"RECLAIMIN' MY CROWN": A BLACK FEMINIST CRITICAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF A BLACK WOMAN EDUCATOR WHO LEFT K-12 EDUCATION

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by

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Reclaimin' My Crown As A Black Queen

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

"RECLAIMIN' MY CROWN": A BLACK FEMINIST
CRITICAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF
A BLACK WOMAN EDUCATOR WHO LEFT K-12 EDUCATION

presented by Brittany Fatoma,

a candidate for the degree of doctor of education,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Dr. Emily Crawford-Rossi

Dr. Lisa Dorner

Dr. Ty-Ron Douglas

Dr. Juanita Simmons

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DEDICATION

First, I dedicate and return this body of work to my redeemer, my strength, and my life, My God. I would not have been able to go through this journey without God leading, guiding, and keeping me. Next, I dedicate this piece to my mommy, Niquita P. Rox, because she was and still is my first teacher and the original Black woman educator of my life. She has always been my biggest cheerleader and supporter. I also dedicate this work to my brother, RJ. Knowing you are always cheering me on means the world to me. Then, there's my husband Amos. Thank you, my love, for holding me down and our family while I pursued my dreams. To my joy and forever why, Ava K! Oh my sweet girl, you are a literal answer to a prayer and we did this together from the womb until now. Thank you for loving me unconditionally and supporting me with lots of laughter, love, and prayers. To my extended family, I love and appreciate you all. Every kind word, thoughtful text, and meaningful prayers made this journey easier. Extra special shout out to Auntie Cheryl and Auntie Stephanie, I appreciate you both for offering a listening ear and wisdom that helped and challenge me to think more and read more. My sister-in-love, Andrea, your support of my work and willingness to read and provide feedback was priceless and I could never repay you. I also appreciate my mother-in-law calling almost daily to check and see if I am okay. To my community of sista-friends, doc-sistas, brotha-friends, scholar-friends, church fam and doula-sistas. Wow! Each of you have been there to help me every step of the way and I would not have been able to go on this journey without your love and support. Thank you!

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Abstract

A disproportionate number of Black women educators leave the classroom and do not return. This Black feminist critical autoethnography yielded a personalized narration with a more detailed description of why Black women are leaving the classroom. Furthermore, this study allows me and readers of this work to engage in the implications of being a Black woman educator and the white supremacy culture of K-12 education. The data collected was a detailed retelling of my story, field notes based on photos taken during my teaching experience. Applying Collins' (2000) Black Feminist Thought as an analytic tool provided a solid foundation to discuss oppression and activism in the context of K-12 education while analyzing my experiences critically. There were three major recurring themes I uncovered (1) Oppression based on Intersectional Identities, (2) Reoccurring and Persistent Effects of Trauma, (3) Liberation, Freedom, and Decolonizing the Black Woman's Mind, highlighting some personal accounts that literature aligns with the experience of Black women educators. Specifically, how poor working environment, burnout, white supremacy, white supremacist thinking and action, and hostile racial climates negatively impact the attrition of Black women educators. These findings indicate recommendations for educational leaders and policymakers wanting to retain Black women educators. Some best practices for supporting Black women educators are autonomy to create and build their own support system, do no harm, address implicit biases consistently and continually, and create spaces and environments for Black women without white oversight.

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Section One—Introduction to the Dissertation-In-Practice

White Supremacy Culture, Antiblackness, & Lack of Teacher Diversity

Although Black women educators are teaching powerhouses, they are 60% more likely to leave the profession than non-Black teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). This is the result of a culture of white supremacy in which harmful ideologies shape and inform the experiences of Black women educators. Scholars have named that race is a social construction, constructed and affirmed by a given society, particularly in the U.S. (Jones, 2015). Although socially constructed, race and racism more specifically, holds real material realities for Black people. One of these lies in the understanding of whiteness is property (Jones, 2015), which is the belief that those with a lighter complexion are right and good and deserving of benefits, privilege, and access (Johnson, 2019). This viewpoint is detrimental to everyone, especially people with a darker complexion (Fridie, 1975).

White supremacist thinking is based on a false notion of a racial hierarchy based on the hue of an individual's skin and that those with a darker hue are inferior (Fultz, 2004). Imbued with this diabolical thinking, British settlers exploited Africans socially, physically, mentally, emotionally, and economically to create and maintain a system of domination and indoctrinated society with the false ideology that Black people are subhuman and without value: anti-blackness (Garza, 2014; Johnson, 2019). Although the act of enslaving people was not a new venture to the then- "New World," U.S. slavery was one of the most heinous undertakings of oppression that evolved over time to institutionalized acts of racism and racist ideology post-slavery throughout American history and present-day. This was seen through the emergence of Jim Crow laws, anti-

voting laws, criminalization of Black people, mass incarceration, and Black maternal mortality (Davis, 1981).

In addition to the atrocities above, the expansion of whiteness ideology further perpetuates racial prejudices that persist today for Black people and others of the global majority (formerly people of color). Indigenous people have suffered the annihilation of their different tribes and the stealing and exploitation of the land in which they were initial habitants (Smith, 2006). Like the work of Dumas (2016), I will not capitalize *white* in this body of work because it is a social construct that does not speak to the shared experience of a particular group of individuals besides colonization and terrorism. The term *white* is mainly used to negate others, while the term *Black* is used to describe the everyday experiences of people of the African Diaspora as it relates to colonization and terrorism in the United States. Capitalizing the term *Black* is naming the experiences of people of the African Diaspora in the U.S., even though it is also a social construct. Sadly, across U.S. institutions and systems, like education, government, and health care, to name a few, there are apparent social injustices that target people of color, Black people specifically, systemically, and systematically. By unpacking the very nuanced belief system of domination and oppression that targets Black people, it provides clarity of the impact historically, presently, and to come.

One of the foundational notions of white supremacy culture is anti-blackness, and it is more than racism toward Black people. Anti-blackness refers to the "antagonistic relationship between blackness and (the possibility of) humanity" (Dumas & Ross, 2016, p. 429). Meaning in order for white supremacist to achieve utter domination over another group of people, one must adhere to the strict belief that blackness is not human. Once

that strict belief is accepted and adopted it becomes permissive to treat a person as if they are not human. Thankfully, the result of how white supremacy shows up in practices that are anti-black has birthed movements like the #BlackLivesMatter movement, a now-worldwide network started by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi, three Black women with other oppressed identities such as immigrant and sexual identities (Garza, 2014). This movement was an effort to mobilize and empower people to promote justice, healing, and freedom for Black people around the world, which began officially after the brutal 2012 death of Trayvon Martin, the driving impetus for naming why it is essential to articulate that Black Lives Matter. Garza uses several examples of state violence against Black people to describe the ways Black people are systematically oppressed. State violence is the use of power by the state or state-related/managed entities to legally cause harm and harassment to a particular group of people. Garza (2014) explains,

> When we say Black Lives Matter, we are talking about the ways in which Black people are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity. It is an acknowledgment [that] Black poverty and genocide is state violence…1 million Black people are locked in cages in this country–one half of all people in prisons or jails–is an act of state violence…Black women continue to bear the burden of a relentless assault on our children and our families, and that assault is an act of state violence. (para.12)

Regrettably, the U.S. government supports societies' dehumanization of Black people, and this dehumanization operates across government institutions and is fundamental to their functioning (Garza, 2014). Such memorable examples from the past and present of

how society has embraced white supremacist thinking and actions are the massive annihilation of Indigenous people in the Americas, the enslavement of Africans, the massive Lambert St. Louis International Airport buyout that destroyed Missouri's First All-Black city, Kinloch (Woodson, 2021), burning of Black Wall Street in Tulsa, and the January 6th, 2022 Capital Riot, to name a few. Education is one of the key government institutions that reflects and maintains societal beliefs about Blackness and Black people (hooks, 2013). As a result, it also instructs society on how to enforce prolong white supremacist thoughts and actions. In education its, deficit ideology, blaming individuals of disenfranchised communities have supposed deficiencies that result in educational inequities (Gorski, 2010), the emphasis placed on whiteness and white contributions in curriculum (Billings & Tate, 1995), the promotion of behaviors associated with whiteness (Dillard, 2020), tokenization and microaggressions towards Black students (Allen et al., 2013), criminalization of Black youth (Garza, 2014), and even contemporary issues such as eliminating Black studies courses and departments in K-12 settings in Florida and Missouri.

White supremacist thinking and action are at the center of K-12 education because it is part of the "hidden socialization" in U.S. society (hooks, 2012) which disseminates the ideology of antiblackness and the superiority of whiteness. In schools, white supremacist actions have evolved from incidents of overt racist acts through macroaggressions, to covert racist acts of microaggressions. Macroaggressions can include but are not limited to the use of racial slurs and other racially motivated derogatory statements. Microaggressions can be understood as covert or socially

acceptable, given that they communicate inferiority in ways that are disguisable to those with privilege or lack of awareness (Sue et al., 2007). In educational settings, Black children might be told that they are articulate or intelligent for simply accurately speaking standard English on a basic level. Schooling and mass media preserve racism by imprinting on developing minds supporting white supremacy (hooks, 2019). Further, even when parents thoughtfully and intentionally work to raise their children as antiracists, "…children [are] still being inundated by white supremacist thinking in schools: 'It was a startling indication to us of how deeply ingrained stereotypes, misconceptions, and fears can be, even at a very early age" (hooks, 2019, p.13). Subsequently, the natural outcome of school administrators, teachers, and students are teaching and learning in a racist environment generates a system of inequality and inequity. Though formal education was formed to sustain the culture and beliefs of the communities in the U.S., even those damaging beliefs promoting white supremacy can also serve as a place to challenge the very system it is created to uphold.

One of the most effective ways to counteract the impact of white supremacy is through education because it can challenge or support societal norms (Duncan, 2019). Therefore, addressing white supremacy entails ensuring a diverse teaching staff reflects the demographics of the student population and overall society. Black teachers have a greater rapport with all students, especially students of color because they are typically more multiculturally aware and utilize culturally responsive pedagogy to address the needs of students of color, in comparison to their white colleagues (Hill-Jackson, 2016). Yet, Black educators also endure the yoke of racism in schools (Kohli, 2020) and its

weight on all Black educators, particularly Black women educators, due to the intersectional oppression of racism and sexism (Collins, 2000).

