

If you have questions about the study, please ask them now or contact Jasmine S. Betties by e-mail at jsb0084@auburn.edu or by phone (706)-992-4193 or Dr. Kamden Strunk, at kks0013@auburn.edu or (334) 844-3084. If you want a copy of this document, select print.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334) 844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

If you wish to receive the described VISA gift card, please email me at jsb0084@auburn.edu indicating **YES** to receiving the VISA gift card.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO. THIS LETTER IS YOURS TO KEEP.

_____*Jasmine S. Betties*_____03/01/2022_____
Investigator's signature   Date

_____Jasmine S. Betties, M.S._____ ___
Print Name

Kamden Strunk   03/14/22
Faculty Investigator's signature   Date

_____Kamden K. Strunk, Ph.D._____
Print Name

The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from March 1, 2022 to --------- Protocol #22-076 EX 2203, Betties

Interview Questions for Black Women Teachers

1. So, tell me a little bit about yourself (Where are you from, married, kids where did you receive your teaching degree from) As a Black woman, who or what inspired you to become a teacher? When and where did you begin teaching?

2. What does it mean to be a Black woman teacher? How do you self-identify?

    a. What do you think others think it means to be a Black woman teacher? (Williams and Lewis, 2021, gendered racial identity questions)

3. As a Black woman teacher, what type of challenges or constraints do you face in your school? (What is the hardest part about your job?)

    a. What motivates you to overcome those challenges and to continue showing up as yourself?

4. Tell me about your teaching philosophy. How does your spirituality and belief system play a role in the way you respond to the behavior of Black girls?

5. How important is African American culture to you as a Black woman teacher?

6. How much of a role does your culture play in the way you connect and communicate with your students/Black girls? How did you build that relationship?

7. Can you give me a description of the behaviors or actions that you believe are leading Black girls to get into trouble?

    a. As it relates to your classroom, how do you typically respond to those behaviors or actions that you believe are leading Black girls to get into trouble? Can you give me an example?

    b. How much of a role do you think your identity as a Black woman play in the way you choose to respond?

c. What are the typical disciplinary actions your school's administration usually assigns to Black girls who get into trouble? (Questions 4 a-c adapted from Morris, 2016, p. 208)

8. How do you think the disciplinary experiences of the Black girls you teach differs from that of White girls?

9. What do you believe is the underlying cause of behavioral issues with your Black girls?

10. What does it mean to you to embrace the role of being the othermother or parent figure to the Black girls you teach when responding to behavioral issues?

11. What does it mean to you to express an awareness of the sociopolitical issues that shape the lives of your Black girls? How do you remain conscious of those issues when discipling them?

12. How important is it that other teachers become aware of Black girls' socioeconomic/political status and upbringing when responding to their behavior?

13. What does it look like for you to take an ethic of risk or challenge the way your school administration responds to the behaviors and actions of Black girls?

14. What kind of role do you think parents play in preventing or intervening Black girls from engaging in unwanted behaviors or actions (such as defiance, disobedience, or disrupting the class) at school? How would you describe the type of relationship you have with the parents of your Black girl students? (adapted from Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 184)

15. What type of influence do you think the community/environment in which your school is located has on the behaviors and actions of Black girls?

16. What do you wish your school would do more of as it relates to the parent-teacher-student relationship?

17. What do you think schools could do better to support the social, emotional needs of Black girls?

18. What did you learn about discipline as a result of your teacher training program? What do wish you would have learned or what changes would you make? (adapted from Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 184)

19. Is there anything you believe teachers of Black girls should know about discipline? What do you wish White teachers knew? Especially white teachers who are from predominantly white communities?

20. What type of professional development opportunities are available at your school as it relates to teaching and connecting with Black students/Diverse students in general?

21. What do you think should be done to attract more Black teachers to the teaching field (K-12 setting)?

22. What type of discipline strategies and practices do you believe are beneficial to the learning and development of Black girls?

23. What dreams or hopes do you have for the Black girls you teach?

24. What has been your biggest takeaway from this study?