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Black Female Educator: Underappreciated, Overworked, and the Indelible Quest for
Agency Within the Educational System

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Louis in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Education with
an emphasis in Educational Practice

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<u>Advisory Committee</u>

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Dr. Ja'Nae Alfred, Ph.D.

Dr. Robert Good, Ph.D.

Dedication

To my father, Jimmie Stevenson

It does not seem like six years have passed since I lost you. Words cannot express how much I miss you daddy. Thank you for all the wonderful memories and lessons you taught me over the years. From fishing to changing a tire or the oil in a car, you helped create a strength in me I sometimes forget I possess. I am grateful for the years I got to spend barbecuing at the shack and just shooting the breeze with you. Thank you for encouraging me to go back…I would not be on the verge of receiving my Doctorate if you had not. This is for you.

To ETW

They were just moments in time, but their significance was profound. I had lost my father earlier in the year and I was slowly falling down a dark hole. The first time you looked at me, in Saint Louis, I was on the verge of crying. He was supposed to be there with me. We talked about how much fun it would be to see you in person. The next couple of times were when I went home to California. In San Diego with my brother and in Los Angeles. Each time it felt like he was there with me and we were having our usual discussion about your game. Thank you for seeing me…those moments provided the light that help me see my way out of the darkness.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank Dr. Thomasina Hassler. She is the reason I transitioned from the certificate program into the doctoral program. She is also the reason I continued in the program during some rough patches. The conversations we had were right on time. I want to thank my committee: Dr. Ja'Nae Alfred and Dr. Robert Good. The road was long and bumpy, but I made it to the final destination with your help.

I have to also acknowledge Karen Douglas. My dissertation ride or die. Many times, you were the voice of reason I needed to see that I am a "Bad B". Thanks for the laughs and the eating out sessions. We finally made it.

Abstract

In this study, I examined my experiences in the educational system as a Black female who feels overworked and underappreciated, like I must constantly prove my credibility and fight stereotypes, and feel strain of trying to remain healthy, physically and mentally, while trying to find agency in the educational system. I recount the trauma I faced as a Black female student and then as a Black female educator. I documented my experiences from my time in K-12 and my years as an educator. I utilized the Critical Race Theory tenet, persistence of racism, Intersectionality, and Black feminist thought as the framework for analysis. I follow with implications and recommendations for Black female educators and school districts. I conclude with my final thoughts on the study and where this journey has led me as I look to my future as an educator.

Definition of Terms

This list consists of terms that are essential to the study. Its inclusion is to provide a concise definition of the terms to create a common understanding of the key terminology used in the study.

- Agency (sociology) – capacity of individuals to act independently and make choices that shape their lives within the context of social structures (Scholarly Community Encyclopedia, 2024)

- Autoethnography - "Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systemically analyze (graphy) personal experiences (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)," (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2005, p. 273).

- Critical Race Theory - the view that race is socially constructed concept that functions as a means to maintain the interests of the white population that constructed it (Ortiz & Jani, 2014)

- Culture – the values, beliefs, language, rituals, traditions, and other behaviors that are passed from one generation to another within social groups (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2023)

- Race – a social construct used to group people. Race was constructed as a hierarchal human-grouping system, generating racial classifications to identify, distinguish, and marginalize some groups of people across nations, regions, and the world. Race divides human populations into groups often based on physical appearance, social factors, and cultural backgrounds. (National Human Genome Research Institute, 2024)

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I was not born a bitch. When I was cut from my mother's womb, I was a miracle. A treasure to be prized and more precious than a diamond. I was the apple of my daddy's eye. The star of a show I did not know I was starring in. Each day I received rave reviews. My audience could not get enough of me. Standing ovations and fans clamoring to get to me was the norm. My parents stood proud as the marquees grew larger and my star shone brighter. She's so precocious they would say. She's so kind and caring, they shared. She's so smart they hollered from rooftops. When I walked into the room silence ensued as people watched my every move. Even the critics could not deny my 'uniqueness'. Then one day someone said, "let's put her on a larger stage." On that stage I soared to new heights. Toppled mountains and let the world know that I was there.

And then the lights went out.

I walked onto the stage, and no one knew I was there. I walked around the stage, careful not to disturb the other players. I sang my highest note and performed the most expressive soliloquy known to man. Yet, no one rose to applaud my performance. But where was I going to go? This was my stage. This is where I was comfortable. Sharing my intelligence with others brought sunshine to my life. As the curtain closed, I realized I was doomed to repeat this scenario day to day.

As I stepped beyond the theater door, the marquee began to spit vitriol. I did not understand what was happening as I watched the angry sparks yell at me. What about me caused such a change in the atmosphere? I was not a different person; I was the same. I decided to keep my head down and walk the streets without incident so I could continue.

I returned to that stage daily struggling to maintain my sight. Hoping that the strength I held within was enough to sustain the onslaught of negativity I received.

Setting the Stage

Thinking about the above analogy, I realized that I have lived my life on a stage, in a world that would never let me be a star. The color of my skin precluded me from reaching the heights of stardom. My old reality, being the center of the world and feeling like I could do anything, became my new reality, living in confusion and fear because of my race and gender. There is no marquee highlighting my name and letting people know I am there. The bright lights, the desire and strength within me, guiding me across the stage, were slowly put out. The people I thought were there for me no longer saw me. I was not seen; therefore, I did not exist.

As a child, I was surrounded by family and friends who thought the world of me. On that stage I was a star. The people in the community where I lived were my audience and they encouraged me to be all that I can be. Then I had to move beyond my community to a larger stage. I went from being the star, to being an extra, sometimes not even getting recognition. My initial foray into education as a student went well. The lights were shining brightly, and I was still at the top. Moving forward, I began to encounter teachers, particularly white female teachers, who did not want me to succeed. Their actions initially caused me to falter and ultimately, caused me to lose that within myself that propelled me to strive for greatness.

When I entered the world of education, as an educator, I presumed I would be in a position of strength as I was certified in a highly sought after subject area. I was also a Black female educator at a time when most Black female educators in math were leaving

due to retirement or looking for a change in career. My expectations were that being an

educator would be a great opportunity to help students and learn a new skill. What I

received was a new education about the way Black educators are treated and how I, as a

Black female, was considered the lowest of the low. On occasions when I had a Black

principal, I was seen, and my contributions valued. I was given chances to lead and show

how capable I was in my position. Once the Black principal was replaced by a white

principal, I became invisible again. For example, walking into a staff meeting I am likely

not to be seen. I could walk to the front of the room, begin speaking, and most people

(i.e. my white colleagues) would not acknowledge that I was there. The issue was as

Black women, no matter what my position, I was assumed to be invisible and

unimportant. To prove my point, there was a white male in a position, that would have

been considered below mine, and when he walked into the room, they would stop

whatever they were doing, turning to pay attention to him. By the way they treated me,

one would assume I was the 'help'. This is the role that many people type cast Black

females in no matter the organization or her rank (D'Oyley, 2016). It reminds me of old

films where the Black maid would be in the room doing her 'chores' and everyone else

would continue about their business like she was not there. They would speak about

things they normally would not talk about *in front of company* like she does not have ears

to hear and a mind or voice to take what she knows and use it. For instance, I was

working in a room that was not mine and I couple of teachers stopped in the hallway

holding a conversation about a colleague who had gotten into a bad situation. One of the

teachers overheard me in the room, peeked his head in, and said, "Oh, it's just

Stevenson." The conversation they were having was not something I think any of them

would have wanted repeated and I am sure they would have moved the conversation elsewhere if it had been someone else, but they continued to talk as though I was not there. This is something that happens regularly and I have witnessed conversations stopped or the party moved when others enter the area.

Being Black in a room full of white people, means I do not blend in. So how is it that I have become the invisible woman floating around the room, gathering information as though no one can see me? Yet, I can make myself seen. What entails, however, evokes feelings of negativity towards me. I have occasionally become one of the many stereotypes that are used when characterizing Black females. Asserting myself or, as they see it being loud and aggressive, alerts them to my presence, but at what price. I have become what society, and the media see as the Black woman (Muhammad, 2015) . Why is it that I have to become something negative to be seen by others? Then, with my newfound visibility, I have to suffer the consequences brought on by how I achieved it. As a Black female, out in society, I have become accustomed to the negative attributes applied to me (Croom, 2017). As a Black female educator, I am held to the same stereotypical standards (Muhammad, 2015). How does one find agency in an educational system designed by whiteness and upholds anti-Blackness?

Becoming a Black Female Educator

I did not know that I was going to be a teacher when I received my master's degree. I was a business major, and my sights were set on conquering the business world. Alas, the job market had other ideas I was thrust into what felt like my only option: Teaching. To say that I did not want to teach would not be true. I assumed that my teaching career would begin once I retired from the business world.

. Upon being hired, I was told I exhibited the most patience, so they placed me in

Special Education classes and one self-contained classroom. I truly had no idea what I

was walking into. The educational landscape had changed so much from what I knew as

a student and what I was entering into as an educator. Though I was excited about the

opportunity, I did question my initial ability to perform to my own standards. I had

expectations of myself and it was stressful feeling like I may not be able to fulfill

them.   What I needed was consistent professional development to help my performance

and growth as a teacher (Penuel et al., 2020)

Despite not having formal training, what I did have was the memories of my

elementary school teachers who gave me the foundation to become the successful

educator I wanted to be. So, on that first day of school, I walked into the building with

the enthusiasm of Ms. Rider, the creativity of Ms. Allen, the sternness of Mrs. Fordham,

and the determination of Mr. Blue. I wanted to emulate them when I entered the

classroom. The school district I began my career in was an inner-city school and was

predominately Black. I know how great it felt to see someone who looked like me,

standing before me filling me with knowledge. Not just from a book, but from life and I

wanted to evoke that same feeling in my students. Though mimicking my past Black

teachers helped me through my first few years as a teacher, having the opportunity to be

thoroughly prepared for the classroom would have helped me be more efficient and

effective (Douglas et al., 2008; Marchitello & Trinidad, 2019; Samuels et al., 2020).

The Creation my Duality as an Educator

Earlier I spoke about being on a stage and not being the star of the play. That is

how I felt in my first year of teaching. I was thankful to have two Black female mentors,

however, they were both older and retiring or leaving the classroom for another

position. As such, I learned a great deal from them, but they were not subject to the overt

and covert racism I faced as a young Black female educator. Now that I am looking back

at that time, that was not something I would have learned in the classroom. It was

something that I would have learned in life. It brings to mind a passage from the book

The Souls of Black Folks by W. E. B. DuBois (1903):

> "It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness… one ever feels his two-
>
> ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled striving;
>
> two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from
>
> being torn asunder." (p. 3)

I never would have imagined during those first few weeks of work, as I strutted down the

halls in my pants suits and heels, that I would have to be two people to have a career in

education. But as the days passed, my strut became a harried walk and the light I was so

eager to shine upon my students became a mere flicker. I was suffocating in a school

environment that would not allow me to remain myself.

I was accustomed to being treated differently because I was a Black female

outside of the school building; inside the school building it became a burden as well

(Crenshaw, 1991) . It weighed heavily on my psyche as I pondered how to be me, yet

also be like the white teachers, in order to fit in and keep my job. In my opinion, I did

not display the characteristics they would normally attribute to Black women. I was not

loud or aggressive, I dressed conservatively, and I was an eager and will participant in the

established culture. So that meant the problem was not my behavior, but the color of my

skin. Something that I had no way of changing. But what I could change were my

actions to mimic their behavior and become *white* as my students would often tell me because I was not from the area and I spoke proper.

Eventually, I became two different people while in the building. I was the consummate *white acting,* based on my speech and demeanor, educator in settings calling for that behavior and I was myself in settings where the population was predominantly black students and I was free to speak my true mind. This duality not only created problems for me mentally and emotionally, but it also created a situation where I was unable to show my students that being true to yourself was a possibility. This took away my ability to fully integrate myself into their worlds even though I lived in the neighborhood with them.

I convinced myself that this was just a case of code switching. That was a concept that even my Black students understood as this was a part of living and being Black (McCluney et al., 2019). Yet, it was more like the undercover cop who infiltrates the drug cartel and eventually becomes so ingrained in their way of life that he forgets who he initially was and becomes that which he was working to end. Or, like my immigrant students who come here and lose their native culture because they want to be seen as more American. This is what I did. I assimilated myself so well into the school culture I became what they wanted and, in the process, lost myself.

Finding Agency

Growing up I remember being told no one can give you the power to be you. In essence who I am and what I am to be is determined by me. No one can give me agency. I have the ability to take action, be effective, and influence my own life. However, I have found this is not the case as a Black female within the educational

system. My ability to have agency is hindered in an educational system guided by whiteness (Bruce-Golding, 2020, Mabokela & Madsen, 2003). I received a promotion from a Black principal but was demoted when a white principal was hired without explicitly being told why I was receiving the demotion. I have been asked by principals to complete a task for the good of the entire group to have it tossed aside or not even recognized. I found it impossible to feel confident in my abilities because there were limits to what I could do. With only 20% of all teachers being minorities and only 7% of those being Black women, we are at a large disadvantage with more than 70% of teachers being white women (Cherng and Halpin, 2016; Walker, 2018). Though I have a great deal to contribute, especially since the student populations have changed to a majority of minority students, my voice is drowned out by the larger number of white teachers. Actually, I am rarely allowed to speak. Oft times, administrators and department heads have their own agendas, whether sent from the district office or their own personal feelings. Trying to give input on how we can improve the culture and curriculum in the building is not an acceptable practice. Though, as a Black woman, I have the ability to impact the school experience of minority students (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2019).