While Black women educators have demonstrated that they are well-equipped to engage students in critical consciousness and do an enormous amount of racialized labor, they, themselves, are experiencing racism (Lisle-Johnson & Kohli, 2020). However, Black women educators cannot do this needed labor solely; school and district leaders must respect the impactful work of the critical Black women educators and learn her ways. Ultimately, everyone is responsible for establishing and maintaining equitable schools (Lisle-Johnson & Kohli, 2020). Research highlights how the teaching profession is losing educators of color, and Black women educators are 60% more likely to leave the profession than non-Black teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The lack of representation of Black educators is a dire concern when 79% of teachers are white, and 7% are Black in public schools (Taie &Goldring, 2020), compared to student demographics which consist of 51% white, 14% Black, 25% Hispanic, 5% Asian, and 4% identifying as two or more races (de Brey et al., 2019). The continuing lack of teacher diversity supports the ideology of white supremacy because of the propagation of white-centered norms and beliefs. It negatively impacts the academic achievement of all students, and intentionally students from marginalized communities (Allen-Handy & Farinde-Wu, 2017). The teacher workforce should reflect the student body, and the discrepancy between the number of students of color and educators of color is not because teachers of color are not recruited. Instead, there is a scarcity of intentionality in their retention (Ingersoll & May, 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2017).

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Although Black women educators have powerful stories and experiences to share in relation to our retention and support within the educational system as educators, our experiences remain largely invisible. Black women's lived experiences are often erased, rewritten, or ignored (Brown-Vincent, 2019). As a result, it is imperative that we work to tell our stories on our own terms, thus emphasizing the need for more first-person accounts of Black women educators. This Black feminist critical autoethnography seeks to do just that, emphasizing the importance of *reclaimin' my crown.* Black women are donned as Queens in Black culture, which is heavily tied to my identity, value, and worth; it was important for me to see this, and to demonstrate to other Black women educators how they, too, could reclaim this sense of self-worth and self-respect. I needed to see myself, telling myself, that my lived experience was real. Thus, this study focused specifically on my experiences with education throughout my life, my experiences as a Black woman educator in the classroom, and how white supremacy culture in K-12 can impact the retention of a Black woman educator.

Statement of the Problem

The achievement gap between students of color and non-students of color is a prevalent issue in K-12 education, and increasing teacher diversity has often been seen as the remedy for this issue (Hills-Brisbane, 2005; Hill-Jackson, 2017). Schools need Black women educators to improve all children's educational attainment, access, and opportunities, especially for Black children, because they bring a specialized skill set (Lisle-Johnson & Kohli, 2020). When educators address the needs of the most marginalized students all children reap the benefit. Conversely, Black women educators are leaving at an almost 22% higher rate than education institutions can recruit (Carver-

Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). White supremacy, plus the white women-dominated workforce in education, forces Black women educators to operate in a "hostile racial climate" (Kohli, 2018, p. 307) while also experiencing the interwoven oppressions of sexism and racism. hooks (1997) coined imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (IWSCP) to illustrate the ongoing and interlocking system of domination in the U.S. The Black woman educator's experience is positioned in the intertwining system of IWSCP because of the societal views and beliefs around the value of Black women's intersectional oppressions of racism (antiblackness), sexism (inferiority due to gender), and class exploitation, coupled with the value of Black women's work (Collins, 2000). A hostile racial climate is an environment imbued with racism that entails constant and consistent encounters with macro and microaggressions grounded in implicit biases perpetrated by all people (Brown et al., 2017; Kohli, 2018). After working in a racially hostile environment, Black women educators internalize the numerous racist acts that unequivocally impact their overall well-being and, ultimately, can influence their decisions to leave the teaching profession. Although research details why Black women educators leave teaching and how to retain them (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Farinde-Wu et al., 2020), extraordinarily little research outlines how white supremacy culture foundationally impacts Black women educators' attrition. Furthermore, there are very few firsthand accounts from a Black woman educator on her experience, emphasizing the detrimental and underlying influence of white supremacy culture, and how it eventually persuades them to leave K-12 education.

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Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to share my story and detail how white supremacy culture in K-12 education considerably swayed me to leave the classroom. Through Black feminist critical autoethnography, I investigated the context of beliefs, thoughts, experiences, and motivations perpetuating gendered and racialized oppression towards me, specifically as a Black woman educator. With the help of this deeply reflective process, I sought to better understand myself inside and outside the white supremacy culture within K-12 education. This research also aims to fill the gaps by understanding Black women educators' experiences with white supremacy culture (hooks, 2013), racially hostile working environments (Kohli, 2018), internalized racism (Brown et al., 2017), controlling historical images and stereotypes (Collins, 2000), and the intersection of racial and gender oppression (Collins, 2000, hooks, 2015) and how these dynamics and ideologies impact attrition for us.

This work is also an act of reclamation for me because I have always allowed others, to control my life by allowing them to dictate my thoughts, feelings, and actions. I did not feel comfortable being myself fully and authentically and thus seek to challenge my own internalizations of whiteness and white supremacy. My demeanor and disposition exuded freedom and independence from the judgment and acceptance of others. Inwardly, acceptance from everyone was a dire need for me. This entire work is an intentional act of reclaiming myself and owning who I am and echoing the powerful words of Congresswoman Maxine Walters, "I reclaim my time." Permanently leaving the classroom forced me to critically analyze my experiences in public and private education

and identify the entwined ideology of my intersectional oppression as a Black woman in education.

Research Question

To explore my experience as a Black woman educator and the factors that contributed to my departure from the K-12 setting, using the lens of Black feminist thought, I ground my inquiry in the following research questions:

1. What was my experience as a Black woman in a K-12 white supremacy culture?
2. What oppressive factors and dynamics ultimately influenced my decision to leave the classroom?

Theoretical Framework: Black Feminist Thought Epistemology

Theorist Patricia Hill Collins (2000) underscored critical writings and conceptualizations of Black women's lives by Black women thinkers in her text *Black Feminist Thought*. Black Feminist Thought honors the diversity of perspectives, experiences, conceptualizations, forms of analysis, and activism that Black women have used to understand racism, sexism, classism, etc. Ultimately, Black feminist theorists want to encourage commitment to justice for Black women while challenging systems of oppression that target Black women. Collins (1989) explains that

> Black feminist thought, by extension, represents a second level of knowledge, the more specialized knowledge furnished by experts who are part of a group and who express the group's standpoint. The two levels of knowledge are interdependent; while Black feminist thought articulates the taken-for-granted knowledge of African American women, it also encourages all Black women to create new self-definitions that validate a Black women's standpoint. (p. 750)

Furthermore, Black Feminist Thought underscores the importance of understanding and "fostering Black women's empowerment in a context of social justice" which provides an analysis for oppression, particularly intersecting forms of oppression, and underscores the importance of understanding knowledge in connection to power relations (Collins, 2000, p.228). Black Feminist Thought provides a conceptual lens to analyze Black women educators' work inside and outside the home, how they identify and value themselves, and how they define their culture. As the literature notes, Black women's access, treatment, mobility in careers, and jobs correlate with race, class, and gender intersecting oppression (Collins, 1986). Black feminist thought consist of six core themes (West, 2019), however in the context of this study I focused on these three themes, the Interlocking Nature of Oppression, Self-Definition and Self-Valuation, and the importance of Afro-American Women's Culture (Collins, 1986). I will provide more details about these core themes below.

The Interlocking Nature of Oppression

Collins (1986) posits that a recurring theme in Black feminist scholarship is the significance of interlocking oppressions of racism, classism, and sexism. Moorosi et al. (2018) illuminate the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), who formerly introduced the term intersectionality, and argued that negating the intersection of oppression of Black women ignores either their blackness, gender or both. Thus, Black scholars and others divulge how "Black women—raced and gendered beings—see, experience, and exist in the world differently than all other racial and gender groups" (Farinde-Wu et al., 2020, p.339). Crenshaw (1991) conceptualizes intersectionality into three forms: structural, political, and representational. Similar to how the intersection of race and gender makes

the experience of domestic violence and rape of Black women immensely different from White women, similarly for Black women educators and white educators, their experiences are vastly different along racial and gendered lines (Farinde-Wu et al., 2020). Black feminists desire to bring awareness to the manifestation of interlocking oppression by creating new theoretical analyses themselves (Collins, 1986). Another reason Black feminists need to add to the body of scholarship about intersectionality is to create an alternative or counternarrative in response to the pervasive societal beliefs and ideologies about Black women. As Black feminists address the interlocking oppression of Black women, they also liberate and bring awareness of the oppression of Black men and white women.

The Meaning of Self-Definition and Self-Valuation

The self-definition theme within Black Feminist Thought underscores the importance of self-definition for Black women; and self-valuation as a determining factor on how one characterizes themselves (Collins, 1986). For example, a Black woman can self-identify as a strong Black woman and self-value. This means that she is aware of herself emotionally, physically, mentally, and socially and confidently navigates public and private spaces. Collins (2000) posits that self-definition involves challenging the sociopolitical knowledge-validation process that has created "externally defined controlling images of Black womanhood" which entails exerting authentic Black women images and replacing falsely derived ones (p.94). Challenging the sociopolitical knowledge validation process is a continual practice of defying stereotypes that have externally defined and continue to support the dehumanization of Black women and the exploitation of Black women's labor (Collins, 1986).

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Self-valuation is also about an individual giving value to their identities and characteristics of themselves. This can be expressed in owning "externally defined controlling images of Black womanhood" like sapphire, and challenging the ideals of patriarchy and stereotypical definitions of feminism (Collins, 1986, p. 94). A typical description of a Typically, sapphire is describes as being assertive is a negative notion, but Collins (1986) encourages Black women to embrace this redefining of what it means to be assertive. Another reason Black women self-definition and self-valuation are critical is that it encourages Black women to combat the damage of internalized psychological oppression on their self-esteem. The degree to which Black women internalize frequent assaults of controlling images is vast and requires inner strength (Collins, 2000). The cost of this inner strength can be more than Black women can pay. It is powerful when Black women define and create their own standards for Black womanhood, thus my exploration of my experience as a Black woman educator.