The one place I do have agency is in the classroom with my students. In this space, I have the autonomy to create the kind of environment that is conducive to the students' emotional wellbeing as well as their ability to obtain knowledge. Many students, as well as staff, feel as though my classroom is a prison. The place where you go when you 'break the law'. Yet when you walk into my room you do not feel like you are in jail. I have paintings and puzzles on the walls that were done by students. There are

lots of colorful fabrics covering bookshelves. I even have a meditation space that is a sitting area with a rug and floral arrangements where the students can go when they need a break. I did not want to sit in a room that was cold and unfeeling. My classroom reflects that. Though we go through many trials and tribulations, they still see me as a valuable part of their educational experience. They understand who I am and what I want to see them achieve. We have conversations about their struggles, their behavior, and the things they can and need to do to get the most out their educational journey. They allow me to be myself without fear that I will be judged negatively or risking my job. I can speak in my natural cadence, wear what I want, dance to my own beat, and be that crazy aunt they all pretend that I am. While I cannot have a sense of control and effectiveness in the school system, I can find it with my students, which keeps me coming back regardless of the hopelessness I feel as an educator.

Problem Statement

As a Black female educator, I have been subject to the constant feeling of being unappreciated. Black women educators must guard against the constant questioning of their ability to perform their jobs and overlook and suffer the daily bombardment of microaggressions (Ferinde, Allen, and Lewis 2016; Rogers-Ards et al. 2013). Practices guided by oppression and injustices become a barrier to their empowerment and affirmation (Taylor 2013). Additionally, Black female educators lack respect and acceptance, face barriers because of their race and gender, and often feel lonely in their roles as educators (Taylor 2013).

I asked myself several questions regarding the reason Black females are unable to find agency within the educational system. There are three areas that continually arise as I looked into the phenomenon. Black female educators are:

1. Underappreciated and overworked. (Davis & Bowman, 2023, Kohli, 2012)

2. Constantly proving credibility and fighting stereotypes. (Farinde et al., 2016, Rogers-Ard st al., 2013)

3. Not taking care of their health (Welton, 2016)

Feeling Underappreciated and Overworked

As I recall my time as an educator, I find that I allowed myself to be used for whatever purpose those around me needed. I have always been willing to help, particularly as I thought it was important to be a team player. It was nothing to go the extra mile to ensure that things would run smoothly at the school and for the students. However, that willingness to help meant that others did not feel the need to step up because they knew I would do it.

Over time this mutated into me becoming a Jack of all trades. Not only was I doing my job, but I was also taking care of things that would normally be the responsibility of the librarian, secretaries, or the IT department. When I decided to no longer take on the roles of others, people pushed back because they did not want to start doing something that they had not been doing even though these things were part of their job descriptions. For example, I used to help out with Chromebooks and other IT issues the teachers would have. The person who was initially supposed to do that job did not have the organizational skills needed to do it properly. When that person left and the new

person was hired, they took over the role as the IT person as it should have been. However, teachers and even the new person who had all the training that went along with the position, continued to come to me though the building principal informed them that I was no longer the contact person. When I informed the new secretaries that I would no longer taking care of id pictures or helping in the main office and that I would be training them to do the things that were part of their job descriptions, they agreed to make time for the training. Yet, to this day, they have found ways to avoid taking on the jobs that fall under their job descriptions. I find myself telling them *that is not my job regularly* even as I continue to perform their duties. Thank you and we appreciate all you do for us are never things I hear. Most people do not notice me until they need something. When they get what they want, I go back to being the invisible entity they will not call upon until they need something else.

Proving Credibility and Fighting Stereotypes

Despite having bachelor's and master's degrees and more than two decades as a math teacher, in my current position I have had to prove constantly that I am capable of performing at a level that is above my current position. I have been told that the In-school Suspension Instructor was little more than a glorified babysitter and because my position does not require teaching credentials, my colleagues assume that I am uneducated. This is evidenced by the way they treat me. I have had English teachers question my ability to help their students with basic English concepts. One teacher question who came into my room and left an outline for a simple paragraph on my board as a template for the students writing assignment. Even if what I am proposing would be beneficial to the team, they look past me and move on to someone they feel knows more.

I receive this treatment particularly when I have something to contribute about math. They ask how I got a student to understand a concept, but when I share it with them, they act like I do not have a clue about what I am sharing and how could what I shared have helped the students. Then another teacher will put forth an idea that is very similar to mine and they exclaim how great the idea is and how they can incorporate it into their classrooms.

When I first started working at my current school, I did not feel the need to let everyone know the degrees I have or that I am a math teacher. As I got to know people and I shared with them my credentials, they were shocked. However, this did not stop them from acting like I was not on par with them. Even when I told a few of them I was working on this degree, they assumed I was working to get my bachelor's degree. I realize this thinking on their part was not only because of my position, but because stereotypes and the positions held by other Black females in the building (Acosta, 2019). I had a white male colleague who would ask me weekly how long until I received my bachelor's degree. He would go on to say, "I did not think you would be doing that if you were only going to be in this position." Yet, he at one time held the position and used it as a steppingstone to become a teacher. Why would I do anything less? He even supported his thinking by saying the other secretaries, all of whom were Black, did not have their degree.

Speaking up for myself is another problem within the school setting. Society sees the Black woman as the outspoken, angry Sapphire stereotype (Harris-Perry, 2013) when she speaks up for herself, so I have had to be careful of my actions. Simply telling a white coworker that he does not need to keep reminding me to take a specific action resulted in

him whispering about me to others, no longer greeting me when we are in the same area, and ignoring me when that was not something he did prior to my speaking up. It does not matter that I did not raise my voice or threaten them, the mere fact that I had the audacity to question them meant I was not conforming and thus I became the stereotypical Black female who is forever angry (Harris-Perry, 2013).

The issue here is my white female colleagues are not regarded the same way (Collins, 2000). White women are seen as delicate and the epitome of womanhood, where the Black woman is seen as hard, strong and manly. If they do not like what is happening or they want to tell someone off, they are just having a bad day, and everyone bands together to make sure they are taken care of. When I express my displeasure, I am isolated, and people act hesitant to talk with me.

Not Taking Care our My Health

I rarely miss a day of work. There are several reasons for this. First, I just do not like to be absent. Second, the students need me to be there. And third, I would have to be extremely ill because the expectation is that I will be there since no one can take my place when I am out. Even if I come in, try to make it through the day but must leave, I am asked if I am sure I cannot make it to the end of the day. Many times I have stayed, but if I do leave, they act like I have committed a great crime because now they have to make different accommodations for students or another person will have to step up. Generally, that means I return to an even greater workload because no one decided to help. While the first two do not affect me health wise, it is the third that creates the problem.

As a Black female, I know that there are expectations of me that do not apply to others in my building. (Kohli, 2012) The stress and demands that come with being in my position sometimes leave me depressed and physically ill. I have trouble sleeping and often do not want to get out of bed. Yet I do without considering that I need to take care of myself. If I am not well, then I cannot be present for the students that need me.

Black females are consistently bombarded by subtle racial assaults that cause unwanted stress (Yasso et al., 2009). This constant stress is what Carroll in 1998 deemed Mundane Extreme Environmental Stress (MEES). For Carroll this acronym means:

- Mundane – this stress is commonplace, and we expect to experience it daily

- Extreme – it has an effect on how we view ourselves.

- Environmental – it takes place in our environment and continues to grow there.

- Stress – negatively affects or health.

Due to this stress, Black females have a higher rate of depression (Welton, 2016). They worry in their sleep which affects their ability to rest (Meyers et al., 2003). They use maladaptive and passive coping strategies to deal with racial stress creating health issues (Clark et al., 2013). This leads to lower production levels making it difficult to come to work (Eagan & Garvey, 2015).

Rationale for the Study

As long as studies continue to group Black female teachers with Black male teachers, then their voices will continue to go unheard (Constagno, 2008). This is

detrimental, not only to the educator, but also to Black students who are not afford the opportunity to see educators who look like them and provide positive reinforcement against the negative stereotypes they see in society as a whole (Samuels et. al., 2020).

In this study I am seeking to add a different dimension to the conversation about Black females in education. While there is some commonality to the issues we face, the experiences and outcomes differ. Most important my experiences are unique, and my narratives will be adding to the commentary regarding Black female educators, why they are needed, and why they leave.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because as a Black female educator my voice has value. My stories will tell of my experiences as a minoritized person in the educational system working against stereotypes and oppression. As a Black female in the education system, whether as a student or educator, I have been subject to microaggressions (Lewis et al., 2016).

Despite working through these microaggressions, my self-narratives will showcase what motivated me to remain an educator. According to Dirksen et al. (2017), my motivation or lack thereof to remain an educator is linked to my development personally and professionally and my ability to attain job satisfaction. Additionally, these narratives will show how my role in the school setting and my ability to have a positive impact on students kept me from leaving the profession (Han & Yin, 2016).

Summary

This autoethnographic study will look at my experiences as a Black female educator in public school systems over the course of twenty years. The trauma I

experienced during these experiences caused me to feel underappreciated and over

worked, always fighting to prove my credibility and push back against stereotypes, and

neglected myself causing physical, mental, and emotional distress. This journey will help

me realize what it is that I am getting from my educational career and what I am

not. More importantly, by the end of this study I will know where I stand on my future as

an educator.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review will look at racism epistemologically within the education system (Zamudio et al, 2011) through the lens of Critical Race Theory in Education and Black Feminist Thought, while focusing on the effects it has on Black female educators. Zamudio et al. (2011) states:

> …[e]pistemology is the study of nature, status and production of knowledge and how we know and understand the world. Specifically, it includes questions about how knowledge is constructed, whose knowledge counts, what knowledge is valued, how knowledge is shared and acquired, how we assess what someone knows, and how we know what we know. However, the concept of epistemology is more than just a way of knowing and can be more accurately defined as a 'system of knowing.' Importantly, people's epistemological orientation is related to their worldview which develops based on the places they live and learn, as well as their racial, gender, and class backgrounds. More directly, epistemologies are racial and gendered. (p. 98-99)

Thus epistemological racism looks at racial biases that are based on the history of the white race, supports the supremacy of whites, and demeans the thoughts of those who are not white (Skinner-Dorkenoo et al., 2023).

Critical Race Theory

> *"As marginalized people we should strive to increase our power, cohesiveness, and representation in all significant areas of society. We should do this though, because we are entitled to these things and because fundamental fairness requires this allocation of power"* (Delgado, 2009, p. 110)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an offshoot of Critical Legal Studies (CLS). CLS began in the 1970s as a means to challenge the policies against and the civil rights for Black Americans or marginalized people (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT takes Critical Legal Studies a step further by addressing white supremacy as a hegemonic system in institutions in the United States that was based on a meritocracy (Delgado, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1998a).

CRT is steered by five main principles:

1. *Racism is inherent in our society.*

    a. CRT views racism as established in and a function of society in the United States. This deems race a tool to be used while analyzing racial disparities (Bell, 1980 & 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2016 b; Taylor, 2016).

2. *The system of racism benefits whites through interest convergence*

    a. Bell (1980), employed the idea of interest convergence to explain how racial progress in the Black communities occurs when there is a benefit to whites and/or it does not disrupt their connection to white supremacy. Racism and interest convergence, together, create a benefit for the entirety of the white populace in the form of material and psychological gains (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

3. *Race is a mechanism for organizing society; it is not a scientific fact.*

a. Race is a way for white supremist to maintain a hierarchy by basing a person's status on specific characteristics ((Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2016 a; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Solorzano & Yasso, 2016).

4. *Intersectionality and anti-essentialism.*

a. Race constitutes a social identity that determines who receives privilege and who disparities and can clash with other "status quo categories" (Ladson-Billings, 2016 b, p. 350). Intersectionality acknowledges that race, gender, and class create scenarios of injustice and benefit, yet anti-essentialism suggests that creating homogeneity and taking away individuality and autonomy; however, in order to work against the ills of society we must have a way of identifying groups that are being harmed (Ladson-Billing, 2016 b).

5. *Counter story-telling gives people of color a voice to shed light on racism*

a. There is strength in the use of counterstories in fighting against dominant narratives and racism (Delgado et al., 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, Ladson-Billings, 1998). Through storytelling, Blacks and other marginalized people, can offer experiential knowledge adding a voice to the experiences of marginalized people (Ladson-Billings,1998). Additionally,

stories that have been created by a hegemonic culture to maintain power, can be deconstructed by the narratives of Black people and those that are marginalized (Delgado et al., 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education is a concept developed by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate (1995) more than twenty-five years ago. Scholars in education use CRT as a method to analyze the effects of racism in education (Ladson-Billings, 1998b, 2003). Zamudio et al. (2011), state that educators can address inequalities in education by applying CRT principals. These principles include:

1. CRT asserts that race and racism are central structures in American society. A CRT understanding of the structures cogently explains racial inequality in education.

2. CRT emphasizes the historical trajectory of racism in education and links it to the contemporary challenges students of color face in schools.

3. CRT gives voice to the experiences of students from marginalized groups and, in doing so, challenges the master narrative and taken-for-granted ideologies about these students' oppressive experiences in schools.

4. CRT provides a way of looking at how education policy and school/classrooms are structured to highlight, in tangible and specific ways, how education inequality is manufactured.

5. CRT offers educators a beacon of hope in considering how education policy and school practices might be constructed to effectively diminish the

achievement gap and educational inequality for students of color. (Zamudio et

al., 2011, p 165)

Using these principles, CRT becomes an "epistemological and methodological tool, to

help analyze the experience of underrepresented populations across the k-20 educational

pipeline" (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015, p 206). CRT in education thus provides a way to

address the crossing of white supremacy and education and how it affects students and

educators of color. Additionally, it can aid in the reshaping of policies and curriculum

that are move inclusive of all instead of the current state of exclusion.