The Importance of Afro-American Women's Culture

One of the most meaningful and affirming ways to address oppression is through self-definition and self-valuation through the lens of one's culture. Through self-discovery, Black women can create and explain our experiences outside of societal stereotypes and controlling images. Collins (1986) expounds on the fluidity of culture by using the definition of scholar Leith Mullings, 1997 (as cited in Collins, 1986) , that culture consists of symbols and values of a group of people based on their experiences, and these symbols and values are not stagnant but are ever-evolving. Although Black women's lives have common themes, these themes are lived differently through class, age, ethnicity, sexual identity, and gender expression (Collins, 1986; Farinde-Wu et al.,

2020). Black women's experiences, symbols, values, and traditions make up a distinctive culture that is quite diverse and multifaceted. Collins (1986) asserts that "there is no monolithic Black women's culture-rather, there are socially-constructed Black women's cultures that collectively form Black women's culture" (p. 522). Black women's individual and collective cultures make up many socially constructed values, beliefs, and experiences. One Black woman's experience cannot speak to every Black woman's experience, yet her experiences and others make up Black women's culture. Additionally, Collins (1986) explains the significance of understanding activism in Black women's culture. Due to the interlocking oppressions in Black women's experience, activism is usually a natural phenomenon. This activism varies depending on the Black woman's experience, with resistance strategies being integrated into daily life and existence, yet just as influential. A transformed consciousness as a Black woman and educator is formidable, especially when she shares her own lived experiences and illustrates her reality through those lived experiences (Collins, 2000).

Design of the Study

I see myself as a Black Queen: Why a Black Feminist Critical Autoethnography

I explored my experiences in white supremacy culture in K-12 education and how these experiences influenced my decision to leave the classroom. I used Black feminist critical autoethnography (Durham, 2021), a qualitative research method. Autoethnography entails using the researcher's narratives as the primary data source and conducting a cultural analysis that deciphers one's behaviors, thoughts, and experiences in correlation with those also a part of the culture or society (Boyd, 2008). Critical autoethnographies take the process a step further by using this method as liberation,

asking critical questions that address the intersection of power and oppression in culture and individual experiences (Iosefo et al., 2020). In this critical autoethnographic study, I seek to decode my lived experiences as a Black woman educator who left the classroom due to the underlying impact of white supremacy culture in K-12 education. To date, research mainly centers around the familiar narratives of white women's experience in education instead of the experiences of Black women educators. Until recently, most research on teacher attrition focused on white teachers instead of addressing Black women educators' unique challenges in the workplace (Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Farinde-Wu et al.,2020; Moorosi et al., 2018; Shipp, 2000). My research study used Black Feminist Thought to conceptualize my experiences and guided me as I defined who I was as a Black woman, who I was in the classroom, who I became as an educator, who I was upon my departure from the classroom, and who I am now. Therefore, autoethnography methodology guided this study on exploring why a Black woman educator leave the field of education in the context of white supremacy culture, beliefs, thoughts, experiences, and motivations. Finally, I sought to bring awareness to how the imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (IWSCP) shaped my experience as a Black woman educator and my experiences in education, the Black community, and the United States.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe researchers who conduct qualitative research as intrigued by how people make meaning of their life and experiences in this world. Making meaning of my life as a Black woman educator is indeed enthralling because I am researching a threefold exploration of understanding the value society places on Black, challenging the social constructs and historical implications that still impact society presently, and understanding the value society places on Black women and how I,

as a Black woman, view the world through my experiences. In the subsequent sub-sections, I provide an understanding of ethnography, autoethnography, critical autoethnography, and Black feminist critical autoethnography.

Ethnography

Ethnography is essentially observing and writing about people and their behaviors in an immersive way (LeCompte & Priessle, 1993). Mertens (2020) describes ethnography as acquiring a deeper understanding of peoples' beliefs, thoughts, and actions through conducting research by observing everyday life. Traditionally, the researcher conducting an ethnographic study would decide who and what culture to study. There are various research approaches, especially when considering the study as an impetus for social change (Mertens, 2020). Ellis et al. (2011) describe ethnography as a research method closely examining a particular group's cultural practices, values, beliefs, and shared experiences. To do so, the researcher immerses themselves in the culture and documents the study through methods like interviews, field notes from observations, and artifacts (Ellis et al., 2011). This research tradition allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of culture, but also the behaviors, customs, traditions, and actions of those whom they study.

Autoethnography

Ellis et al. (2011) explain that autoethnography combines autobiography and ethnography. Autobiographies are critical moments of enlightenment produced by extenuating circumstances that push individuals to dissect their experiences (Ellis et al., 2011). In comparison, ethnography pursues an understanding of the culture of a particular group of people (Merriam &Tisdell, 2016). When combined, autoethnography is a

research method that entails using the researcher's narratives as the primary data source and involves conducting a cultural analysis to decipher one's behaviors, thoughts, and experiences in correlation with those that are also a part of the culture or society (Boyd, 2008; McElderry & Hernandez Rivera, 2017). Similar to Boyd (2008), I am using autoethnography to "engage in mindful learning" about my experiences in white supremacy culture in the field of education. As a part of this process, I explore my socialization, retention, advancement, training (professional development), mentoring opportunities, and preparation (teacher education programs) and the impact it had in my attrition.

Critical Autoethnography

Critical autoethnography examines the various intersections of identity that can impact one's life to consider social conditions, expose oppressive systems, and challenge the ideology and theory of domination (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020). Durham (2020) describes critical autoethnography as a "mind-mining excavation of memory" (para. 20). This is in an effort to use one's lived experience and cultural life to challenge and change society. In comparison to an archaeologist, who exposes, processes, and records archeological remains, autoethnographers reveal their own lived experiences and processes and records about themselves. Fa'ave (2020) explains that critical autoethnography is a creative approach that depends on the relationship between personal storytelling and critical theory. Using storytelling as critical research provides a means for Black women specifically to share how they "existed, resisted, and persisted" (Baker-Bell, 2017, p.526). Critical theory focuses on challenging and changing society and has historically

been used selectively and broadly (Bohman, 2005). In this context, critical theory is intricately intertwined within critical autoethnography.

Black Feminist Critical Autoethnography

Black feminist autoethnography combines Black Feminist Thought and Critical autoethnography (Durham, 2021). Griffin (2012) provides an example of combining Black Feminist Thought and autoethnography through centering her narrative around the tenets of BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT. In her work, she challenges the system of oppression in the field of communication. Similarly, autoethnographers expand the use of autoethnography by crafting various art forms. One notable scholar, William-White (2011), uses autoethnography and spoken word to challenge several entities, microaggressions and intersectional oppression of Black women in the academy, perceptions of autoethnography, and the use of spoken word as a form of storytelling. In doing so William-White underscores how autoethnography can address multilayered oppression in several ways and an acknowledgement that her story "advances methodological choices for narrative. Elevates the accepted discourse on Inter/Intra-Ethnic-Conflict and Sexism" (p. 237). Other scholars (e.g., Ngunjiri et al.,2010) delineate that autoethnographic exploration can involve analyzing how white privilege impacts the research and the researcher's life. Using Black Feminist Thought and autoethnography allows one to dig deeply into experiences, including emotions that may not be possible if someone outside of the respective identities were to conduct the interviews (Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang, 2010). Similar to Griffin (2015), by writing a BFA, I am unapologetically centering my experience as a Black woman educator to foster opportunities for others and agitate systemic and intersectional oppression. This further

proves that as Durham et al. (2020) claim, the "future of autoethnography is Black" supporting this bold claim by stating, "the ability to conceive creative ways to communicate or convey cultural knowledge across space, body, and time has been a politically imaginative, life-sustaining technology for the African diaspora" (p.289). In other words, telling our stories as Black people about our culture is a part of our identity as Black people. As a Black woman, it is fitting, if not compelling, that I am writing a Black feminist critical autoethnography.

Setting

The setting of this study is Missouri; specifically, I taught for six years in Kansas City in Kansas City Public Schools (KCPS) and Columbia, MO at Columbia Public Schools (CPS) from 2013-2019. Missouri is geographically located in the Midwest of the United States and consists of an Anglo-European culture dating to 1673 (Missouri Digital Heritage, 2017). In this year, white European explorers traveled down the Mississippi river and unlawfully claimed the land, later becoming Missouri. By 1682, French explorers claimed ownership of the Louisiana Territory for France. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 lawfully forced the Indigenous people of the original tribes of Chickasaw, Illini, Ioway, Otoe-Missouria, Osage, Quapaw, and Sac and Fox from their lands and homes (Indigenous Tribes of Missouri: Missouri's Native Peoples, 2020).

Another historical moment that further solidifies the power relations of white supremacy and oppression in Missouri is the Missouri Compromise of 1820. The Missouri Compromise allowed Missouri to become a part of the Union as an enslaved state while Maine would be a free state, keeping the balance of power and an equal number of enslaved people and free states (Missouri Digital Heritage, 2017). The

conditions of Missouri statehood detail a history of enslaving Africans and forcibly removing Indigenous people from the land, which exemplifies white supremacy and IWSPC. Along with present-day actions of white supremacy, have been the fatal shooting and death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO, or the disparate law enforcement practices of increased traffic stops of Black people in Columbia, MO (Jamieson, 2023), redlining (MARC. Mid-America Regional Council, 2023), and white flight throughout Missouri (Woodson, 2021). The state of Missouri is the setting in which I expound on my experiences with white supremacy culture and its long-lasting impression on my teaching experience and, eventually why I departed the K-12 classroom.

Participant

I am a Black woman leader, activist, educator, wife, mother, and southern belle from North Carolina. I am also a proud Historically Black College and University (HBCU) graduate of Oakwood University in Huntsville, Alabama. I received my undergraduate degree in Elementary Education, later attended La Sierra University, and graduated with a master's degree in educational administration and leadership. I then taught for eight years as an Elementary school teacher and Instructional coach in a parochial school in Kansas City, Kansas, as well as Kansas City Public Schools (KCPS) and Columbia Public Schools (CPS) in Missouri. I am pursuing an EdD in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri (MU). In 2021, I won MU's College of Education Graduate Student Leader of the Year award; in 2022, I won the Mary Gutherman Award for Community Engagement. In 2023, I was awarded Mizzou 18, one of the highest honors bestowed to MU graduate students for leadership, scholarship, and commitment to involvement on campus and in the local Columbia

community. The award I cherish the most is the "40 under 40" award from Oakwood University, acknowledging the impact of alumni under age 40 that have made remarkable contributions after graduation Oakwood University.

I hold multiple roles both professional and personal. I am a graduate assistant for Academic Access and Leadership development and a perinatal doula. A perinatal doula is a certified and knowledgeable birth worker that supports and advocates for the pregnant mother from prenatal to postpartum. During 2022, I served as the SALT (So Amazing Life Today) Fellows Director, an organization that supports individuals to seize opportunities to have an extraordinary life physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. The SALT Fellows program is a post-baccalaureate program that provides early career and recent graduates an opportunity to combine their profession and their faith through serving communities in the urban core of Columbia, Missouri.

Previously in 2019, I served as the Executive Director of Worley Street Roundtable (WSR) and the founder of the "I See You" Teachers of Color Support Network (TCSN). WSR is a grassroots and nonprofit organization that partners with the local school district, parents, teachers, and community members to address the educational disparities and disproportionalities in the lack of success and access amongst students of color in Columbia, MO. "I See You" TCSN is a WSR initiative that seeks to support and retain Black and Brown educators in Mid-Missouri. Under my leadership, WSR has won two awards: the 2021 MU Celebrates MLK Community Award and the 2020 Missouri National Education Association's Horace Mann Award for Civic Organization Achievement. All my life experiences play a role in retelling my story of how white supremacy culture impacted my departure from teaching in the classroom.

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Storytelling is personable and fitting as I divulge my feelings, thoughts, and emotions about my experience.

Data Collection

Autoethnographic researchers collect their data by examining their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a specified culture (Merriam &Tisdell, 2016). Each data piece collected captures my teaching experience, how white supremacy culture impacted my teaching experience, and why I left the classroom. The specific data collection tools I used in this autoethnographic study were recording my personal narratives (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020) on Zoom and analyzing artifacts in the form of photographs (Merriam &Tisdell, 2016) from my teaching experience. Retelling my story aloud to pattern after the tradition of storytelling in the Black community that originates from our African ancestry (Dilliard, 2022). Sharing my story through 'talking it out' assisted me in telling it in a more genuine expression, which is and authentic to Black storytelling (Dillard, 2022). Black American storytelling is paramount to the cultural norms and values of Black folks (William-White, 2011). Specifically, this storytelling tradition was a common custom of passing history from one generation to another in Africa (William-White, 2011). Naturally, formerly enslaved Africans who were forced to come to the Americas brought this rich tradition with them. "Talking out" my story was very natural and freeing. Like (re)membering, Dillard (2022) shares how Black women teachers (re)member their experiences and share them through storytelling.

Brown-Vincent (2019) explains this process as "observed myself observing," which entails autoethnographers or anthropologists focusing more on recounting their experiences authentically so that the reader communicates with the researcher and others

throughout the body of work and gains an insider view which can be countercultural, into the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of the researcher within the established culture (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Like Brown-Vincent (2019), I chose to write and recite proudly, my experiences to inform "what came to be and in turn, what we understand as possible" (p. 123-124). Validity can be described as *what came to be,* and reliability *what we understand as possible*.

Engaging in this process was dually beneficial because retelling one's story via autoethnography helps the researcher remember details forgotten when "the event was emotionally evocative" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 751), while also aiding the reader in identifying with my story personally. My teaching experience was quite psychologically reminiscent of how white supremacy culture is preserved in K-12 education through white supremacist thoughts and actions coupled with anti-blackness, internalized racism, and microaggressions. Reiterating my story brought to my remembrance the depths of the impact of my life on my teaching experience. Using Zoom provided a medium for me to realistically 'talk out' my story and to see myself. In reclaiming my crown, which is heavily tied to my identity, value, and worth, it was important to be seen. I needed to see myself, telling myself, that my lived experience was real. My lived experiences as a Black woman is often erased, rewritten, or ignored (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1981, hook, 1993). For others to see me, I must first see myself.

To collect these recorded retellings, I first selected places around Columbia, MO, that looked similar or reminded me of the various places where I lived during periods of my life. I recorded my personal narrative using Zoom, which included transcription using crafted critical questions from the interview protocol (see Appendix A) based on the

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Black Feminist Thought concepts of interlocking oppression, aspects of white supremacy culture like microaggressions, internalized racism, and antiblackness, which relate to my overarching research question. I retell my life's story in four parts titled Part 1: Childhood Experiences; Part 2: Undergraduate Experience and Young Adulthood; Part 3: Teaching Experience; and Part 4: Educational Leadership Outside the Classroom and EdD Journey. It was extremely difficult to retell my life's story focusing on my experiences and how they shaped me as an educator, leader, and scholar. However, utilizing interview protocols provided structure and support for this arduous work, which is necessary (Appendix A). The protocol itself is arranged by the aforementioned "Parts" of my life.

In essence, I structured the recording and retelling of the phases of my life and title them the four parts. I recorded each part chronologically on Zoom. I began with Part 1 and then Part 2, and after recording, those sections I realized how emotionally taxing the process was and the massive amount of data as a result of answering all the questions, so I simplified the questions to two overarching questions for this study. I began by asking myself about my childhood experiences inside and outside the classroom, which I believe created my desire to teach and influenced how I viewed Black women educators and myself. Furthermore, I asked myself to discuss my experiences with Black women educators as a grade school student. The rationale of asking myself about my experiences with Black women teachers was to understand better my foundation and understanding of who and what a Black women teacher is. Asking these critical questions helped me retell my story, focusing on recounted memories that gave insight into how I was socialized and how white supremacy culture and its tenets were present. Then I transitioned to my

undergraduate experiences, which included my teacher preparation program. Then, I talked about my teaching experience combined with my graduate school experience obtaining my master's degree. Although, it didn't seem easy to discuss part 1 and part 2, part 3 was emotionally draining because I had not critically thought about my teaching experiences as it related to my life. An outside company compiled the transcripts from Part 3 of my life's story which details my teaching experience to help relieve some of the trauma from watching and listening myself retell the traumatic experiences I experienced during my teaching career. The last section, Part 4, I shared about my EdD graduate school experience.

In addition to retelling my story via Zoom, I selected 27 pictures from 1000 pictures I took during my teaching experience for analysis. Photographs are a great tool for analysis in ethnographic studies (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020). I wrote field notes with descriptive and reflective notes (see Appendix B), while examining the 27 photos from my teaching experience, which I detail later in this section. I selected the pictures that resonated the most with me and best illustrated my experiences at the school. Additionally, the pictures that gave me the most joy from my teaching experience. I selected six pictures for two schools and five pictures for three schools and arranged them by school. I selected the most meaningful images from each school year to serve as a tool to dig deeper into my previous teaching experience. Meaningful images could trigger a specific memory that will help me recall events, feelings, and thoughts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) that exemplify the research inquiry of my teaching experience in a K-12 white supremacy culture and why I left the classroom.

Data Analysis for a Black Feminist Critical Autoethnography

Data analysis and collection is an overlapping process in ethnographic research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, to analyze my data, I used Black Feminist thought as an analytic tool and selected core themes that spoke to me and the current trends in the literature about Black educator retention and attrition. Based on various dimensions of Black Feminist Thought proposed by Collins (2000), I first engaged in a deductive coding by coding for: intersectional oppression, white supremacy, white supremacist thinking and action, microaggressions, internalized intersectional oppression, self-valuation/ self-definition. Then I engaged in another round of coding that was more open and in which I worked to analyze the data based on words and phrases I specifically used (Saldaña, 2016).

Durham (2021), in her Black Feminist critical autoethnography, uses the same analytic strategy to share her story about having fibroids, trying to conceive, and working on faculty tenure. She uses theory and methodology to talk about her experience with fibroids and fertility and how that experience impacted her personally and professionally. Like Durham (2021), I analyzed my story and field notes from the pictures, using Black Feminist Thought.

Efforts to Support Quality Black Feminist Critical Autoethnography

Autoethnography Challenges Traditional Research

Qualitative and quantitative researchers support the quality of their work through validity and reliability. In autoethnography, supporting quality of research is different because it challenges the conventions of the traditional concepts of validity and reliability in critical social science research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Validity in autoethnography is

the researcher conveying that the experiences are real and believable, while reliability, is not so much as relying on factual recounts of the past, but how the researcher ascribes meaning to their experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis et al., 2001)—deeming reliability in the traditional sense impossible (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Some ways researchers conducting autoethnographic studies emphasize reliability is by conducting reliability checks also known as peer reviews (Ellis et al., 2001). Originally, I intended to do peer reviews to provide reliability in my study, and I planned to contact one to two individuals that taught with me at each school. The data collection process for interviewing additional participants as peer reviewers for reliability (Ellis et al., 2001) was overwhelming after I conducted the first interview because of the amount of transcription and coding of the data. It also wasn't necessary at this time, because sharing my story does not need validation or proven true by someone's account of my story or experience. However, sharing my story creates space for other Black women educators to share their stories or give me permission to share them in future research. Reimagining validity and reliability in autoethnography, the researcher thoroughly examines and reflects on their lived experience and culture. This depth of reflection and introspection is fundamental to quality and rigorous research (Ellis et al., 2001). Black feminist Critical Autoethnography takes this a step further by challenging and resisting the cultural norms of White supremacy culture as a whole but specifically in critical social science research. Thus, I challenged the notion of a singular or sole truth, or the idea that my research is biased and not objective or subscribes to eurocentric ways of conducting research (Huber, 2009).

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In this critical work, I challenge white norms for qualitative research similar to Brown-Vincent (2019) and Few et al. (2003) and define that quality Black feminist critical autoethnography encompasses Black women telling their stories without the need of validation through intuitively prescribing meaning themselves and the quality of research with validity and reliability. To accomplish this, I used Black Feminist thought as a theoretical framework and the body of scholarship on Black women educators as tools to both support the analysis and the quality of this research. I rejected the belief that my experience requires validation but could be compared to what other scholars observed in sharing their stories as Black women in education.

Black women researchers doing autoethnographic work have challenged and revolutionized critical social science research and reframing the methodology to see themselves (Brown-Vincent, 2019; Samuels et al., 2021; Toliver, 2022; West et al., 2022). Few et al. (2003) share that "Black feminists see research as being for Black women, rather than simply about Black women" (p.206). Brown-Vincent (2019) further explains that Black feminist autoethnography goes a step further than autoethnography and critical autoethnography by situating the oppressed to theorize and operationalize their observations to liberate themselves and to acknowledge the totality of their history beyond the destructive and so easily regurgitated white supremacist-infused history.

As a Black woman using Black Feminist theory, I shared my experience as a Black woman in K-12 education for Black women in K-12 education, and my data collection and analytic process are consistent with other Black Feminist scholars (Brown-Vincent, 2019; Few et al., 2003). I have reimagined the concept of supporting the quality of research by reframing validity as not that I need to convey that my experiences are real

and believable based on the white-centered ideology that my experience needs validation (Brown-Vincent, 2019) or must match anyone's else experience, including other Black women K-12 educators. I found solidarity in Collins' (2000) work that explains that Black women have some shared experiences because of the intersection of two marginalized identities, being Black and being a woman. However, we do not all have the same lived experiences. Likewise, reframing reliability is me ascribing meaning to my experiences by utilizing the core concepts of Black Feminist Thought, such as the Interlocking Nature of Oppression, Self-Definition and Self-Valuation, and the Importance of Afro-American Women's Culture and also drawing on the body of current scholarship on Black women educators for my analytic system. These are the means by which I provide structure to maintain critical and meaningful research.