Intersectionality

In Crenshaw's Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex (1989), she uses

the concept of intersectionality to explain the multitude of negative conditions faced by

Black women merely because of their race and gender. In the article, Mapping the

Margins (1991), Crenshaw continues her exposition on the concept stating:

> "In an earlier article, I used the concept of intersectionality to denote the
>
> various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions
>
> of Black women's employment experiences. My objective there was to illustrate
>
> that many of the experiences Black women face ae not subsumed within the
>
> traditional boundaries of race and gender discrimination as these boundaries are
>
> currently understood, and that the intersection of racism and sexism factors into
>
> Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the
>
> race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately. (Crenshaw, 1991, p.
>
> 1244)"

Crenshaw's use of intersectionality was adopted because feminism did not consider the lived experiences of women of color but only those of the white female. She states, " …when white feminists attempt to include other women, they often add our experiences into an otherwise unaltered framework. It is important to name the perspective from which one constructs her analysis, and for me, that is as a Black feminist…I see my own work as part of a broader collective effort among feminists of color to expand feminism to include analyses of race and other factors such as class, sexuality, and age (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244).

The use of intersectionality as an analytical tool has developed continuously since its inception. Purdie-Vaughna & Eibach (2008) put forth the model of intersectional invisibility. They defined intersectional invisibility as "the general failure to recognize people with intersecting identities of members of their constituent groups" (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008, p. 381). The model is based on the concept of prototypicality. For the Black women this mean she does not fit into societies standard, nor does she fit into any of the hegemonic identity groups formed around the concepts of Androcentrism and Ethnocentrism. As a woman she is non-prototypical from an Androcentric viewpoint as Androcentrism is centered around the male being the prototype. As a member of the Black race, she in non-prototypical Ethnocentrism is centered around the dominate culture which is white. Black females are also subjected to intersectional identities that do not place her in the prototypical groups. For instance, the prototypical woman is a white female, and the prototypical Black person is a Black male. Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach contend that "being a non-prototypical member of a social group results in an experience of social invisibility" (2008, p. 380). By looking at

Black women through the lens of intersectional invisibility, a spotlight is placed on their non-prototypical existence shedding light on the trauma the experience at the intersections of race and gender. In navigating the workplace through the lens of intersectional invisibility, Black women, in contrast to their white female colleagues, have experiences that lead to adversity and trauma.

Black Feminist Thought

Black feminist thought (BFT) seeks to shed light on the Black women who did not figure in the feminist movement that only paid attention to the interactions between white females and males (Collins, 2000). BFT also removes white middle-class women from the center, as they were in the feminist movement, and takes into consideration women of color's experiences so that their perspectives are not marginalized and removed from the main rhetoric (Collins 2009). In the United States, white women are used to explain the experiences of all women and does not take into account the variations in race and class of other women (Guy-Sheftall, 1993). BFT shows that the experience of all women in the United States is not similar or equal to the experience of white women (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003).

Collins (1986, 2000, 2009), through her working Black Feminist Theory, puts forth a few themes in BFT that work in tandem to highlight the struggles of Black women. These key themes are self-definition and self-valuation, the interlocking nature of oppression, and the importance of Black female culture.

Self-definition and self-valuation

Collins (1986) states that "self-determination involves challenging the political knowledge-validation process that has resulted in the externally defined, stereotypical

images of Afro-American womanhood" (p. 16). Black females have been subject to

many stereotypical narratives concerning who they are. Collins (2000) describes four of

them as mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas. The mammy is

always depicted as being beloved by the white family she served, yet she still knew her

place and was seen as the "faithful, obedient domestic servant" (p. 72). Depicted as an

"overly strong Black woman", the matriarch "is less desirable than White ones because

we are too assertive" (p. 77) This characterization is other times called Sapphire. The

welfare mother is the descriptive term used for "poor, working-class Black women who

make use of social welfare benefits to which they are entitled by law" (p. 78). Finally,

the hot momma or Jezebel is seen as being "sexually aggressive" (p. 81) and "just can't

get enough" (p. 83). These stereotypes are often used to justify the negativity directed

towards Black women. BFT seeks to challenge these undesirable images of Black

women by using counter storytelling through the Black woman's voice (Collins,

2000). By allowing Black women to control the narratives about who they are as

individuals, they can replace the negative images with those of positive images that truly

describe who they are as women (Collins, 1986).

Interlocking nature of oppression

Black feminist thought looks at the way race, class, and gender come together at

intersections to create lived experiences that are unique to Black women. White women

can use their whiteness to invalidate the negativity of being a woman and Black men can

use the fact that they are men to advocate for better treatment, however the Black woman

does not have those options (Collins, 1986). Though Black women have oppressions

coming at them from multiple avenues, Collins (1986) feels that "Black women should be

the first to realize that minimizing one form of oppression, while essential, may still leave them oppressed in other equally dehumanizing ways" (p. 19). Black feminist thinking allows for the connection between systems of oppression and does not let the idea that fixing one element of oppression will fix them all or that doing it one at a time is acceptable (Collins, 1986).

In 1989 when Crenshaw (1989) began introducing the theory of intersectionality, she questioned the homogeneity of the Black female experience. She used intersectionality to show that Black female experiences were heterogeneous in nature and consisted of each female's unique existence at the intersections of race, gender, and class. Crenshaw also urged researchers to look at these intersections as they discuss where Black women reside in the discrimination, civil rights, and social movements.

The importance of Black women's culture

It is important to use the definition Collins (1986) used for culture when determining what she meant by the culture of Black women. To help give culture a concise meaning, Collins used Mullings (1986) definition. Mullings describes culture as:

> "The symbols and values that create the ideological frame of reference through which people attempt to deal with the circumstances in which they find themselves. Culture…is not composed of static, discrete traits moved from one locale to another. It is constantly changing and transformed, as new forms are created out of old ones. Thus culture… does not arise out of nothing: it is created and modified by the material conditions." (p. 13)

Families and churches are the main places Black women develop their cultural identities though those identities are not limited to these places (Guy-Sheftall, 1993). Black are now existing in other areas, like the arts and politics, so that now their cultural identities are being shaped by these places as well. That being, the sight to see the Black female as a whole individual being and not someone who is left out or silenced as the world dictates to them who and what they are. (Collins ,2009; Crenshaw, 1993).

Giving Black females a voice, allows for their truth to be told through their eyes and thus giving them back the power to frame the narrative around who they are and how they are to be perceived. (Collins, 2013). With this voice they are now able to present images of themselves as influential, free-thinking individuals. This ability to rewrite the negative stereotypical images of the Black female challenges those who look to keep them invisible. (King, 1988)

Moving forward, Black females must educate themselves not only as a community of Black women, but as an individual as well. "One key task for Black women intellectuals of diverse ages, social classes, educational backgrounds, and occupations consists of asking the right questions and investigating all dimensions of a Black woman's standpoint with and for African American women" (Collins 2014, p. 33). BFT allows Black women to see their place in society. It helps them to recognize the power, purpose, and place in society. When a Black woman knows who she is, she can play a better role in affecting change as a Black female among her peers. She can now be a leader instead of being led. She can impart her knowledge to the younger generation and start the process of healing and change that will bring promise for generations to come.

The Black Female Educator

Brief History of Black Female Educators

In 1896 the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (163 U.S. 537) ruling decreed that separate but equal was constitutional. This meant that Black children could be educated just not in the same building as white children. With this ruling, schools specifically for Black children were open and there became a need for Black teachers. Teaching became a viable option for Black women where they could be leaders and did not have to subject themselves to teacher education programs (Butchart & Rolleri, 2004; Fultz, 1995; Tillman, 2004).

With the passing of *Brown v. Board of Education* (374 U.S. 483) in 1954, which determined that schools should be desegregated, Black educators were not taken into account and were not integrated into schools (Tillman, 2004). While Black students were integrated into white schools, the teachers were not and the Black schools were closed. In the south, lawmakers began putting policies in place to disqualify Blacks from teaching (Fultz, 1995). Black women constituted the majority of teachers and administrators and were the most susceptible to the job loss and found themselves unemployable (Collier, 2002; Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014). Additionally, the ruling took away a major path to advancement socially and economically via leadership roles that were no longer available to them (Watson, 2017).

Barriers became the main reason Black female educators were unable to continue as teachers. In the South, lawmakers passed policies that disqualified Black teachers. They also began, based on Tillman's (2004) account, tests that discriminated against Blacks who were not educated in the white systems and therefore unfamiliar with the content they were being tested on. While *Brown v. The Board of Education* (374 U.S.

483) was sold as a great thing in the fight against segregation, it was not for Black

educators as they were the one most negatively affected (Collier, 2002; Tillman, 2004).

Expectations on Black Female Educator

Research done by Kohli (2009, 2012) suggests that Black educators in general

are not given the training needed to sustain a teaching career given the extra

responsibilities they are subject to. Black teachers in general and Black female teachers

more specifically are often given more responsibility where their white peers are not

(Kohli, 2012). According to Ladson-Billings (1998), Black teachers are expected to

"propel students academically, enhance student awareness of their cultural heritage and

their ability to challenge prejudice and discrimination, and empower students to address

social inequities" (Ladson-Billings, 1998a, p. 262). Black female educators as Walker

(2013) states,

> "It was the job of the teacher to organize in her community and educational
>
> committee… it is their duty to go before the local board when it meets on the first
>
> Tuesday in the courthouse and to ask for the things that are fair and just and in
>
> keeping with the needs of your schools." (p.212)

Historically, Black female teachers were often sent to areas where white teachers

(females in particular) did not want to go to teach Black children (Butchart and Rolleri,

2004). Additionally, because they were Black, they were seen as experts with the ability

to produce unbiased experiences for students oftentimes without any formal training

(Farinde et al., 2015; Gasman et al., 2017; Pham, 2018).

Black educators are expected to adhere to the team mentality. This means there is

an unspoken expectation that the Black educator will not disrupt the dominant school

culture and become a team player (Mabokela & Madsen, 2003). For the Black female educator who is already fighting against racial stereotypes, this creates a burden. Despite not having a voice, Kelly (2007), who describes these women as tokens, reports how Black female educators have to work beyond the normal school hours to meet pressures of teaching, navigate around confines put on them and find ways to not be trapped in roles hindering their ability to be promoted.

Many Black female educators find themselves doing work without compensation. For the Black female educator, she becomes a disciplinarian and a counselor in addition to her role as a teacher. She is the one who is called upon for issues dealing with minority students

Black Female Educator and Stereotypes

> *"Jezebel's sexual lasciviousness, Mammy's devotion, and Sapphire's outspoken anger - these are among the most persistent stereotypes that Black women encounter in contemporary American life. Hurtful and dishonest, such representations force African American women to navigate a virtual crooked room that shames them and shapes their experiences as citizens. Many respond by assuming a mantle of strength that may convince others, and even themselves, that they do not need help. But as a result, the unique political issues of Black women are often ignored and marginalized." (Harris-Perry, 2013, p. 55)*

For many Black women who are educators, the media's stereotypical representation of them is one of the many battles they have to fight (Muhammad, 2015). Stereotypes like overly aggressive Sapphire, meek Mammy, the sexual Jezebel are behaviors many expect from them in the professional setting. Though their behaviors

might not differ from women of other races, socially they are judged by their class, gender, and race (Harris-Perry, 2011).

When a professional Black woman steps out into the world she is fighting the many stereotypes society has used against her. She must be aware of those around her and their actions based on the standards set forth by the dominant culture (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). She is judged by a double standard in relation to her white peers, regardless of her position, showing that her gender and race matter (D'Oyley, 2016). Trying to reclaim her identity, defining who she is and redefining how others see her is a challenge because this goes against historical representations and thus her voice is not heard (Farmer, 2017).

Croom (2017) did a study where she wanted the "experiences of Black women, who have endured early career hurdles to be moved from the margins to the center to understand the multiple ways institutionalized systems of oppression manifest fully and operate" (p. 558). Crooms (2017) discussion also included bring the issues of Black women in the education system as they navigate their careers while fighting dominant narratives that have evolved throughout history which depict Black women at the bottom and with certain negative behavior characteristics Because these characterizations are so deeply ingrained in our society, it is important to have discussions around them as they have an effect on the social realities of the Black woman teacher in professional spaces.

Reynolds-Dobbs et al. (2008) give another view of the argument that Black women have to act differently in professional settings than their peers. They state, "In regard to the professional profiles of Black working women, their experiences in the workplace are quite different from other women of color, which may stem from their

unique history in America" (p. 130). Black women must diligently remember that there are things determined about them simply because of their race and anything they do may become fodder that plays into existing stereotypes. They assert that "Black women, find themselves at the intersection of both racism and sexism in the workplace. Due to their unique status as racial and gender minorities, they encounter unique and unexplored barriers that inhibit their career" (p. 129). This also creates environments that are not inclusive and is void of support from colleagues and mentors (Croom, 2017; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008)

As stated above, stereotypes like jezebel, mammy, and sapphire cause Black women to work twice as hard to get ahead in their chosen professions and to show that they are just as talented as their peers (hooks, 2015; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). These are characterizations Black women have to combat before they walk through the door of their workplace and have to continue fighting for their spot within the spaces they choose to avail themselves.

Black Female Educators and Mental Health

"I've taught for five years, experiencing…

Three states, three schools, three levels

Urban and suburban contexts

Homogenous and diverse student bodies and staffs

Laughing with colleagues

Mourning students and colleagues

Wanting to quit

Being more energized about teaching than I can put into words

I have formed strong, lasting relationships in each setting but…

I'm tired (emphasis mine) (Habte, 2021, p. 1)

As I started teaching, I would have never suspected the amount of mental stress I would endure. Just as I did not understand, I can imagine that many new Black educators entering the profession do not understand the beating our mental health would take. The predominant social stressor, according to Anderson et. al. (2019), is racial discrimination. In the school culture, that becomes the implicit and explicit that eventually causes psychological and social distress.

 DiAngelo (2011) asserts that racial taxation, which is a legacy of white fragility and privilege, is a cause of racial stress for Black people. Oftentimes this racial tax manifests itself as added responsibilities, particularly if it has to do with diversity and inclusion, speaking for the Black population as a whole, and not speaking up when "whiteness" within the school culture is blatant. In addition to the outward racial taxation, there are times when this racial taxation can be self-imposed. In my case, this happens when I feel it my duty to protect my Black students.

The result of these racial stressors can be detrimental to the Black female educator who is bombarded with images that they are inferior. Depression, personality disorders, anxiety, and PTSD are health issues that result from these stressors (Carter, 2007). In a study by Hancock et.al. (2020) they concluded that:

> "Racial stress coupled with racism, hostile school culture, and lack of support can make BWTs more susceptible to fatigue and depression as they navigate the professional resistance to teach from a Black feminist perspective" (p. 411).

King (2016) speaks of a tax, however invisible, that teachers of color have to face when working in the educational system. He explains how this tax becomes a burden to those that have to endure it. Eventually leading to teacher burnout and finally their leaving of the profession for a career that does not cause the mental anguish they feel as teachers of color. Due to the challenges Black women face, whether in the school or out of the school, they show determination and resilience despite the oppression and adversity (Bruce-Golding, 2020; Hobdy, 2015; Wall & Bellamy, 2019). Taylor (2013), further asserts this by stating that Black women educators in spite of being marginalized and oppressed, are able to overcome those obstacles through self-efficacy and resilience.

Summary

In Chapter 2, I discuss the frameworks that will be used in this study. They include critical race theory, intersectionality, and Black feminist theory. I also investigated the expectations and perceptions of the Black female educator. I ended with a look at Black female educators and mental health.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This qualitative study explored the plight of Black female educators through the lens of critical race theory, intersectionality and Black feminist thought. Autoethnography allowed me to analyze the ideas I hold regarding my experiences as a Black female educator in the middle and high school grade levels. The main assumption, based on Landson-Billings (2008) critical race theory in education's first tenet, is that Black female educators are victimized and marginalized through racial injustices.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography can be broken down into multiple parts. *Auto-* which looks at the personal experiences, *-ethno-* which examines the beliefs, cultural contexts, practices and experiences, and *-graphy* which seeks to describe the -ethno-. Autoethnography can be approached using multiple genres, so it has no set guidelines to follow (Mendez, 2013). For those doing autoethnography, the goal is to show the purpose of their struggles (Bochner & Ellis, 2016).

Autoethnography relies heavily on self. Deciding where to start can be daunting and oftentimes the need to find more in depth meaning in our experiences determines where we start (Adams et al., 2014). Importance is placed on the individual's collective experiences which cause one to question the norms of the world. Taking pride in one's own personal history will lead to asking questions and the questions will lead to the direction the autoethnographer should take (Adams et al., 2014).

Autoethnography, as promoted by Chang (2016) "combines culture analysis and interpretation with narrative details" (p. 46). Ellis and Bochner (2000) define autoethnographies as stories about self that are intertwined with culture and explained

through ethnographic narratives. I would define autoethnography as the ability to use my lived experiences to generate understanding of my actions and how I might make adjustments in the future. I am choosing to do an autoethnography because it will allow me to use my own voice in a way that is familiar to me. Taking my experiences from a first-person perspective, my narratives detail experiences, race and identity that is personal to me (Marx et al. 2017).

It will also help me purge myself of the emotional strain caused by holding the experiences inside, not feeling free to share them with others. Poulos (2008) states that writing stories that are personal to me can be therapeutic. As I am not prone to talk about my feelings, this study will help me express them in a more positive way while bringing to light the struggles I face as an educator.

Data Collection

According to Chang (2016), delving into one's mind to bring forth memories is not always a positive thing for the autoethnographer. Overtime, our memories can take on new shapes and meanings and it can be a struggle to accurately detail the experience (Chang, 2016). Despite these challenges, I feel the experiences I will detail in this study are so vivid, as a result of me living some form of them every day, that I believe my recall will be accurate and reliable.

The task of chronicling my experiences can be a monumental task. This Is particularly true as I intend to chronicle experiences over a large timeframe. Chang (2016) suggests "breaking it down into manageable steps" and "to create a thematically more focused timeline" (p. 72-73). This autoethnography will focus on eras (as a student in k-12, the first five years of my career as an educator, and the last decade in my

educator journey and will be based thematically on my experiences as a Black female educator. I have not deliberately lived these experiences, but have used my recollections of the experience to choose which I will use in this study (Ellis et al. 2011)

My main form of data collection will be journaling. In ethnographic studies, field journaling is used to have a record of the researcher's thoughts and feelings that would not otherwise be accounted for. Chang (2016) contends that, "Autoethnographers could benefit greatly from this practice of field journaling as they record reflections on self and the research process (p.96). Journaling, which is similar to writing in a diary, often has a deeper insight into the author (Chang, 2016). These musings are wrought with perspectives about self that generally do not show themselves in writings for larger audiences. For this reason, journals or journaling have become valuable methods for collecting data for autoethnographic writings.

A major issue with journaling is the use of memories. Memories can, at times, be open to doubt and misleading as time can cause important details to fade (Chang, 2016). However, memories play a significant role in ethnographic research. An autoethnography, which is a type of ethnographic research, would therefore employ some of the same processes. According to Coffey (1999) the collection of data for ethnographic work consists of all participants in the field. For autoethnographers their journals and or diaries, which are collections of their memories, become their field notes and when combined with headnotes provide a reliable data source for autoethnography (Coffey, 1999).

Data Analysis

Analyzing an autoethnography is a delicate balance between being an active player and sitting in the stands. As I move forward into data analysis, I cannot disconnect myself from data collection as I may need to make adjustments and shore up areas that need to be more robust (Chang, 2016). Essentially, I will need to create a symbiotic relationship between the data I will collect and the analysis I will undertake.

Through reflexive analysis while I collect data, I will be able to generate a recurring theme within the cultural phenomenon. This process will give meaning and structure to my data collection and help me be more succinct in my analysis (Chang, 2016). From this I will move on to cultural analysis and interpretation. Chang (2016) specifies that:

> "Cultural data analysis and interpretation are also quintessential to autoethnography because the process transforms bits of autobiographical data into culturally meaningful and sensible text. Instead of just describing what happened in your life, you try to explain how fragments of memories can be strung together to explain your cultural tenets and relationship with others in society" (p. 126).

I will not be just telling a story but taking my experiences and generating relevant discourse.

Limitations/Delimitations

This study is an autoethnography and focuses solely on my experiences as a Black female educator. It also only includes a specific aspect of my experiences and does not include any experiences unrelated to the study. It is limited to my interactions with students and other educators within the school setting. This study excludes several

populations. Those populations include Black and white male educators and white female educators.

While I have had many experiences as a Black female educator, this study will be limited to my experiences as they pertain to my interactions with colleagues in school settings that are predominantly white. More specifically, this study will examine my reactions or lack thereof to the different experiences and how they shaped who I am as an educator.

Ethical Considerations

It was very important to protect the identity of the individuals discussed in this study. As such several precautions were put in place to ensure that no individual was singled out. Names were not used. Instead, initials were used for names (not the actual initial of their first or last name). This was to provide a safety net for the families of the individuals who may still be living. Though my journaling was done chronologically, the vignettes were not listed in chronological order. Additionally, no individual names were used. In their place were pronouns that may or may not be representative of the actual individuals involved.

Summary

Chapter three consists of the methodology used in this study. This includes a definition of autoethnography, data collection, data analysis, limitations/delimitations, and ethical considerations. As with any situation where one is asked to analyze oneself, there can and will be barriers that may prevent one from seeing the total picture. Therefore, I had to dig deep to look at the bigger picture so that my narratives are true and express how I feel without jeopardizing anyone's anonymity.

Chapter 4: This is my story; this is my song.

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!

O what a fore taste of glory devine!

Heir of Salvation, Purchase of God.

Born of his Spirit, washed in His blood.

This is my story, this is my song…

(Lyrics from Blessed Assurance, Crosby, 1873)

Introduction

I love to learn. I love helping others to learn. There is an excitement that comes with seeing the light of joy enter a child's eyes when they finally grasp a new concept. This is why, after obtaining my graduate degree and the job market was horrible, I did not have a problem going into education. I did not look at it as a 'job' until I could find what I really wanted. At some point in my career, I knew that I would retire, and teaching would become my second career. What I had not anticipated was it becoming my main career.

I was excited to become an educator. Particularly because I was able to teach math, a subject I truly enjoyed and wanted to help other students enjoy. I was aware of the negative feelings students had towards that subject. During my undergraduate studies, I worked with the America Reads program. This was a program within many universities that paired college students with neighboring schools to help tutor students in elementary and secondary schools. I started as a tutor and then became a manager helping the director coordinate with the schools and matching the college students. I was able to see the effects of our presence on the students. That experience is what helped me

determine that I would eventually go into education. However, at the time I was more interested in a career that made more money than I could as an educator, so I did not major in education. My major did require me to take upper-level math courses, so I was able to do an alternative certification program while teaching.

My lack of an educational degree was a blessing in many ways. I was able to enter my career as an educator without blinders. I was open to seeing things from a different perspective and that allowed me to be more creative in my thinking process. It also afforded me the opportunity to use the educators that most influenced me as examples of the kind of educator I wanted to be. The spirit of all my elementary school teachers took residence inside me, guided me then, and continue to guided me know as I continue to evolve as an educator.

My Educational Journey as a Student

As a child, I lived in an area that was considered rural. Though we were surrounded by larger cities, we lived on a dirt road and what some would consider a farm. We live on an acre of land, grew our own fruits and vegetables, and raised animals for food. Our community was not large. Though the population had a higher percentage of whites, there was a good mixture of Blacks, Native Americans, Latino and Asians. This provided me with a very diverse upbringing. Though racism was evident, it was not as blatant as it was in other places. Its subtlety was a blessing and a curse as there were things I was not prepared to deal with in the education system.

"Elementary School"

My educational career as a student started on a high note. My mother was told that I could not attend school in the 1st grade because of my age. However, because the

principal knew my mother and had an idea about my abilities, she vogued for me and I was able to start in the first grade despite my age. While there was some hesitation from a few of the 1st grade teachers, there was one who told them to put me in her room. Both the principal and the teacher were older white females who looked beyond the color of my skin. In my opinion, they only saw a child who had the ability to learn and an eagerness to do so.

After my 1st grade year, I was introduced to my first Black teacher. Though I had aunts who were educators, it did not strike me as normal to have a Black teacher. Everything I was exposed to on television and in life showed teachers as white males and females. So, meeting my 2nd grade teacher was incredible because not only did she look like me, but she was also in a position that I had previously only associated with white individuals. This was the first time I could picture myself being anything I wanted to be. Even though my parents emphasized this regularly, my mother, due to an injury, was a homemaker and my father worked for a law firm, but he was not a lawyer. Though, having the opportunity to be exposed to lawyers through him is what initially stoked my desire to be a lawyer.

Ms. Rider's class was a combination 2nd/3rd grade classroom. This meant that as a 2nd grader I was able to do 2nd grade level work as well as 3rd grade work if I was able to work at that level. This provided the challenge I needed to appease my thirst for knowledge. As if she could see this, she continuously challenged me to do better. There was not a time I can remember when she would settle for me or any other student being ok with just settling for the minimum. Thinking back, I can see her working towards

building students that were confident in their abilities to perform and willing to do what it took to meet her expectations.

Since Ms. Rider's was a combined class, I was able to have her as a teacher for my 3rd grade year. This only served to reiterate all the things she had done the previous year. As a result, my confidence did not falter, and I became a stronger student from her efforts. She is the teacher that caused me to see education as a potential career. I wanted to be like her when I grew up. She was beautiful, articulate, and cared for her students as though they were her own.

My 4th grade year saw a change in schools. Though it was in the same school district, k-3 went to one school and 4-6 went to another. For the students it was the first of several rites of passage we would undergo by the time we finished high school. Though this school was new in the sense that I would be attending there, the teachers were not new because I had an older sibling that attended there and my mother made sure I had the Black 4th grade teacher.

Ms. Allen was like seeing Debbie Allen to us. She was a dancer and carried herself as such. She glided around the room like being there was a song, and we were her audience. She held us captive and created an environment that not only increased our core knowledge but began my experience with being artistically creative. In Ms. Allen's class I learned that it was acceptable to like the arts, sports, and academics. She showed us all what it meant to be well rounded though we did not know that is what she was teaching at the time.

My 5th grade year was different. I again had a Black female teacher, but this teacher was the one everyone called hard. Mrs. Fordham was older, and I was fortunate

to have the opportunity to be in her presence as she retired after my class. She expected all her students to come prepared to learn. That meant having homework done, supplies that would be needed, and behavior that was conducive to a room where learning could thrive. She never wavered from these expectations. During this time, it was not against the law to use corporal punishment and she was not opposed to it. As a matter of fact, she had a paddle on prominent display within her room. We all knew who Gertrude was and none of us wanted to be the one she spanked.

Though my previous Black female teachers were strong women, Mrs. Fordham showed me what it meant to be a *strong* Black female. There was an energy about her when she entered a room. She was not what some would call beautiful, but she knew her value and was not afraid to challenge her students or those who would work against her. She was always respectful to others, but she demanded respect as well. If there was a teacher I would say I most closely resembled, it would be her. Despite her hard shell, she was one of the kindest women I have ever known. Be it as a child or an adult.

My 6th grade year, which was still in elementary school, the only Black teacher happened to be a Black male. I am glad, at this point in my life, that I had the opportunity to have a Black male teacher at this level (I would only have two more the entirety of my k-12 career: one was American Black and the other was African). Though having Black female educators to compare myself to was great, having a Black male as a teacher allowed me to look beyond my relatives and television for a strong example of a Black male.