Definitions of Key Terms

whiteness

White settlers initially authored the social construct of whiteness and white superiority (Johnson, 2018). Then later, to appease their religious beliefs they l maintained and defended that whiteness is synonymous with being human, whereas those with darker skin are not human and thus must be dominated and oppressed by those deemed white (Jones, 2015). Whiteness, directly tied to capitalism, is the idea that someone with lighter skin is superior and deserving of privilege and access (Jones, 2015). Thus, those who are part of this presumed elite social class are entitled to economically exploit those with darker complexions (Jones, 2015).

white supremacist thinking

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White supremacist thinking is the thought process that those with a lighter skin tone are superior and should dominate society and all aspects of culture and belief systems.

Imperialist white Supremacy Capitalism Patriarchy (IWSCP)

Imperialist white supremacy is the ideology that whiteness is superior and should dominate society (hooks, 1997). Capitalism rooted in white supremacy creates inequity in economic mobility and disproportionality of wealth accumulation (hooks, 1997). Patriarchy describes men's use of power to dominate women and male possession of economic power (hooks, 1997). IWSCP illustrates the intertwining oppression of Black women in the U.S. and even globally, and how our existence is either unseen, disregarded, or reviled (hooks, 2015). Understanding this phrase in the context of this study provides the foundation of the plight of Black women educators.

Black Women, Black Female, African- American women

Black women, Black female, and African-American women are terms used interchangeably in this study to describe Black women assigned female who racially and ethnically identify as of African descent. Scholarship uses the term Black female and African American women interchangeably to label women identifying people who are Black. Although they are different terminology. In this study, I chose to only use Black women as an act of self-definition (Collins, 2000), self-valuation (Collins, 2000), and reclamation of the humanity of Black women (Garza, 2014; Johnson, 2019).

Implicit Biases

Implicit biases are the unconscious feelings, thoughts, and mindsets based on stereotypes that permeate every aspect of society, i.e., the school system, government,

healthcare, and the workforce (Ruhl, 2020). White supremacy-rooted implicit biases lead to racial microaggressions and macroaggression.

Macro and Microaggressions

Microaggressions are racial insults and assaults, while macroaggressions are overt (Solórzano, 2012). White supremacy-rooted implicit biases, microaggressions, and microaggressions filtrate through the public education system to create the foundation for a hostile racial climate.

Hostile Racial Climates

A hostile Racial climate is an atmosphere immersed with myriad institutional and interpersonal racial inequities and racism (Kohli, 2016).

Hostile Work Environment

Hostile work environments are due to hostile racial climates; thus, a hostile work environment is a work environment that consists of racial injustices on a micro and macro level.

Internalized Racial oppression

Internalized racial oppression describes when a Black person or person of African descent accepts and believes the negative and oppressive actions and views of white supremacy culture (Bailey et al., 2011), while simultaneously rejecting any historically accurate or positive representations of African and Black culture. This encompasses but is not limited to "negative stereotypes, discrimination, hatred, falsification of historical facts, racist doctrines, white supremacist ideology" (Bailey et al., 2011, p. 481).

Intersectionality

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Intersectionality is a theory coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) but has been a politics and sensibility found in the writings and activism of Black women such as Sojourner Truth, Patricia Hill Collins, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, the Combahee River Collective, and many more. This complex theory, sensibility, lens, and framework cannot be conceptualized in just a few sentences. However, for this work, intersectionality is used to describe the intersectional oppression of race and gender as described in Crenshaw's (1989; 1991) work as she outlines the mutually reinforcing patterns of racism and sexism around the experiences of Black women; furthermore, how the law did not account for the interconnected oppression impacting Black women.

white Supremacy culture

White supremacy culture consists of the thoughts, feelings, actions, and beliefs that whiteness is superior.

Significance of the Study

This study helps pinpoints anti-racist practices that disrupt white supremacy, which school districts must employ to retain Black women educators or other educators of color. This research intends to inform policy, state education department recruitment and retention initiatives, teacher education programming, and school district's professional development and teacher support systems. Providing an insider perspective humanizes the fundamental cause of why Black teachers are leaving and how white supremacy culture controls education to ultimately derail the recruitment and retention of Black women educators in K-12 education. This work is also an act of reclamation for me, because I have always allowed white supremacy, to control my life by allowing them to dictate my thoughts, feelings, and actions. I did not feel comfortable being myself fully

and authentically and thus seek to challenge my own internalizations of whiteness and white supremacy. My demeanor and disposition exuded freedom and independence from the judgment and acceptance of others. Inwardly, acceptance from everyone was a dire need for me. This entire work is an intentional act of reclaiming myself and owning who I am and echoing the powerful words of Congresswoman Maxine Walters, "I reclaim my time."

Furthermore, permanently leaving the classroom forced me to critically analyze my experiences in public and private education and identify the entwined ideology of my intersectional oppression as a Black woman in education. Through this autoethnographic account, this study hopes that school leaders will better understand the impact of white supremacy in education, connect more deeply with Black women educators, and address this issue with a sense of urgency. I provide practical solutions to mediate the detrimental impact of white supremacist thinking and action in K-12 by providing educational leaders and policymakers with insights into the experiences of a Black woman educator. For Black women educators, my intent was to share my story in hopes that my experiences may resonate with them to either affirm that our shared experiences are valid and true and inform others that some of us are experiencing this even if we all are not. Moreover, this research is an effort to personalize and humanize the current scholarship on Black women educators and to ignite a passion for changing the current education system. Lastly, this section will highlight my study's contributions to existing literature.

Practice

My research study contributes to the practice of educational leaders and policymakers by providing a personal account of how detrimental white supremacist

thinking and action are to everyone, especially Black women educators (Fridie, 1975). Black women educators are just the educators needed to increase all children's overall educational attainment, access, and opportunities, especially for Black children, because they bring a specialized skill set (Lisle-Johnson & Kohli, 2020). Yet, Black women educators are leaving at an almost 22% higher rate than education institutions can recruit (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Although research details common reasons Black women educators leave and how to retain them (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Farinde-Wu, 2020), few researchers examine how white supremacy culture foundationally impacts Black women's attrition. There are very few personal accounts from Black women educators on how destructive the underlying influence of white supremacy culture is and how it eventually persuades these teaching powerhouses to leave K-12 education.

My study also provides a space for understanding healing journeys for Black women educators (hook, 1993) as I seek to process and recover from my time teaching in a white supremacy culture. White supremacy forced me out of my purpose and passion for educating children even though I had an outstanding Black woman principal and phenomenal Black woman teacher-mentor. None of it was enough because of the underlying influence of racism in K-12 schools. This covert racism is brutal and difficult to articulate but deeply felt. By sharing my experiences and critically analyzing them, I can dig deeper to uncover all the underlying factors of intersectional gendered-racialized oppression impacting all teachers, particularly Black women. Sharing this knowledge will inform leaders on practices, policies, communication, professional development, and

what teachers encounter within the school setting to ensure that schools are equitable spaces for children and teachers.

Scholarship

The significance and impact of this study can add to the body of scholarship on Black female educators' recruitment, retention, and attrition across the U.S. teacher workforce, especially white-dominant spaces. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) admonish that further study on Black women teacher attrition and turnover would be beneficial. This study hopes to raise consciousness about Black women educator attrition solely due to white supremacist thinking and action. By raising awareness, it "affirms, rearticulates, and provides a vehicle for expressing in public a consciousness that quite often already exists. More importantly, this rearticulated consciousness aims to empower African-American women and stimulate resistance" (Collins, 2000, p.36). Many scholars (Farinde-Wu, 2018; Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2018; Farinde-Wu & Griffen, 2019; Farinde et al., 2016; Fleener & Dahm, 2007; Frye, 2019; Fuller, Hollingworth, & An, 2019; Fultz, 2004) share the stories of Black women educators; yet there is scant research on why Black women educators leave the profession, particularly due to white supremacy culture. This study hopes to foster a public consciousness based on our experiences and to empower Black women and incite resistance (Collins, 2000).

Summary

A Black feminist critical autoethnographic study of my personal experience allows me and readers of this work to engage in the implications of being a Black woman educator and the white supremacy culture of K-12 education. In other words, "combining ethnography, biography, and self-analysis, autoethnography…that utilizes data about self

and context to understand the connectivity between self and their culture within the same context" (Ngunjiri et al., 2010, p.1). I used a detailed retelling of my story, field notes based on observations, and Black Feminist Thought themes to analyze my experiences critically. Applying Collins Black Feminist Thought as an analytic tool provided a solid foundation to discuss oppression and activism in the context of K-12 education. Although a potential challenge is the subjectivity in recounting my experiences in the classroom, I utilized Black Feminist Thought, current scholarship, and peer review to provide validity, reliability, and transferability. Furthermore, I emphasize that in taking a Black Feminist Thought approach to this work, I challenge ideas of objectivity and neutrality within research processes, as well as the eurocentric standards to which validity is measured. The data collection for this study included recording the retelling of my life and field notes through Zoom and analysis of pictures (see Appendix C) taken during my teaching years. I excavated my story, annotated it, compiled themes, and compared it to current scholarship that accentuates my lived experiences. The objective was to share my experience and situate it within existing research about white supremacy culture in K-12 education and Black women educators' experiences. This Black feminist critical autoethnographic account yielded a personalized narration with a more detailed description of why Black women educators leave the classroom and do not return.

Section Two—Practitioner Context For The Study

Introduction

Scholarly practitioners challenge themselves to be open to critically examining their practice (Paterson & Chapman, 2013), developing, and growing from their previous experiences, and applying their new knowledge. When I left the classroom, I reflected on my teaching experiences, some common themes, and occurrences that I attribute to how white supremacy culture influenced me to leave the classroom. Since the inception of American schooling, it has been inherently white-centered and exclusive, mirroring white dominance's social norms and use as psychological bondage for colonization (hooks, 2013). Racism in K-12 education has evolved from overt acts of racism like segregation and school bombings (Kunzia, 2017) to "new racism" (Kohli et al., 2017; Solorzano, 2012), or more subtle, racist behavior that is more difficult to identify, which makes it more detrimental and harmful.