Mr. Blue was the most fun of all my elementary teachers. For me he took learning to a different level. Though all my teachers pushed me to excel, his push and style of

teaching is what I needed to transition to junior high. Without his direction and insight, myself along with many of the other students may have gotten lost in the system once we left his room. He made sure our parents knew what to expect once we graduated, he helped many of them get the assistance they needed for their child. In my case, that was making sure I was tested for the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program.

I can say that my elementary education had the most profound impact on my positive thoughts of what it means to be educated and to be an educator. As I write this, I am overwhelmed with feelings of joy. I can remember every one of those teachers and even some of those who I did not have the pleasure of being in their classrooms. I can still see myself in their classrooms like it just happened yesterday. I can see them walking around the campus engaging with all the students, creating lasting relationships. I know that if we had the ability then to stay in touch with each other as we can now, I would be calling upon them for the wealth of knowledge.

I was fortunate to have multiple Black teachers as an elementary student. It is for this reason that I believe I was spared the racial hatred many students of color face. I am sure my thoughts and feelings towards education would have been different, in a negative way, if I had to endure the trauma many of our students face today in the educational system. Landson-Billings and Tate (1995) asserted that Critical Race Theory in Education explains how the racism that is entrenched in society continues to create challenges that oppress students in the school setting. Unfortunately, due to the lack of Black educators, these students will continue to feel the oppression and be faced with traumatic educational experiences.

"Junior High"

The summer before junior high, I received a battery of tests to determine if I would be accepted into the GATE program. They only accepted a student if they could successfully pass <u>all</u> the tests being given. I was one of the few Black students who took the tests and one of two students accepted into the program. This meant that my core classes would consist of students and teachers who did not look like me. This was important because it represented a change to my normal. I was not used to having teachers that were not Black and definitely not used to having all my teachers be white.

This transition, though not the shock it could have been, was only eased by the fact that my teachers appeared to truly care about me and my wellbeing. My first year I was doing great in all my subjects. There were teachers that made being a Black student in a class filled with white student bearable. Those teachers were white males. I did not see the relevance of this at the time. They did not ignore me or act as though my inquiries about class lessons annoyed them. If I raised my hand, they called on me as they did the other students. Though I no longer had Black teachers, the white male teachers made me feel valued and that my opinion mattered. There actions evoked the same feelings I remembered from elementary school thus creating a comfort I was not able to obtain in my class taught by white females.

My 8th grade year brought change. My math teacher, a younger white female, began to show signs that she did not like me. My initial assessment of her was not negative. She was a good teacher. I did not have any problem adjusting to her style and I felt I was going to do well in her class as the material was not hard. Imagine my surprise when I started to feel like there was something wrong. I just could not figure out what that something was. As a twelve-year-old, I was not equipped to handle the prejudice.

Until 8th grade algebra, I had never experienced discrimination in the classroom. However, Ms. Larger disliked having me in her classroom. Even though I had an A in her class she found ways to make my time with her difficult. If I raised my hand, she would not call on me. She never seemed to have time to work with me so getting help during class was impossible. She always found something wrong with my homework even though the answers were the same as other students since we did it together after school. It got so bad that I was moved from her class. Though I was not in the wrong, I was the one being punished. Because she was the only Algebra teacher, I had to move to a lower-level math class. School was no longer the safe place I thought it was.

In chapter one I spoke of a supporting cast in my analogy. This cast or community consisted of family, friends and the Black teachers I had as an elementary student. Entering junior high a major section of my supporting cast, as I no longer had Black teachers, was removed and I was confronted with racism for the first time in the educational setting. This was my introduction to racism explicitly. Though I may have felt the effects of racism implicitly, it was a way of life and as such not something I rarely thought about. However, at this moment, an experience I thought was insignificant at the time, changed my thinking about education and educators from the positive to the negative. I was always under the impression that all educators wanted to see their students succeed. I never considered that a teacher would not be as excited about my capacity to learn as I was.

Her actions though traumatic, did not deter me as I knew my worth. I was determined to continue on and reach my goals. I still excelled and despite being placed

in the lower level math class, I was able to continue on the "college track" enrolling in

Algebra 2 with Trig during my freshman year of high school.

There are times I wish I could go back and ask her why she treated me the way

she did. She had never met me before and my older brother did not attend school

there. So her treatment of me was based on being a Black student in her class. I do not

recall her interactions with the other Black female student. I was so focused on myself

and what was happening to me that I lost sight of her. I did however notice the way Ms.

Larger favored the white students. I still remember sitting in the room looking around

feeling like I did not belong. I was not a behavior problem. She had my test scores so she

knew I was supposed to be in that class. Yet, I was never given the opportunity to show

my ability because she would only call on the white students. She would give them

second chances at work and spend extra time helping them with assignments. There were

moments when you could feel the hostility rolling off of her. As stated before, this was

the first time I met her so there was no previous history between us.

"High School"

After the experience I had in junior high school, I asked my mother if I could

attend a different high school. Since our community was just starting to see an uptick in

the population, there was still only one high school. Additionally, the high school and

junior high were considered a district (elementary schools in the area were separate

school districts that feed into the high school district) and the teachers tended to converse

among each other. I did not want to be put in a class with a teacher she was potentially

friends with.

My freshman year, I was able to attend the high school one city over. This was one of the higher-ranking high schools in the area and would provide me with more access to opportunities I would not get at the high school in my community. The downside to this was that the population of white students greatly outnumbered the number of minority students. This was not a problem for me as I was accustomed to being one of very few if not the only Black student in the room.

The experience in middle school had not completely soured my taste for education. Though I was now leery of teachers, I still held on to some of the joy that came with learning. I thought the only problem I would face in high school was adjusting to a new setting and making new friends. Being subject to another traumatic experience because of my race was not on the agenda. I was taking my final steps in preparation for college and that was my focus.

Having watched Mrs. Grant, an older white female, make concessions for students who did not do their homework, needed a higher grade on a test, or even missed multiple days from school, I found myself, again, being discriminated against. Unfortunately, I became very ill and was out of school for a week. Not only did my mother contact the school to have my assignments made available to me, but Mrs. Grant also never provided the materials needed for me to complete the assignments. As this happened at the end of the semester, she refused to allow me the opportunity to make up the assignments. The principal agreed with her and I was stuck with the bad grade. Though I had to remain in her class the rest of the year, I managed to receive an A at the end of the second semester. She never showed any remorse for what she had done.

The next year, my mother moved me back to the school in our area. Though I now had my old friends back, nothing could make up for the hurt Mrs. Grant caused. After that incident, I no longer enjoyed school. Realizing that there was no one there that would advocate for me made it difficult to go every day and live up to my own expectations. While my grades did not fall, I no longer felt welcome. I started to notice that I was being pointed out. That negativity was being attributed to me. I became withdrawn and though I played sports, I rarely hung out with my teammates. I no longer cared.

Reliving these events through this writing, I see that people thought I was just quiet when in fact I was traumatized. Standing at the intersection of being a female and Black, I could not escape the painful experiences which many times I merely internalized. Using the model intersectional invisibility, I can see how my race and gender subjected me to traumatic experiences that are otherwise not felt by Black men or white men and women (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) Another consistent reason for the trauma is due to the stronghold racism has on our society. Racial fatigue is caused by the battles Blacks face against racism (D'Angelo, 2011). I also realize this is the point where I began to unconsciously do more than was expected of me. Especially if there was a white teacher or administrator involved. It seemed that in my mind if I could show them, I was able to do more than they expected, they would see my value. I would not be just another Black student in their classroom. Because this learned behavior worked, I did not see the wrong in it and have continued to display that type of behavior. Lawrence (1987,2008) writes about culture and how it creates certain beliefs. CRT states that racism is a persistent presence in society. Lawrence (2008) says this persistent racism

creates lesson that become a part of our unconscious without being stated. My understanding, though it was not tacit, came from my observation of the reactions I received. The outcomes were positive thus solidifying in my mind that it was the proper thing to do.   While it was as a Black female student then, I do it as a Black female educator now.

My Educational Journey as an Educator

Working in a school there inevitably will be turnover with the building principal. At least in my experience that has been the case. It has only been in the last part of my career that I have had a principal whose tenure lasted more than a year or two. My current principal has been in the building for so long, most of the newer teachers do not know the pains that come with changing principals every one or two years.

One of the school districts I worked in had a high principal turnover. From year to year we did not know if the current principal would remain. Every year I taught there a new principal was assigned. Another school district I worked in had a similar problem except it also included a high turnover rate among the vice principals. In both cases I was subjected to situations that no educator, new or old, should have to experience.

"Why Am I Being Moved"

As a new teacher, the most important thing to have is stability among administration. It is hard to grow as an educator when there is not a consistent leader in place for guidance (Buckman, 2021). So, at the onset of the school year when we were told there would be a new building principal the reaction was weary as this had been happening for the four prior school years. No one had any idea who this person was or what school district they would come from. It was a shock to learn that we would be

getting a white female principal whose most recent job was in a predominantly white rural school district. During my time at this school all the principals had been male or Black and had experience working with very diverse student population. As a magnet school that pulled from the entire district, the students where Black, white, Asian, Latinx, recent immigrants, etc...

A few days into the period when teachers return, I requested a meeting with her regarding the athletic department and what was on the schedule for the school year. When we finally had the meeting, it was not to discuss athletics but for her to inform me that I was being moved to another school within the district. I would be in a teaching position and would no longer be the athletic director. This was a demotion from a position that I worked very hard to earn. When I asked her why I was being moved, she said, "I have two teachers from Teach for America I want to have here and I have someone else in mind for the athletics director position." I sat there thinking why am I being moved to another school when I have been here for multiple years and I am certified in the positions she is wanting to fill with individuals who have no experience while she proceeded to tell me to pack up my things and report to the other school.

As confused as I was, I packed my things and reported to the other school. When I spoke to the principal of the new school, he was just as confused as I was about the situation. I told him the situation and that I would need to go back to the school and prepare all the information the state would need so the athletes would not suffer because of the new principal. So every day I reported to one school and then returned to the other school to take care of the athletics department.

After multiple days of discussions between myself and the district offices I was placed back at the original school. When I returned for the first day of work, she was livid. Not only did I ruin her plans to have the two white teachers work there, it also would not allow her to place the white male she wanted in the athletics department. For her to still get her way, she stripped me of the athletic director's position and gave it to the physical education teacher. I was placed back in a math class for the duration of the year. She never said anything to me, I just went to my office and found that all my items had been boxed and moved.

As the year progressed, she would find ways to excluded me from activities and committees I had been a part of previously. One of those programs was in place to help students who were struggling make up work and credits so they would not be behind. It was set up by the principal before her and was successful. I started the program from the ground up. I worked with teachers to ensure the correct curriculum was used, generated a calendar showing how many days and hours needed to be completed to recoup the lost grade, and provided extra support for the teachers who volunteered to teach in the program. Despite her behavior towards me, I still felt I had to be there for the students, so I went to her with the details about the program. Nothing needed to be added or changed. It just needed her approval. She refused and a great opportunity for the students was eliminated.

The next time I had to come to her, it was about night school. This was another program I had ran before her arrival. She again refused to let me take the lead or allow me to teach one of the math classes. After her refusal, I did not go to her with further ventures that would benefit the students. None of the other administrators or teachers

who had been there prior to her would stand against her or vouch for me. To say I was

disheartened is putting it mildly. I essentially became a ghost in the building. My days

consisted of signing in, going to my classroom, signing out and going home.

As a young girl, I was a fighter. I did not see myself as someone incapable of

rising to the top. I knew it would take hard work, but I believed that I would still make it

because that is what my family always said. The sky was not the limit. I could reach

heights my ancestors only hoped for. As a young girl, I was not fully aware what being a

Black female meant. I did not know that it would entail restrictions on my ability to soar

(Taylor, 2013).

Even though I tried to ignore the oppressive nature of being a Black female in the

educational system, I am still subject to the whims of people who do not see my

value. They do not appreciate being led by a Black woman, nor do they want to give me

the opportunity to show my worth and how they could benefit from my knowledge.

"Battle Royale"

I was leery of this new white female administrator from the beginning. She did

not present herself as someone new coming into a culture she was not familiar with. Her

prior experience was at a lower level, and she had no idea how the new 'culture' she had

entered worked. As someone she would have to work with closely, I made it a point to

help her with some of the things that would affect her working relationship with me. My

goal was to help provide a smooth transition as there were many protocols in place that

she would need to adhere to. Initially everything was working smoothly, protocols were

being followed and she appeared to be becoming accustomed to her new position. Then

she began to 'forget' what the protocols were. Every time I would bring something to her

attention, she would say, "Thank you. I forgot." Or when she began to 'forget' more regularly, I would get "I was never told that."

After about a month, I began to express my concerns with the building principal, and she said she would have a meeting with her to make sure she understood what things needed to be done for things to not become chaotic. What the problem really was no one wanted to address. I felt she did not feel she should have to make the effort to get to know the building she was working in because she was in a position of leadership, and everyone should listen to her. This was evident by the way she tried to take over a meeting that was being held by the building principal.

. Besides a teacher, all the other Black females in the building occupied roles that do not require any type of certification or college. She made assumptions about me based on my position and the position of other Black females in the building. This was made evident by the way she spoke to me and treated me like I was beneath her. Because of my position and the color of my skin, she assumed I was not educated and would not push back when she continued to yell at me in front of students, threaten to write me up, and tried to intimidate me.

I was shocked to learn that she had worked in this district before as she had come from a school district in a rural setting that was predominantly white. However, I was not shocked to learn that she took direction from the white individuals in the building and cozied up to them. They could 'help' her when she did not know something or did something that was not a norm in our school culture. The only Black person she has a reasonable relationship with is her grade level secretary. I feel this is only because she has to rely on her to do many of the things she was not familiar with. Interest

convergence is why the AP chose to have a better relationship with her Black secretary. Interest convergence entails minority groups see social change when their interests align with those of the majority (Delgado & Stafancic, 2001). Though the secretary was also a Black female, I believe the AP realized it would benefit here to maintain a positive relationship with her secretary. If the AP had treated her in same manner she treated me, she would have alienated one of the supports she needed to be successful her first year at the school.

While many of our encounters during the early part of the year were peaceful and positive, our encounters took a turn for the worse the more I had to help her do things properly. After a while she stopped appreciating me telling her when she made a mistake. In my mind I was helping her not get reamed by the principal for missing several important tasks that needed to be done. As evidenced by her reactions, in her mind, I was trying to tell her, the administrator, what to do. The following are multiple encounters with her that ultimately resulted in a meeting with the principal, a rep, her and me.

"Afterschool Detention"

Prior to the beginning of Afterschool Detention (ASD), directions were given to all administrators who would be assigning students. On the first day this assistant principal (AP) did not follow protocol and those students were not allowed to enter the classroom. Because they were not allowed to enter, a security guard became upset and went to the AP.

As I sat at my desk, my door was opened, and she stormed in.

"You were unprofessional, and I need you to write a statement.", she yelled as she walked across the room to stand in front of me.

"What do I need to write a statement for?"

"The security guard said you would not open the door and let the students in. She said you just looked at her and said the students were too late. I want you to write a statement so that I can get both sides of the story.", she stated while propping her hand on her hip.

"I don't need to write a statement. You were given a list of expectations for students to follow when they stay for afterschool detention. They did.."

She started talking over me and asserted, " I did read the paper but it had the wrong room number…"

Propping my chin on my hands, I stopped her from talking.

"If you would have let me finish, you would have heard me say the students were with your secretary. She new because she called me over the walkie to ask what time I would be in from bus duty and what time the students needed to be at my door."

Clearly upset now, she asked, "Are you finished now?"

"Yes."

"Good", she says, "and I don't do the passive aggressive thing."

I tilted my head and said, "Do you feel it is alright to come in my room and yell at me in front of a student?"

She yells, "That is why I wanted you to write a statement."

"But there is no need to write a statement when the students did not meet the expectations."

Angered by this, she tried to storm out of the room she failed to look where she was going and stumbled over a large object on the floor. She looked back at me, I assume to see if I was laughing, the proceed to exit through the door.

As this was the first time this type of thing happened, I was shocked. I had worked with this person since the beginning of the school year and there was no indication that they would behave in this manner. While I will be honest and say that I was skeptical from the beginning, I did not approach this individual with the mindset that she was racist and eventually would show her true self. However, the signs were there, and I chose to ignore them and treat the her as I would want to be treated.

Though I have had colleagues become upset with me, I have never had them yell at me in front of students. What I found was, I was instantly on alert and if there had not been a student in the room, the conversation would have gone differently. While I was not at the point of "I don't care about this job enough to let you talk to me like that", I was highly offended and overcome with a sense that this individual is not going to fit well in the established culture.

"The phone call"

I received a phone call from the AP stating that a particular student would be sent down to my room for the remainder of the day. I attempted to explain that I had multiple individuals in the room who would clash and thus cause more problems.

"Would you give me a moment to make to contact one of the other administrators to see about getting _____ removed?"

Initially she calmly stated, "_____ needs to come to your room."

"I understand this, but I am asking for a moment to find a better situation for one of my current students. Please just give me a moment."

"I don't have a moment. Stevenson this is your job.", she begins to yell through the phone.

"It's not my job to place myself or the students in a potentially harmful situation."

Now she is really angry and yelling, "Yes, it is your job."

Seeing as she was not going to stop yelling, I said OK and that I needed to get back to the other students.

Another week or so had passed at this point. However, I was beginning to become restless because it did not seem that she was adhering to the directions of the principal, or the principal had not spoken to her. Either way her behavior was beginning to cause me stress. Attendance records were not maintained properly, teachers were not being made aware that students were in my room, and students, when I would tell them they had been scheduled for In-school, would tell me that she had not talk to them or their parents about why they were being placed in my room. I was expected to do my job without the support I needed.

"Hey, I was looking for you."

I did not have students on my list for In-school on this day, so I went to the main office to get supplies. Apparently while I was there, the AP called into my room and could not get me. As I was leaving out of the main office, she was coming in. She stopped abruptly and said, "Hey I was looking for you." I did not think anything of this and stated that there were no students on the schedule for In-school, so I was taking care of things in the main office.

She got upset and began yelling, " I put them on the list. I don't know why they were not there."

"You know that I do not just let students into my room if they are not on the list. Every morning, I have students from every grade level coming to my door because they don't want to go to class. If they are not on my list, I send them back to their administrator."

"Well, I put them on the list.", she continued to yell.

Not wanting to be subjected to this behavior again and to keep things from escalating, I began walking to my room so that the student could begin his day in In-school. As I am walking away, she is still causing a scene while following behind me.

When I got to my room, I opened the door and asked her if this was the student that need to be with me. She still had not calmed down and even the student was becoming uncomfortable. She took this to mean the student was uncomfortable with me and proceeded to try and comfort her while she looked at me as though I had done something wrong. But, yet again, she caused the problem because she did not ensure that she completed the tasks necessary for the student to be able to enter my class.

We were now three months into the school year, and I was the only person she kept having these types of encounters with. I could see if our initial interactions were based on aggression. However, initially she was happy I was 'in her corner'. I was the only one helping her get a better understanding of the building culture. Then something changed. Three months in and I am trying to figure out what her problem is with me. Her actions were stressing me out, I was not sleeping, and no longer wanting to go to work. I was starting to feel depressed and the only advice I was given was go talk to her. The person who should have been eager to eliminate the confusion did not seem like

they cared. While I know this is only my take on the situation, because that person had a lot to deal with as well, I did not feel supported in my endeavors to help bring a resolution to the problem. As such, I did not feel that I was able to do my job to the best of my ability and the students began to suffer. I did not want to be there and stopped putting forth the effort to make sure my students received the support they needed.

Frustration had begun to set in. Though I got up every morning and went to work, I had already begun to accept the fact that I would not be working in that building the next school year. In my mind, that school year was a bust and I started packing my things in preparation for my eventual departure.

"Is she doing this again?"

This encounter started out as a simple phone call. She asked if a student could come down and I requested she give me a moment to make sure I would have room for the student as I was at capacity. As I had become accustomed to at this point, she began to escalate and go off on a tangent because she did not want the student in her office. After listening to her complain and yell about that student not being able to remain with her and that she was sending him down, I said OK and hung up the phone.

To not appear upset in front of the students in my room, I stepped out into the hallway to wait for the student she was sending down. About five minutes later, she comes sashaying down the hall like she was on a runway, waving her walkie in the air, and loudly saying, "I think we somehow got disconnected or you just hung up on me." I did not address her assumption, I just asked if this was the student and proceeded to tell him where to sit while she continued to yell in the hallway about the phone call.

Teachers were starting to come out of their rooms, and this only served to incite her theatrics. Not wanting to be a part of that anymore, I started to close my room door. She ran and threw her foot in the path of the door so I could not close it. Now she is not only blocking the door, but she is also yelling in my face and invading my space. She began yelling, "I'm your boss and you have to listen to me."

Yet, I had not once told her I would not do what she asked. However, I was determined to not be yelled at again in front of a classroom full of students and I also wanted to help her not lose some of the respect she felt she had from the students. She was so determined to get her point across she did not see the damage she was doing. I looked back at the students who had weary looks on their faces and then I looked backed at her. I took a deep breath and calmy asked, "Are you really going to keep yelling at me in front of the students?"

She would not stop so I looked down at her foot and said, "Excuse me, I need to close my door." She shoved herself between me and the door. After making contact with me, she yelled out, "I can't believe this. You put your hands on me." Now I was dumbfounded because both of my hands were on the door.

"I did not touch you."

Angered by my reaction or lack thereof, she yelled, "I am worried about you. Get your stuff you are going home and I'm going to write you up."

Tired of her over-the-top behavior, I shook my head, said, "I'm not going home." I then proceeded to close the door.

I was tired by this point. Tired of feeling like I could not say anything. Tired of having to deal with her issues. Tired of feeling tired. I did not want to deal with the

students. I did not want to think about the remainder of the day that was left. I just want to go home and go to sleep. Yet, looking at the students I could not do that. They were expecting me to help them understand what just happened, but I was trying to figure it out myself. I did not yell at her like I wanted to because that would make me the angry Black woman and she would be vindicated in her actions. I could not yell at her in front of the students because I did not want them to think that behavior was OK. But I also could not accept the fact that I did not say or do more than try to get away from her nonsense.

I used this as a teachable moment for the students. Once they realized I was not going to freak out, they began to talk. One student stated, "You are better than me because I would not have stood there and let her do that to me." Another expressed her displeasure with the AP and how she was not fair to the Black students. And another just shook his head while explaining how she should have known better than to do something like that and she only did it because she was white. They all even offered to write a statement so that she could not 'lie on me'. I went on to explain to them I did more by not doing the things they suggested than I would have if I had done them. I also told them that in the end things would work out.

"The Meeting"

After several months, we were finally going to have a meeting. I believe the principal could finally see that this was becoming a huge issue and could no longer be ignored. I had sent emails and spoken to her directly. As did the AP. However, by this point I did not want to have the meeting any longer. There just did not seem like any point in doing so. From what I was being told she had every right to do what she did, and

I had to accept it. Expressing this to the principal, she still wanted to have the meeting. I felt it was partially because we had to work together and because she never did get around to having a conversation with her about protocols and expectations. Despite my hesitation, the meeting date was set.

Prior to the meeting, I went through all the things that I had tried to do to help soothe the situation. I got emails together, made sure I had a representative, and looked over her track record with discipline over the past few months. I wanted to bait her into showing that she was racist. I felt that was the only way to get to the meat of the problem. She was determined to show that I was insubordinate, and I was determined to show her true colors.

The day of the meeting, I decided my initial thought of what I should do would not do anything but cause an already taunt string to snap. To make sure the meeting moved along quickly, I decided to only highlight the things I needed to effectively do my job. My rep agreed with this, and we moved to the early morning meeting hoping everything would go smoothly.

The principal started the meeting off by stating we were not there to go off on tangents that were not relevant to the situation and that she would shut down anything that seemed to be going in that direction. After saying a few more things, she asked if I would like to go first. I declined and allowed that AP to speak. This was not a show of weakness, but to assist me in my endeavor to have a cordial meeting based on the things I needed to be successful at my job.

She opened her notebook and began to read the 'notes' she had written down. The more silliness that spewed from her mouth, the more my body language changed from

thinking this was going to be a good meeting resulting in a positive outcome to laughing at the outlandish things she was saying to make it seem like I was the one doing the exact things she had done. I was so through with the meeting that I slouched in my seat waiting for it to be over. When she finished her tirade, she removed her spectacles and looked at the principal like she had just given the greatest speech ever.

Finishing her notes, the principal asked if I wanted to address the things that were stated. I told her there was no need to address the lies and that I only wanted to talk about the things I do in my room and how we can all be on the same page, so this does not happen again. The principal was fine with that, and I began to share with them the things that I do and what I need them to do so that the students can receive what they need. I told them about the little things that need to happen and how those things would help the students not be in the wrong area and make sure they received their work in order to not fall behind.

My decision not to address the negative things about our interactions and her inability to follow simple protocols, seemed to be working well. Then I brought up the subject of removing students from my room. I explained to her that by the time I call about a student to have them removed permanently from my room I have exhausted every possible option.

She jumped in and said, "You just send students to my office."

"Why would I do that? All the students look like me."

She instantly went on the defensive saying, "Are you calling me racist? I sent _____ _____ to your room last week."

I just mumbled I did not say that and inwardly laughed. The principal quickly jumped in and stopped the conversation. While the rep, who until this point had not said a thing, gasped. However, I was ecstatic. The one thing I had previously plotted to get her to say, she inadvertently threw into the universe on her own. She made the statement like sending 30 to 40 Black students to my room compared to one white student showed that she was not racist. It also showed how well she understood the roles of the people she 'leads'. She failed to realize that I, like the principal, have access to all the referrals that are entered into the system. That the principal and I periodically discuss the students that are put in my room and why. This is particularly true if I see a student is being put in my room for the same reason and there are no interventions being put in place and I bring to her attention when Black students are punished while white students are not for the same offense.

The meeting ended with her saying she needed to have a meeting with me. I still did not want to meet with her, and I definitely did not want to meet with her alone. She, however, was determined to place a memo in my file. I am positive this was because she lost ground in her efforts to show her superiority and needed to save face. At least in front of the person she had to report to and the person who represented the rest of the faculty in the building.

When the assistant principal's actions towards me and students showed her views, but she still tried to cover is up by suggesting I was calling her racist. Asking if I was calling her a racist is exactly what a racist person would do. Her goal was to take the spotlight off her obvious racist actions and put it back on me. By doing this she did not

have to explain her actions and her way of think went unchecked as the principal, who was also Black, stopped the dialogue.

"*All By Myself*" (Carmen, 1975)

One of the hazards of being a Black educator is being one of only a handful. The next thing is being the only one in your subject area or on your floor. For most of my career I have been in this position. I can picture myself sitting in my room singing the chorus to *All By Myself* (Carmen, 1975). Many days I would find myself alone in my room eating lunch or during my planning period. These were times when I should have been building relationships. Yet, I never felt as though I fit in and there was never any effort made to help me feel included.

"Not eating in the teachers' lounge."

Every school I have worked at I have started out eating in the teacher's lounge. Every year after all the cliques have been formed, I am left to fend for myself. Due to the lack of Black educators, there generally is not another Black person to eat lunch with so I sit off to the side waiting for the bell to ring and the new class period to start.