New racism in schools leads to hostile racial climates, which are environments imbued with racism, whether racial macro or microaggressions (Kohli et al., 2017). A hostile racial climate can be an attribute of a poor working environment, but not all poor working environments are hostile racial environments. When anyone works in a hostile racial environment, the individual naturally wants to remove themselves from the job. Black women are leaving the field of education at a higher rate than any other group (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). After leaving K-12 education, research, reflection, and practice provided a means for me to heal from my traumatic teaching experience and address significant issues plaguing K-12 education, teacher attrition, and

diversity. The purpose of this scholarly work is to expand awareness of Black women's attrition.

Black women attrition is relevant and an important contribution to research because it considers the intersectional oppression of Black women in education and how intricate and multifaceted Black women's experiences are in a K-12 white supremacy culture. Specifically, society views Black women through a limiting lens of gendered and racialized oppression, controlling negative and stereotypical images and implicit biases (Collins, 2000), which is exacerbated in education because education reflects societal norms and values (Duncan, 2019). To expound on this, hooks (2013) describes "unlike race and racism, which does not overtly harm masses of folk in ways that causes direct damages, white supremacy is the covert ideology that is the silent cause of harm and trauma" (hooks, 2013, p.5). White supremacy in schools harms and traumatizes everyone but especially Black women because of the complexity of the Black women's experiences teaching in a white male-dominant leadership with white female-dominant workforce, immersed in white supremacist thinking and actions perpetrated by all races (Hooks, 2013). Which does not negate the intersectional racism and sexism that negatively impact Black women and the underlying false societal views of Black women and the value of their work.

This section will provide a brief overview of my eight years of teaching in five different schools with 14 different administrators, focusing on each school's organization, structure, leadership, and my experience teaching in a white supremacy culture and why I left the classroom. Second, I will discuss how teaching in a white supremacy culture impacted my passion and purpose for education. I will describe my leadership style and

how it influenced my overall view of organizational structures and leadership during my tenure as a classroom teacher. This provides further context and is important to help examine how different leadership styles can corroborate with white supremacy. To protect the identities of the persons discussed in my reflection, I use pseudonyms and change the names of the schools or organizations where I worked. Lastly, I will discuss the leadership styles of the administrators in comparison to my leadership style. This section aims to contextualize how white supremacy culture is prevalent in all schools and perpetuated through microaggressions, antiblackness, and internalized racism. Microaggressions are more covert racist actions. While antiblackness is the belief that black or darker skin is subhuman, internalized racism is the acceptance of the racially oppressive notions, negative stereotypes, and imaging about Black American culture, and a complete disregard for any positive ideals of Blackness or African centeredness (Brown, Rosnick & Segrist, 2017).

Teaching in a white Supremacy Culture in K-12

White supremacy culture in K-12 education can permeate any school and become the foundation of a hostile racial climate. As a former Black woman, my reflection on my experience in the classroom was tumultuous because I was degraded, devalued, overutilized, and underutilized. This section will introduce each school's governing organization, for example, a district or religious organization, including an overview of the purpose and structure. Then I will analyze each organization using Bolman and Deal's (2019) organizational frames. Secondly, I will describe the individual school, the demographics, and leadership. Lastly, I will describe my experiences and ultimately why I left that school.

Reclaimin' My Crown As A Black Queen

I compiled a chart, see Table 1, that characterizes my teaching experience in four phases titled reigns. In the Black community, Black women are referred to as queens. It is a term of endearment and pride. Matriculating through my academic and scholarly journey has helped me redefine my identities as a Black woman, Black woman, a leader, and a Queen. As a Black Queen, each school I taught was my kingdom to reign. Each reign names the school, the leaders, their ethnicity, the number of years I taught at the school, and a brief description of the work environment.

Throughout my former teaching career, ten of my administrators were Black females, two were white males, one was a white female, and one a Latina female. My experience is unique because administrators are typically white males (Fuller et al., 2019), and having Black women administrators was a privilege. Yet, having majority Black women administrators during my teaching experience did not negate the magnitude of the impact of white supremacy culture in K-12. Understanding the nuanced experience of Black women in America and education can explain why simply hiring more Black women administrators does not adequately address new racism in white supremacy K-12 culture—changing policies and systems that are deeply rooted in white supremacy while equally as important giving Black people, especially Black women space, time, and resources for Black liberation and self-recovery. Remember, Americans of African descent did not ask to be captured, colonized, brutalized, murdered and genocide, demoralized, and ostracized in global white supremacy and capitalism. My experiences with white supremacy, including antiblackness, internalized racism, poor work conditions, racially hostile working environment could not be diminished because of Black women's presence. White supremacist thinking and action will always accomplish

white superiority and domination and that greatly influenced my ultimate decision to leave the classroom. Later in this section I will expound on specifically why I left each classroom.

1st Reign: My first two years of teaching at Midwest Parochial School (MPS)

Overview of the Adventist Education. The first Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church school opened in Buck's Bridge, New York, in 1853 (https://adventisteducation.org/abt.html). The Adventist school system has since grown to comprise 7,500 schools with 1.5 million students and 85,000 teachers in approximately 150 countries. They are reigning as the second-largest Christian education system globally. The Adventist education mission states, "to enable learners to develop a life of faith in God, and to use their knowledge, skills, and understandings to serve God and humanity" and vision reads, "for every learner to excel in faith, learning, and service, blending biblical truth and academic achievement to honor God and bless others" (https://adventisteducation.org/abt.html). The organizational structure consists of a Vice President of Education, Director of Elementary/Curriculum, Director of Secondary Education/Accreditation, Director of Early Childhood/ REACH, Director of Technology and Support, Associate Director of Higher Education, Adventist Learning Community (ALC) Educational Professional Development Coordinator, Director of Adventist College Abroad, Director of Marketing Association of Adventist Colleges and Universities, Administrative Assistant for Vice President of Education, Administrative Assistant for Directors of Elementary/Secondary, and Administrative Assistant for Director of Adventist Colleges Abroad (https://adventisteducation.org/). The overarching

office of Adventist education is the North American Division (NAD). The MPS school is a part of the Mid-America Union Conference (MAUC), one of the NAD conferences.

MAUC started in the 1950s and governs 35 churches and 73 schools in six conferences in the following states, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, and New Mexico. One of the six conferences is a regional conference and is predominately Black, while the other five state conferences are predominately white. Max Weber, an organizational structure pioneer, created "monocratic bureaucracy" to describe a late nineteenth-century European structural model based on a patriarchal organizational structure where the father figure has limitless power and authority (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 48). The substantial features of monocratic bureaucracy, as cited by Weber (1947), is the set division of labor, hierarchy of offices, established rules of governing performances, delineation of personal and official property and rights, the use of procedures and protocols for hiring not familial ties or familiarity, and primary and long-term career employment. There are also several weighty features of this structure, and I will highlight the attributes that best reflect the organizational structure of the Adventist education system.

The Midwest Parochial School (MPS). The Midwest Parochial School (MPS) is an All-Black school that offers classes for Preschool-8th grade school and is in an urban low-income neighborhood in the midwest. Most homes on the street leading to the school were rundown, debilitating, and needed repair. I began teaching at MPS, with roughly 40 students, three teachers, and one teacher-principal. A teacher-principal served as both teacher and principal. Although the school was in a marginalized community, 90% of students came from middle-class, two-parent homes with both parents being highly

educated. Ninety-nine percent of the students were members of the SDA church, including 80% being the children of the SDA church conference. For example, the SDA conference vice-president of administration and conference treasurer children attended MPS.

MPS Leadership. MPS leadership consists of a hierarchical office based on one leader being on the top of a unilateral leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The regional conference president is the overall leader of the conference and father figure, and the subordinate roles are the Superintendent, School board, and principal. Individuals who hold a conference position usually occupy, what they consider their primary occupation and career until they die or retire. The Conference president oversees the Superintendent, who supervises the principals of the conference schools. The principal is a non-voting member of the school board. The school board governs and makes autonomous decisions, including policies, personnel, purchasing, and budget. The MPS school board consisted of a board chair, assistant board chair, two or more church members from the four churches in the area, and the pastors. The MPS school board governs the school, and the board consists of ministers and church members. The leadership structure of MPS is the foundation of its dysfunction.

My Experience at MPS. I had no prior knowledge of MPS before working there and knew very few people from the area before accepting a teaching position at MPS in 2011. The person I was dating at the time was related to the conference president and connected me to the Superintendent for a job interview as the Preschool-Kindergarten teacher. During the interview, I was extremely excited about the job. The school offered me substantial money to relocate, but there was some confusion about getting the money

to me. This incident was one of the first indications that they did not follow procedures well. Nevertheless, I was thrilled to begin my teaching career at MPS.

When I was a teacher at MPS in 2011 that leadership operated more out of their emotions than according to policies and procedures. My first year of teaching was stressful due to a seemingly endless workload, poor and ineffective leadership, and a lack of resources and a culturally relevant curriculum to address the diverse student academic and socio-emotional needs. The poor and effective leadership entailed the lack of communication of a clear vision for the school year, a lack of consistency and cohesive plan for professional development, and a lack of knowledge to help with instructional challenges. Teaching at MPS also included dealing with disgruntled parents, not having a teacher mentor, and being constantly under the administration's scrutiny. These issues are rooted in a white supremacy cultural belief that MPS, an all-Black school with an all-Black staff, was inferior to the predominately white Adventist school 15 minutes away. Being a teacher in the Adventist Education system, a monocratic bureaucracy with a white-centered curriculum, and a poor work environment greatly influenced why I left MPS and the SDA education system. During my tenure at MPS, there were a lack of culturally relevant curriculum, racially segregated schools, and an unequal distribution of funding. The leaders of MAUC were all white and Adventist education was centered around whiteness. Sadly, a hostile racial environment was unequivocally the greatest influence on my departure from the school and the Adventist system.

After surviving my first year of teaching, I realized that teaching was not sustainable for several reasons. The day-to-day imbuement of white supremacist thinking was done by me and others through antiblackness, gaslighting, and microaggressions.

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White supremacist thinking shows up when "black leaders began to equate gaining freedom solely with gaining economic power, with getting what it was assumed white folks had" (hooks, 2017, p.19). MPS leaders cultivated a culture of antiblackness and comparison to whiteness instead of healing from the racialized trauma of being in a white-dominant conference, MAUC, which lead to low self-esteem and self-hatred. At MPS, everyone— teachers, administration, students, parents, and even myself, constantly compared MPS to the white Adventist school instead of MPS being the best school they can be. This led to the spoken and unspoken pressure to make sure students were getting an equivalent education, which meant a white-centered education like at the white Adventist or public schools. I faced the constant threat of students leaving or transferring to another school if I did not make parents, administration, and church leaders happy. It was difficult to accept that the principal of MPS was intentionally being harmful to me. Her behavior is an example of antiblackness behavior rooted in white supremacist thinking and action. The principal did not behave the same way with the white higher administrators at the Mid-American Union. In those spaces, she was quiet and docile compared to at MPS; she was degrading and mean. Moreover, I was confused about why they made me sound like an ineffective teacher instead of coaching and giving me strategies to improve. It was the first time I experienced gaslighting, a form of manipulation that often occurs in abusive relationships, from a Black woman. She was manipulating and mistreating me to gain control over me. This oppressive behavior maintains white supremacy culture.