One time I decided to sit at the table they normally occupied. I thought maybe they would sit there and engage me in conversation. That was not the case. When they all began to trickle in, the first person sat at the table, but the others went to another table in a different area of the room. When the person that was sitting with me realized everyone sat somewhere else, they moved to the other table. Another time, I sat at their table after everyone had entered the lounge and the conversation came to a halt. I did not

understand this because they would hold the conversation loud enough to be heard by anyone in the lounge any other day.

In essence, they were saying it was appropriate to talk negatively about the Black students when I was not there, but not acceptable to do it while I was sitting with them. Microaggressions, like keeping quiet when a Black person comes around is a racist habit that white people feel is acceptable (D'Angelo, 2011). Because racism is so ingrained in our society, when a racist behavior occurs it is not addressed (Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 2016b). While some may say that it was a good thing, they would not say it in front of me, I did not agree with that. They were still bold enough to say it. If they were bold enough to say it within hearing distance of me, I should have been concerned with the things they were saying and doing when I was not around. Particularly what they were doing to and saying about the Black students.

Because I was being shunned and they were holding negative conversations about Black students, I stopped eating in the lounge. It did not feel right and was making me uncomfortable. Black feminist thought holds that black women are oppressed (Collins, 1986). By shunning me because of my race, I felt the oppressive nature of my existence. The discrimination I face because I am Black means I am not allowed to be a part of the group or any meaningful conversations. This also means I am stymied in my efforts to thrive and find value in my role as their colleague (Crenshaw, 1989). The downside to this was everyone started to call me standoffish and wondered what was wrong with me. While I could have said something, being new in some of these instances, I did not want to draw attention to the problem and when I was a more seasoned educator, I did not see

the point in going to the lounge for lunch when I had enough stress to deal with in the classroom.

"Staying in my room,"

Generally, I am a busy body, but there came a time when I no longer felt inclined to go mingle with the other teachers during my planning period. This should have been the time when I could collaborate with other teachers. Or we could share ideas about things that worked and did not work in our classrooms. However, most of the time I would just sit there because my opinion was never considered, and my contributions never used.

The first time I encountered this was at a math meeting. Since all math teachers had the same planning period, we were assigned to meet periodically to discuss new curriculums and other math issues. Having looked at the agenda for the meeting, I prepared some items to present to the group. The white female who was bringing the meeting to order, asked who would like to share their thoughts. I raised my hand and was placed on the sheet to go forward at the appropriate time. After everyone who had volunteered had spoken, she began to end the meeting.

"Hey, you forgot about me."

She looked surprised and stated, "Oh my. It seems we have run out of time. I'm not sure you will have much to contribute to the conversation."

"Well, I raised my hand and you wrote my name down ahead of many of the people you let speak. Why would you not let me?"

She looked me up and down while stating, "Maybe next time."

Walking away, I went back to my room to get ready for my next class.

For another math meeting, I was asked by the principal to make a slide presentation of the things I was doing differently to help the students in special education classes. She sat in on one of my classes and was impressed by my methods to help the students understand what I was teaching them. An agenda was handed out and I was inexplicably left off. Yet again, I was skipped over, and the lack of acknowledgement was not unnoticed. However, nothing was done to reprimand her for her actions. It was moments like these that felt like I had no backing. Though the principal insisted that I put together the presentation, I did not have his support.

"I'm not your Superwoman!" (Lyric from Superwoman, White, 1989)

"Why do you always call me?"

Working on the floor that houses the lowest grade level had its advantages. I could get to know the students as they started their school journey. This was important because the better my relationship with them as they entered in the beginning level, the stronger my relationship became with them as they moved from grade to grade.

There were several teachers on this floor who could not seem to get their students under control. Due to my ability to get them to 'behave', I became the person they always called to 'get the student'. Even when instructed to enter a referral for the student or send them to a buddy room I was the one they called. They would even get upset when I had to inform them that my room was full, and the student would not be able to enter or that they really should be informing the students grade level principal.

One day I decided to ask them why they sent the students to me even though they know there is a protocol to follow. This is their responses:

Teacher #1: I send them to you because you understand them better than I can and they listen to you. I also did not have time to stop and make a phone call or enter a referral.

Teacher #2: They respond better to you because you are African American like them and it is easier to just send them to you. Besides you are the In-School Suspension person so they will eventually end up with you.

Teacher #3: I have seen you with them and the way they respond to you. It seems like they don't like me because I am white.

While I understand how frustrating dealing with a room full of students can be, the problem was not necessarily the students. Likely, it was the teacher's inability to perform proper classroom management (Blake, 2017; Rosas & West, 2009). Instead of looking for way they can improve in that area, they would rather pass the problem to me because I can handle it. They have, at times, used the adjectives often deployed to describe the 'mammy' caricatures of a Black woman: no nonsense, nurturer, hard disciplinarian, etc… (Harris-Perry, 2011) I have also heard them use these adjectives to describe other Black females in the building. Gladly exalting Black women on their ability to take on this persona. My question for them is: what does that say about you? If I look at you, what am I to see?

"Why would I want that job?"

In a building with over one hundred faculty and staff members, only eleven of those individuals are Black. Of those eleven, two were men and the remainder were females. The two males held teaching positions and the females were building principal, nurse, counselor, registrar, two secretaries and me. My position did not necessarily need any type of degree or certification.

Midway through the year, the administrative secretary resigned leaving the position open. About a week after her departure, there were rumors floating around that I was going to take the position. It was being said that that would be a big step up for me. While no one approached me about the rumors, they spent a lot of time discussing why that would be a good position for me. Ironically, it was not one of the Black staff members engaging in the rumors that challenged the groups assumptions, but a white female coworker who relayed to the others why that would not be a step up for me. She informed them that although I was helping keep things running smoothly until a replacement was found, that would be a step down for me.

She stopped me in the hall and told me of the interaction. She said she was confused as to why they would assume I wanted that job. While this probably would have been a good time to engage her in a conversation about the misconceptions of her white counterparts I chose to leave her in her confusion. Telling her that they made the assumptions based on the fact that I am Black and female would have just ended in the proverbial 'I don't think that's what they meant' (Farmer, 2017). Black feminist thought speaks about self-valuation and challenging the negative misconceptions of Black women based on stereotypes (Collins, 2000). By not engaging my colleague in the needed conversation, I lost the opportunity to provide a counter narrative to the gossipers' beliefs. I let the racist views held by her and others continue to be viable. That was a moment I could have used to help remove myself for the intersectional invisibility (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Lack of motivation and the familiarity of racism kept me silent.

Then I took a moment to think about who was going to take over the position I held. No one thought about that aspect which would have left them all trying to figure out what to do with their behaviorally challenged students. After about a week or so of helping and no one else volunteering to take on some of the load, I started to figure they were expecting me to do both jobs as no one inquired about the probability of someone being hired. It became so bad that staff was calling into my room to help them with things that would normally fall under the job description of the administrative secretary. Even the grade level secretaries would call to ask me for information that they should have had access to or had the means to take care of.

I was not shocked that the staff would think that I wanted that position. They do not see me as capable of being more than the position I hold (D'Oyley, 2016; Farmer, 2017). When a math position opened, no one started rumors about me taking that position, particularly when they all knew that I was a math teacher, and they were having trouble finding someone to fill that position. What I now realize is that I should have held the conversation with her. Maybe that would have caused her to share what I was feeling with the others and started a ripple effect.

"To speak up or not? That is the question."

One of the first things we tell students is to speak up for themselves. We emphasize that if they do not speak up, no one will know what ails them or is causing them pain. Yet, as an educator in the same position, I find myself picking and choosing where to voice my opinion and when to remain quiet. Most often the choice to remain silent is dictated by the perception that a negative consequence will be the outcome of my actions. As an educator, I wanted my daily tasks to be focused on my students and their

success, but there is also an underlying fear that I am unable to properly defend them against the same microaggressions I endure. Ladson-Billings (2003) details how racism in education creates and unequal balance between white teachers and students of color. This same notion can be applied to the relationship between Black teachers and their white colleagues. Zamudio et al. (2011) also links racism to the challenges faed by students of color. This also creates a problem for me as I attempt to fight for the Black student knowing it may result in a simple reprimand or the loss of my job.

"I got a kid DH'd"

I normally close my room door at the end of the day. This day I decided to leave my door open because I thought most of the teachers had gone for the day. Sitting there taking care of shutting down for the day I heard a teacher skipping down the hall singing, "I got a kid DH'd. I got a kid DH'd." (A DH is a discipline hearing that determines if the student will be able to return to school and if not, how long their expulsion will last.) I sat there a moment debating whether I should address this teacher who was a white female or let it go. The longer I sat there the angrier I got because I knew the student she was talking about and although the actions taken were correct, the fact that she was celebrating having a negative impact on a student made me want to lash out.

After taking several breaths, I went to her room to ask if she was really singing about getting a student DH'd. Upon entering her room, I saw she was conversing with two white male teachers about what she had done. I asked her if she was celebrating getting a kid DH'd and she happily said, "Yeah." I then asked her if she was serious and one of the male teachers chimed in and said, "that's great and we should celebrate." I looked at him, shaking my head, telling them they should be ashamed of themselves

celebrating something that could be a life altering event for this particular student who never gets in trouble, but made a mistake trying to fit in. They all looked at like I was crazy. So, before I took my anger to another level, I walked out the room, went back to my classroom, and sat there contemplating the boldness.

This was one of the rare times that I said more than I normally would have. Yet, I still did not feel I said what truly needed to be said. However, at that moment, my body language and vocal toned was that of an angry person and I did not want them to not hear anything I said because they were so focused on the way they perceived my delivery (Reynolds-Dobbs at al., 2008).

This was not the first time this teacher has done something that reflected negatively on the Black students and staff. Because she has mostly worked in urban schools, she thought she had an in on the culture of Black people and actually got into an argument with me and other Black teachers about something in the Black culture she had no clue about. Suffice it to say I already had a negative impression of her and had previously let her know that I did not appreciate the way she interacted with the students. So, stepping into her room I already knew that I would have to be 'delicate' in my response to her. That also cause me grief as I debated why I had to be soft on her when she was hard on the Black student and the Black students in her class. As society still sees the Black woman as rough, hard, and unfeminine, I knew that speaking aggressively to the white teacher the way she was speaking to the students would not go over well (Muhammad, 2015). I also knew, because of racist views and stereotypes, I had to act differently and not express myself in the same manner she had (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008).

I found that my trust of her and her ability to treat the Black students positively took a complete nosedive that day. I could no longer justify defending her when the students claimed she was racist. It also put a burden on me because I had to navigate the complexities of keeping her students positive without making it seem like I was justifying what she was doing and would continue to do because no one felt the need to let her know that what she was doing was unacceptable.

"*I am an Educator.*"

I receive different sets of students on a daily basis, and it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that students have their assignments and or manipulatives they may need to complete their assignments. Most teachers come into my room, give students their assignments, and leave without giving directions or they send the work down with the knowledge that the student will not be able to complete the assignment. While this may work for some, my expectation for the students is that they complete the assignments or put forth an effort while I give them support.

Whenever I have a particular teacher's students in my room, she enters and instantly begins to coach me on how to do the assignments. Her perception of me is that I could not possibly help her students because I am merely a babysitter. While she has not come right out and said this, her actions over multiple interactions say that she does. She even has had the audacity to ask me if I have a degree. Since she has never seen said degree, she continues to address me as though I am uneducated.

One particular day she came into my room, and I had just finished helping multiple students at varying grade levels complete their assignments. On my whiteboard were several examples of the students' work done in a manner that would help them see

where they were getting things mixed up. Her initial response was to stare at the board, trying to see what I had shown them. After several moments of her carefully dissecting the information on the board she turned to me and said, "Did you do this?" I told her yes and proceeded to explain to her why I used varying colors to help the students understand the problems. I also told her that I am an educator just as she is and that I had taught at the high school and middle school levels before I took my current position. She continued to give me a look of skepticism and only accepted that I had indeed done all the work on the board after one of her students informed her that they understood the concept she was trying to explain better after I explained it.

My lack of response to her prior to this encounter contributed to her conclusions that I could not possibly be a math teacher. I did not feel I should have to explain to her my qualifications to teach math or any subject that I help students with when they are present in my classroom. What I did discover is that her perception of me was based on the same perception she has of the students in her classroom. Having done multiple observations in her room, where she has a majority of Black students, I witnessed her treating them like they were incapable of learning the material. The same vocal tone she used when them was the same vocal tone she used with me. That mindset that they did not and could not understand the material was referenced when she saw me a Black female in a nonteaching position could not possibly understand the math concepts she was teaching. She never as what my credentials were, and I never volunteered. I see now that many of the issues I had with her would have been alleviated if I had spoken up and told her that I was more than capable of teaching the math she was presenting to the students.

"Meeting at the copier."

On multiple occasions I have walked into a room filled with white teachers speaking negatively about a Black student or Black colleagues. Rarely have they stopped their dialogue upon me entering the room. Occasionally, I will turn towards them wondering if they would stop holding the conversation because a Black person is in the room. A high percentage of the time, they continue on unaware that my patience is wearing thin with their constant babbling about the Black students in the building.

On a professional development day, I walked into one of the grade level offices to grab some papers I had printed. When I entered the room, I saw that a group of white women were gathered around the copier. I wanted to pretend like I did not see or hear them, but I had to maneuver around them to get my papers. If I was stumped by their inability to get out of my way, I was even more confused by the conversation they were having.

- Mrs. Karen: Did you see Micky today?

- Ms. Tiffany: Yes, she came to my class late again.

- Ms. Jenny: Yeah, she acts like she can't understand sometimes, but I know she is just ignoring me.

- Mrs. Karen: I know. She was trying to act like she was friends with me. She's pretty dumb.

- Ms. Jenny: Right. I don't know why she thinks her being cute is going to get her anywhere.

- Ms., Tiffany: When she finally got to my class, she was more worried about fixing her hair than she was in getting the assignment done.

- Mrs. Karen: How stupid can she be?

This conversation continued on in this fashion until the meetings started for the day.

A part of me wished I had said something to them at that moment. I did not because I wanted to keep the peace. Asking them if they knew the definition of dumb and stupid would not have gone over well. Particularly when I would have called them stupid using its definition correctly for standing in the open talking about a student they were paid to help educate.

At that moment I knew I did not speak up because there were no students in the building to buffer me from their need to run tell someone. To call them on that would have resulted in me being talked to by the principal because I hurt their feelings and what they said was not what they really meant. As I have on a continuous basis, I walked out of the room feeling bad for the student and disgusted with myself for not speaking up for the student who was not there to defend herself.

Reflection

As I read through the narratives, smiling at some and becoming angry at others, I realize that the majority of my experiences were centered on race, racism, gender, and sexism. Whether covert or overt, the fact that I am a Black female played a role in how others reacted or did not react to me. They used stereotypes to include me in situations they did not want to be involved in and exclude me from others. Overall leaving me with a feeling of being oppressed and not in control of my ability to see growth in my chosen career field.

When analyzing my narratives through the lens of critical race theory, intersectionality, and Black feminist thought, I found that being overworked and

underappreciated and constantly proving my credibility and fighting stereotypes lead to

racial trauma. As a result of this racial trauma, I suffered from chronic stress that led to

health issues which I ignored because I did not want to miss too many days at work (did

not want to be labeled as lazy, trying to get something for nothing) and did not get the

satisfaction I sought year after year in a career I did not know I wanted to be a part of

until I was a member of the club.

"Critical race theory – Tenet #1: Racism is inherent in our society."

When I was journaling my experiences, I started to see a pattern of racism. I did

not go into my initial stage of analysis thinking all the stories would fit in that

category. Racism has been a part of my life since birth. Many times, situations we

encounter are minor on the scale of racism and racial injustice that I might not see that it

is indeed a racist act. This happened many times as I decided which stories to

use. Taking a deeper look at each narrative, most of the situations were covert in nature.

Overt occurrences of racism were easy to spot as the people involved were

blatant in their display of racism. For instance, the intentions of the principal in *Why am*

I being moved?, the principal wanted to remove me from my assigned school sight to

replace me with white teachers. Then she took away a promotion, I worked hard for, to

give to a white male.

Percentage wise, most of the encounters were covert. I would not realize the

experience was racist until days, weeks, and months later. In this case years later as I'm

doing this study. For instance, in *Not eating in the teacher's lounge*, being the only

Black person in the room was not new. Being shun by the other teachers was. Even

when one of the white teachers was sitting at a table with me, he chose to squeeze

between two teachers at a crowded table instead of staying at my table.

Intersectionality

Black female working. That statement should be no different than any other

person working. Yet, as a Black female I stand at a crossroad that explains why my

experiences as a worker in the education field have been more negative than positive. It

explains why I rarely see opportunities for promotion and why, when promoted, I am

held to a different standard. Being at the intersection of Black and female has been the

cause of much distress.

Black feminist thought – Oppression of Black women

In the narratives *Junior high* and *High school*, each of those teachers took chose

to do things that would oppress my ability to show my knowledge. In *Junior high*, the

teacher took her dislike for me and used it as motivation to cause me harm. Her actions

though not as harmful as they could have been, were used in a manner that could have

taken away a valuable tool for me to use as I moved on to higher education. While I was

not harmed academically, she did harm me emotionally and mentally. The teacher in

High school, oppressed me academically, emotionally, and mentally. Her actions caused

the first major realization that I would have an uphill battle to reach my goals if I had to

depend on the whims of white people.

When I graduated from college and the educational system, I began to understand

the suffocating grip of oppression. There are many ways to feel oppressed. Not allowing

opportunities for advancement in one chosen field. Suppressing one's ability to voice

their opinions and grievances. Using stereotypes to pigeonhole them in a role that does

not accurately depict who they are. Creating fear to kept them under control. I have felt each of these attempts at oppression.

As an educator, I have encountered oppression on a yearly basis. Each year it seemed my colleagues were trying reach a quota of the number of times they had to use oppressive behavior towards me. *Hey you forgot about me* showed how I was not allowed to speak before my fellow colleagues. It did not matter that on one of the occasions it why by direct decree of the building principal that I make a presentation. The white female in charge did not want others to see my value, while she would let the white teachers share though things they spoke of did not provide a benefit to the conversation. In *Why would I want that job?*, I was never under consideration for a position befitting my educational level. But everyone was excited to nominate me for a job that was below my pay grade and would have resulted in a decrease of pay. Or in *Why do you always call me?*, when teachers conversations are centered around me being the prototypical Black woman who is know for being nurturing, yet a hard disciplinarian who does not take any flack.

Putting these three frameworks together, I have created a looking glass through which I can see how the microaggressions, racial injustices, and racial trauma have truly affected me and my ability to thrive as an educator. As I have typically done, I overlook these things and continue to place myself in situations causing myself increased stress. Even though I have all those narratives about my years as an educator and I have wanted to leave the profession, I return because I want to be there for the Black students.

Chapter 5: Autoethnography, Implications, Recommendations, Final Thoughts

This chapter explores whether autoethnography was the right choice for this dissertation. Next it states implications for the Black female educator and future research. Additionally, recommendations for school districts looking to hire and retain Black female educators will be included. It will conclude with a series of quotes by famous Black women and my thoughts about being an educator, whether I will continue in the field of education, and where I see myself in the future as an educator.

Should I have Chosen Autoethnography?

Can I really let go enough to find the truth? This was the first question I asked myself as I began this autoethnographic dissertation. In order to speak my truth, I had to be able to find it. Was I prepared to get out of my own way and be vulnerable? To get to the heart of the study, I had to fight demons and I had to fight life. The mere act of living in a society entrenched in whiteness caused barriers to speaking my truth. But my truth is all I had. While I did not always have words, I had my truth. When I could not clearly see where this study was taking me, I had my truth. Ultimately, my truth is what set me free.

After hours of gathering experiences and writing the narratives that would be included in this study, I found that there was a factor of fear. That fear was debilitating. It caused me to second guess my truth. That fear, at times, turned into anxiety. This anxiousness was caused by the knowledge that my thoughts and feelings would be exposed to all, and that exposure could lead to people having negative feelings towards me. While I had plenty of stories to share, giving myself permission to be true to the

experience without fear was so paralyzing that I could not write. The struggle was so great that I felt choosing a different study method would have been the better choice. In another study method, I would not have seen me. The person I am inside and the person I let others see, combined together as one.

As I allowed myself to become comfortable with the notion of doing an autoethnography, I tried to focus on a reason for pursuing this method. Borcher & Ellis (2016) identified the goal of autoethnography as showing the purpose of the researchers struggles. Initially, I did not see a purpose in my struggles and what could my experiences do for someone else. I surmised, as I did while reading the stories of other Black female educators, that my narratives could provide future readers the knowledge that they are not alone in their struggles. That was an important aspect for me as the lone Black female in a department, on a floor or in a wing of the school, or the entire school building.

Implications for Black Female Educators

Flourishing in my Career

Over the course of my career as an educator, I realize that I have never felt like I could or was flourishing in the educational system. I have rarely felt a part of the school community as a teacher nor as a Black female. Moments to feel joy and acceptance are far and few between. According to Love (2019) the idea of being an *Abolitionist Teacher* camaraderie and feelings of mattering. This is but one of the many steps needed to help Black female educators flourish, feel free to be themselves, and find happiness as a member of the education community.

Another hindrance to the Black female's ability to flourish is the constant battle against stereotypes based on their gender and race. As a Black female, there is war being fought while trying to live as a person who is, Black and female, brought on by living in a society permeated by white supremacy throughout institutional systems (Farinde-Wu, A., 2018; James-Gallaway et al., 2021; Mckinney de Royston et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2020).

Other Educators who Look Like Me

Progressively, trough the extant of my career, the number of Black educators has declined. While I briefly had a Black female mentor during my first year of teaching, I was never afforded the opportunity to have one again. When she left, I became more isolated than I was as there were no other Black teachers in my department, and I was the only Black person in my section of the building. While she gave me valuable information to use as I continued my career, it would have helped me even more if I had enjoyed the connection I had with her for at least the first five years.

Black female educators need a community of people who share their experiences. Coming to work knowing someone there understands you on a cultural and personal level eases the burden of carrying the pain alone. They have someone that can corroborate and at times commiserate with. This gives them the confidence to speak out and share your trauma. It also makes you feel better knowing that they want you to succeed and have your best interest in mind. Without this support, the Black female educator is left to struggle with microaggressions that become more prevalent when she is alone in the educational setting (Frank et al., 2021; Kohli et al., 2017)

Literature shows that having Black female mentors and leadership is important for the Black female educator (Matthews, 2019; Stanley, 2020). Having this mentorship helps with the intersectionality if being Black and female in workspaces it is white dominated. In this study, I found that many of the experiences I had would have been more easily navigated if I had a mentor who could understand my trauma.

Implications for future research

Historically academic research lacks the voice of women of color. When stories of these women, particularly Black women, are shared, they are ignored and scrutinized. Those who wish to research Black women in education should look deeper into the experiences of Black women educators. Cataloging the experiences of Black female educators from the past, present, and those who have chosen to leave the field will help researchers who are looking for the knowledge base pertaining to these educators (Farinde-Wu, Butler, & Allen-Handy, 2020).

Researchers should also delve into the effects of microaggressions, overt and covert racism, and negative workplace culture on Black female educators. Because of the teacher shortage and the fact that the turnover rate for Black female teachers is the highest percentage, the previous issues need to be addressed to curb the turnover and increase the ability of school districts to recruit Black females (Aragon, 2016; Taylor, 2013). By addressing the concerns of this population, their needs can be met and their experiences positive improving the overall experience of all in the education sphere (Farinde-Wu, Griffin, & Young, 2019).

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Create safe spaces for Black female educators.

In her article, Evans (2024) looked at Black people as a whole when stating that affinity groups where one of the best ways to affirm and impact Black educators. However, this can be generalized to Black female educators. Having a space where they can get together, and not be treat differently by their coworkers for doing so, creates fellowship, stronger connections, and helps them hone their skills as educators and beyond.

Recommendation #2: Ensure that Black female educators are recognized and given opportunities to be a part of decision making and leadership.

Black female educators are usual the last to receive recognition for their contributions. They are often overlooked and not called upon for their knowledge and expertise. It is imperative that school leaders look to Black women more often and provide ways for them to have leadership roles and or be included in the decision making at the school level (Evans, 2024).

Recommendation #3: Create a culture that is culturally responsive, inclusive, and anti-racist

The leader of the school must be of the mind that it is important to create a culture that is acknowledging and inclusive of all community members. The leader must be willing to accept that racism and anti-Blackness has a negative effect on its staff and be willing to make the changes necessary. They must be intentional about their desire to

create work cultures that create a positive environment for Black and other minority staff

(Evans, 2024).

Final thoughts

<u>Bendable</u>

I'm bent
but not broken,
and that's the problem.

Better to be broken, then fixed.
Perhaps weaker but not misshapen
Like a warped carnie mirror.

Bent is to will of others,
An accommodation,
A distortion.

Are you flexible?
Are you nimble?
Are you malleable?

Really are you bendable?
How far can they stretch me?
How thin can I go?

Maybe thin like a piece of juicy fruit or
a fiber optic cable, so thin as to be translucent.

No. I don't want to be flexible, nimble,

malleable, bent. I'd rather not give way

but break instead, I say.

I'll mend the cracks,

show my scars,

stand my ground anew.

The years will leave me chipped

and tattered, but not bent. The girl

of 19 will still be in the woman of 90.

    (Sonya Groves, 2015)

  I am bruised but not broken. I have survived more than twenty years as an

educator in a system that was determined to hold me back and six years as a student

being taught by educators who did not want me to succeed. I have accepted that those

experiences have had a profound effect on me as an individual and as a person in a

position to influence others. I have found the old me locked inside the new me.

"The greatness of community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions
of its members."

            – Coretta Scott King

  It takes a village. That is what the African proverbs that everyone likes to spew

when they want help creating a community of people working towards the greater good.

Yet, I have found that the communities I have been a member of do not take that proverb

at face value, they are selfish and in the habit of creating chaos and confusion instead of

cooperation and collaboration. In the future I will attach myself to a community of people who are interested in my betterment just as much as I am interest in theirs.

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

– Maya Angelou

After my first teaching job I have always felt skeptical of others when I moved to a new location. They rarely made me feel welcome. I was treated like an outsider, and I acted like an outsider. In that same vain, I never wanted them to feel like I treated them unkindly. Despite how they treated me I always found a way to let them know they were important. That was the way I thought a community should be.

"I would like to be remembered as a person who wanted to be free…so other people would be free also."

– Rosa Parks

As a Black female I realize that I am a role model for other Black females and Black girls. It is my desire to show them that there is freedom in being who you are and who others want you to be. By doing this I am setting myself free and creating a path for them to do so as well.

"If you are silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it."

– Zora Neale Hurston

I have allowed people to do things to me causing me pain and suffering. I never voiced my desire to not be treated in that manner. As a result, they never felt the need to alter their behavior. When I would become ill, they did not expect me to stop and take care of myself. The expectations were that I would be there for them as I always had.

That is what the Black woman is known for? Right? I could get to the point where work was impossible, and they would say something nice about me while saying she never seemed to dislike her job.

"I am no longer accepting things I cannot change. I am changing things I cannot accept."

– Angela Davis

As I look to the future, I know that I will no longer work in a school building. I have concluded that I am unable to effect the change, on my own, that is needed to combat the institutional racism within the educational system. I do not want to leave education completely. My eventual goal is to create a foundation that provides services for underrepresented communities to have access to the tools needed to become all that they can be. Instead of complaining about the unchanging conditions, I have chosen to be an agent of change. At the end of the day, I create my own agency.

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