MPS created a school culture that demanded complete and unattested compliance, or the teacher did not belong. Reflecting on my first day of teaching at MPS, I felt that I

would never belong, but I began a quest to find a school where I did belong. Later in my teaching career, I became aware of a startling truth that regardless of the school, I would never belong due to the underlying impact of white supremacist thinking and actions in K-12 education. To have a sense of belonging in K-12 education, one would have to unlearn white supremacist thinking and disrupt the aspects of life that support it (hooks, 2013). Knowing MPS would not change, I decided to leave this school.

MPS Organizational Analysis. Bolman and Deal (2017) use four frames to analyze organizations, political, structural, human resources, and symbolic. The human resource frame encompasses what the organization does for the employees and vice versa (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Using this frame, I will analyze the relationship between MPS and its employees. Bolman and Deal (2017) outline fundamental human resource strategies to assist organizations in effectively treating and keeping the right people. The strategies recommended include creating and applying an HR (Human Resources) strategy, hiring people that are the right fit for the company, retaining them, developing employees, creating opportunities for growth and power, and creating an environment for diversity (Bolman & Deal, 2017). By implementing these strategies, companies create and maintain a healthy working relationship with their employees, and employees will remain loyal and productive.

As an MPS employee, we received extraordinarily little of the aforementioned human resource strategies. There was only one clear message: keep enrollment numbers high to pay the teachers' salaries. Consequently, this was not a clear HR strategy. MPS attracted phenomenal Black teachers but could not retain them due to lower enrollment and teacher dissatisfaction. There was a high turnover rate because teachers complained

about a lack of organization and structure. The lack of organization and structure consisted of no real plan for the school year besides a theme. There was a lack of communication in expectations for professional development, teacher evaluation, and school calendar events. With a lack of organization and structure, there was a remarkably high turnover rate at MPS. Bolman and Deal (2019) detail that organizations with "the right combination of goals, roles, and relationships, and coordination is essential to organizational performance" (p.47). Most teachers and administrators stayed one to two years before resigning, including me. MPS school leadership provided little to no professional development besides a yearly spiritual retreat comprising prayer, devotion, and updates to conference policies. Conference policies included the paid days off and holidays for the school year.

Moreover, at MPS, teachers had extraordinarily little autonomy outside of the curriculum. Bolman and Deal (2019) describe this as a vertical Frame, which entails a top-down approach where the higher-ups coordinate and control the work of the subordinates through authority, rules, policies, and planning and control systems. For example, at MPS, we needed more input in policies, procedures, and organizational structure. Lastly, there was not an explicit or consistent diversity effort or plan. MPS administration uses minimal HR principles to create and maintain healthy working relationships with their teaching staff, and unfortunately, this resulted in low morale and high turnover. Next is the 2nd reign of my teaching experience, and there are some similarities in demographics, leadership, and organization.

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2nd Reign: My 3rd year at a Private Urban Early Child Development Center

Organization. In the mid-1980s, the Urban Early Childhood Development Center (UECDC) opened with almost 20 children from marginalized communities in the midwest. The center has grown exponentially to serve almost 400 children in a brand-new site, funded by the City and other generous donors, nestled in the urban core of a Midwestern city. UECDC houses two accredited sites, HeadStart and a Pre-K co-operative. UECDC stated mission entails providing wide-ranging and all-inclusive early childhood care in a safe, loving environment that encourages the development of children from birth to young adulthood. They offer educational programs, healthcare, parent programs, and emergency services to the children and families they serve.

UECDC. UECDC is a predominately Black early childhood center that offers a hands-on educational program for children six weeks to 5 years old and Before- and After-School care for children ages 5 to 13. In the afterschool program, school-age children receive tutoring, homework help, supervised outdoor play, and peer support groups. More than 91% of UECDC families live in poverty, and about 15% of the children are homeless or near homeless, living in battered women's shelters, homeless shelters, or transitional living programs. Often these families live with friends or relatives, cars, dilapidated hotels, or abandoned buildings. I began teaching at UECDC with roughly 80 students, 22 lead teachers and teacher assistants, two bus drivers, two assistant directors, an office manager, human resources director, and an executive director.

UECDC Leadership. Compared to the MPS leadership, UECDC leadership was All-Black, hierarchical, and proved very dysfunctional. While teaching at UECDC, the

leadership consisted of the Executive Director, Assistant Director of Preschool., Assistant Director of Infant and Toddlers, Office Manager/Secretary, and Human Resources Director. The UECDC is a family-owned business, the matriarch was the Executive Director, and the Office Manager/Secretary was her daughter. The family also owned a community center less than five minutes away from UECDC. The Executive Director was the overall leader, but the day-to-day operations were led by the Office Manager/Secretary, the Human resources Director, and the Assistant Directors. It was unclear who made the policies for UECDC; however, the Office Manager/secretary did enforce them, therein the dysfunction and confusion. Ultimately, if there were any serious issues that the other leaders could not resolve, the Executive Director would make the final decision.

My Experience at UECDC. In 2012, the UECDC executive director invited me to work for her full-time after doing a summer science program for the school-age children who attended UECDC. The assistant director of the preschool was also highly respected. She had previously taught at MPS but did not return because they combined her teaching position with the principal role, and she did not want to be a teacher-principal. The assistant director of the preschool and I were close because of our connection at MPS. She mentored me in the way I wish I received as a new teacher at MPS. I remember feeling relieved and heard after our first conversation. Naturally, I was thrilled to be working with her in this capacity. She did warn me before I started the teaching job that the executive director did some unprofessional things with payroll, keeping the facilities up to date and clean, and there was a high staff turnover rate. Unfortunately, I witnessed and experienced payroll issues, lack of cleanliness, and a high

turnover rate. I left after a year due to the poor working conditions, antiblackness, and internalized racism, which I describe in detail below.

Reflecting on my experience at UECDC, I can better identify the more subtle examples of antiblackness and internalized racism. hooks (2017) details that "one of the sad ironies of racism in the United States is that so many Black people/global majority unwittingly collude in the perpetuation of white supremacy while simultaneously denouncing racism and actively speaking out against racial injustice" (p.17). UECDC manifested the subtle perpetuation of white supremacy rooted in antiblackness and internalized racism by frequently equating low-quality standards (i.e., curriculum, food selection, employee expectations, and normalizing derogatory and demeaning stereotypes of Black people). The food options were culturally appropriate and commonly eaten in the community, but the food quality was poor. Most times, the food was spoiling. One could conclude from this example that Black children deserve mediocre quality food because they are Black. The executive director, as a Black woman allowing the use of spoiling food, exemplifies the internalization of racist belief and antiblackness that was evident in her actions or lack of action to replace the food or require better quality food. The ADP shared that the lead teachers were not teaching a rigorous curriculum until after I arrived. It seemed that the staff, which was 99% Black, did not value the education of the Black students enough to provide a quality curriculum. At the time, I did not have the language to describe the duality of why I felt ostracized and welcomed in an all-Black space. It bothered me that seemingly all the staff accepted the low standards and quality. Concurrently, the children were learning antiblackness instead of a sense of pride and value of their Blackness.

Other experiences I recall are unprofessional practices related to human resources and lack of facility cleanliness. An example of the lack of sanitation in the facility was the day I saw a mouse in the closet. I was mortified because babies and small children attended a place with rodents. I spoke with the ED that day, and she dismissed it as a trivial concern. I recall her saying, "you must of been rich to not grow up with rats." She was implying that it is common, if not expected, for Black families to have low-quality housing infested with rodents. Still, I never saw another rodent in my classroom. This is another example of internalized racism by believing that having rodents in one's home is normal and that if you do not have rodents, the person is wealthy. A lack of sanitation is poor working conditions that impact the employee and a human resource issue. Professionally irresponsible human resources practices can best be explained by using Bolman and Deal's (2019) human resource frame to analyze the organization.

Organizational Analysis. UECDC had critical issues in the human resource area because of how they treated their employees. Bolman and Deal (2019) discuss basic human resources strategies. One strategy implores employers to keep their employees by treating them well. Treating employees well can include offering competitive pay and benefits because the excessive cost of turnover can be a steep price to pay (Bolman & Deal, 2019). Offering consistent and competitive pay and benefits was a major growth area for UECDC. An example of a policy that devalued employees and increased turnover was the policy that if the center had not reached the minimum number of students, the employee could not come to work at their scheduled time or, worse, receive no pay. It happened to me once, and I expressed my concern with this policy, and it was not an issue for me, but I noticed other employees had to wait or were not paid.

Inconsistency in salary was highly problematic because I believed it was unfair to show favoritism related to salary and benefits.

In my exit interview with the Executive Director, I shared that the organizational structure, coupled with no holiday breaks, meant I could no longer teach at the center. Teaching all year round was a concern for me, but I let her know that I would love to work for her again if she could provide more of a traditional school year model with holidays and summers off. Reflecting, the poor working conditions, anti-blackness, and internalized racism influenced me to leave UECDC. Although I appreciated the autonomy, I left UECDC because of the lack of respect and equity for all employees, especially when the Executive director was a Black female. I expected that I would feel a sense of belonging there; at first, I did but eventually, I felt complicit in the mistreatment of others by accepting special treatment. I could no longer be a perpetrator of white supremacy anymore, and I wanted to teach in a place that liberated children and valued their Blackness.

3rd Reign: My 4th-7th years of teaching at Kansas City Public Schools

Overview of the Kansas City Public School District. Kansas City Public Schools (KCPS) is an urban public school system that began in the 1860s. The most current student population is over 14,000 students. The student demographics consist of 54% Black; 27% Hispanic; 11% White; 8% Other. During 1980-2000, the district underwent many changes, and almost half the enrollment dropped. In 2016, the school board selected a new superintendent, and together, they created an innovative equity policy to direct the school system's resources and programs to increase student achievement in every school, develop and retain the best employees, be an effective

manager, and cultivate key partnerships and public engagement. The leadership structure consists of the Superintendent, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent, Director of Education Foundation, and the superintendent cabinet consists of the Deputy Superintendent, Chief Financial and Operations Officer, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, Chief Legal Officer. KCPS vision states, "its schools [are] places where every student will develop a deep understanding of the knowledge and skills necessary to pursue higher education, obtain family-supporting employment, contribute to the civic well-being of the community, and have the opportunity for a rewarding and fulfilling life (Kansas City Public Schools, n.d.). KCPS mission states, "to achieve, in a way that is unencumbered by excuses, our vision for education by ensuring that all children benefit from teaching and learning (Kansas City Public Schools, n.d.). KCPS is the district office that oversees Welch and Caboose elementary.

Before the transition of the new superintendent in 2016, I taught for two years in KCPS under the leadership of another superintendent. The leadership structure was quite different. I recall more of a monocratic bureaucracy like at MPS. Under the new superintendent, there was a shift in the organizational structure from a monocratic bureaucracy to a less hierarchical model and web of inclusion (Bolman & Deal, 2019). Using more of Sally Helgesen's web of inclusion based on the innovative management strategies of women executives and how their style drastically differed from the traditional organizational models like monocratic bureaucracy (Bolman & Deal, 2019). Helgesen's web of inclusion is a circular hierarchy with a strong core. The presence of a Black male superintendent introduces the idea of male dominance as an additional combatting force to Black women educators' attrition. In KCPS, the vital core is the

superintendent, and the web or interconnections of the superintendent cabinet depicts collaborative leadership. A collaborative leadership style was replicated in the leadership structures of Welch and Caboose Elementary.

Welch Elementary. Welch Elementary School is a predominantly Black elementary school that offers grades k-6 with three special education classes and five support classes. Designated as a neighborhood school, Welch is in the epicenter of a marginalized neighborhood in the Kansas City urban core. The area surrounding Welch is considered the "red zone", termed by local police, for gun violence and drugs. For example, one time, the school had to go on lockdown because the local police were doing a drug bust at a house across the street from the school. When I began teaching at Welch, roughly 300 students attended one 6th grade class, two 5th grade classes, two 4th grade classes, three 3rd grade classes, three 2nd grade classes, three 1st grade classes, and three kindergarten classes. Most of the students lived in the surrounding neighborhood if not all. Most students came from a one-parent home due to the other parent being incarcerated, dead, or abandoned. Quite a few were living with a grandparent. Unfortunately, Welch Elementary was one of the lowest-performing schools in the district and was widely known as a "dumping ground" for teachers that were no longer effective in their building and students with extraordinarily challenging and demanding behaviors. The school did not have the resources.

Caboose Elementary. Similar to Welch, Caboose Elementary is a predominantly Black elementary school that offers grades PreK-6 with three special education classes and five support classes. Caboose is also a neighborhood school in the epicenter of another marginalized neighborhood in the Kansas City urban core. Caboose and Welch

are about a 10-minute drive from each other. The area surrounding Caboose is also considered the red zone for gun violence and drugs. Caboose Elementary was named after a major street that runs north to south in Kansas City. When I was hired to be the instructional coach for Caboose, roughly 400 students attended two 6th grade classes, three 5th grade classes, two 4th grade classes, two 3rd grade classes, three 2nd grade classes, two 1st grade classes, three kindergarten classes, and two prekindergarten classes. Most of the students lived in the surrounding neighborhood if not all. Resembling Welch, Caboose was also considered a low-performing school and a dumping ground for students labeled as difficult or challenging. These labeled students were usually Black or students of color.

Welch Elementary Leadership. Welch's leadership consisted of a principal, assistant principal, and a school leadership team. The school leadership team consisted of a teacher from each grade level who would meet weekly to discuss policies., assessments, data, and issues concerning the school. I served on the leadership team every year I worked at Welch. Although the administration changed frequently, the organizational structure did not change much. The organizational structure was Helgesen's web of inclusion, with a more shared leadership style. The principal was the head leader, which is more hierarchical, but both principals were intentional about implementing a shared leadership structure.

Caboose Elementary Leadership. Caboose leadership is precisely like the leadership of Welch leadership. As the instructional coach at Caboose, I was also a leadership team member for one year. The major difference between Caboose and Welch was the principals' leadership styles. Dr. Bey was an authentic leader and everything I

wanted to be as a leader. Dr. Bey was poised, funny, approachable, open, honest, and dressed impeccably. One of my favorite memories of Dr. Bey was the day I found out that my roommate's mom was dying. I remember she hugged me and prayed for me. Dr. Bey was always available to talk and give me counsel about anything. She even gave me several bags of clothes that I still own today. Dr. Bey is the type of principal I wish I had when I first began teaching because she was willing to teach, coach, and mentor me to be the best educator. All teachers need a principal like her but especially Black women.

My Experience at Welch. My teaching experience at Welch had multiple layers mixed with personal and professional experiences. It was the first time I had a principal, Principal Queen, who saw potential in me and supported me, encouraged me, and believed in me. I was also partnered with the best mentor a teacher could ever dream of having. My teacher mentor was the best teacher in the district, and she had earned numerous awards. She was extremely humble and willing to teach me everything that she knew. I was grateful to be under her tutelage, and I also had an opportunity to team teach with her for two out of the three years I taught in the classroom.

However, teaching at Welch was also one of the most tiring teaching assignments ever. People in the district (e.g., professional development sessions, teacher lounge chatter) would gossip about the students from Welch becoming prisoners using the school-to-prison pipeline. The school-to-prison pipeline trend is that elementary students being underserved are funneled from school to prison. Students had such deep needs that the school could not adequately address. For example, three people died in one calendar year, including a student, parent, and staff member. After the three consecutive deaths, KCPS sent counselors from other schools to help students and teachers process the staff

member's death for one day after the third death. I remember that day like it was yesterday. I sat in my car and cried. I did not know how to face my students and tell them that another person they knew and loved had died. The school counselor from my first year at Welch came out to my car and talked with me until I was composed enough to enter the school building. Naturally, the entire school community continued to grieve the deaths of the student, parent, and staff member after the one-day visit from the other school counselors.

Welch had several examples of white supremacist thinking and action manifested into internalized and institutionalized racism. Institutionalized racism is a form of racism embedded in a society or an organization's practices, policies, and regulations. Welch only received just enough resources and funding to state that Welch received resources but not enough to address the disparities and inequities. For example, students at Welch needed clothes, hygiene products, housing, food, and other social services. Realistically, a school could not supply all of that. Internalized racism showed how the students, parents, and community viewed the school. One time a parent chased another parent into the building to fight them. Another time a person was walking around the school building with a gun. Students would throw their trash on the hallway floor, and even the trash can was closer. Students would run up and down the hallway, leave the school building without permission, and roam the neighborhood. Parents, students, and community members did not value themselves, and likewise, they did not value Welch. When Black folks do not value themselves, they have internalized the belief that Blackness is inferior and deserves less. Thus, their behavior and how they spoke about the school was white supremacist thinking and action that maintained white supremacy culture.

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Teaching at Welch was traumatizing and uncovered some deeply buried trauma that I had not dealt with since my childhood. I was dealing with the trauma of my students while concurrently dealing with my childhood trauma. Leaving Welch was challenging because it was the best teaching experience. After all, I loved my students, colleagues, and principal. The lack of support and resources to address institutionalized and internalized racism was draining. Eventually, I left Welch, and it was one of the most complex and heartbreaking decisions I ever made because the leadership was exemplary. Still, everything else conspired due to the white supremacy culture and the various aspects, making it impossible to continue working there. By the time I worked at Caboose, I was emotionally, physically, and mentally exhausted.

My Experience at Caboose. My experience at Caboose was similar to my experience at Welch. The notable difference is that Caboose was peaceful because I did not have to teach as an instructional coach, and Dr. Bey led very differently than Dr. Lois, a Black woman administrator. Again, I would have stayed at Caboose, but the same issues of insufficient support and resources to address institutionalized racism and internalized racism made going to work excruciating. One of my fondest memories at Caboose was the week leading up to Christmas break. All the teachers were dressed up, and I took a picture with each teacher and then posted it to social media with kind comments. Notably, it was an all-white staff with only three other Black educators. Still, most of the teachers at Caboose were fighting to address the institutionalized racism and internalized racism by teaching the students to take pride in who they are, their school, and their community. The consistent and critical work to alleviate institutionalized racism and internalized racism is ongoing. Ultimately, I left because I was exhausted. Caboose

was my 4th school in seven years. I had accepted that my time in the classroom had ended and that even healthy interpersonal dynamics could not negate that. Although Caboose was peaceful, I was utterly exhausted, and I had to leave. Other struggles at Caboose included secondary trauma from listening to the traumatic stories of students, the lack of resources being allocated to Caboose to make all the necessary improvements, such as additional social workers and counselors, and too large classroom sizes.

Organizational Analysis. Bolman and Deal's (2017)'s human resource frame also encompasses interpersonal skills and group dynamics. School administrators are like managers, and the bulk of their time is spent relating to teachers, students, parents, and community members (Bolman & Deal, 2017). A school can flourish when the interpersonal dynamics are excellent, and schools become very toxic places when the interpersonal dynamics are poor. One of the areas that impact interpersonal dynamics is how teams make decisions. Both Caboose and Welch had leadership teams. The leadership teams had to make many decisions about the school policies, assessment, evaluation, and school calendar. Levi (2017) details the main advantage of using groups to make decisions is having more resources available to solve the problem. In some cases, group decision-making can lead to "process loss", unfocused discussion time (Levi, 2017). Prudently, principals must ensure the team can fully concentrate on their tasks and the three main factors that produce team decisions quality, speed, acceptance, or support (Levi, 2017).

An example of group decision-making that went well at Welch and Caboose was the planning to prepare for the state testing and the state testing schedule. Both leadership teams had quality ideas, created plans speedily, and accepted and supported the decision.

I cannot recall an example of this not being the case at Caboose, but at Welch, there was a time when the group decision-making was ineffective. I do not remember what we discussed, but I remember being upset after leaving the meeting. The meeting time was wasted on people repeating each other and venting. The discussion lack quality because quality includes a group discussion that entails full group participation. The lack of focus was a major barrier to speed, which entails prioritizing the task. Lastly, we did not come to a decision that resulted in no decision or implementation, which is a lack of acceptance (Levi, 2017). This example Levi (2017) would call group polarization or groupthink, which can affect a team's decision-making process to be disrupted by bias due to interpersonal conflict or a desire to maintain good relationships within the team instead of making the best decision (Levi, 2017). Ultimately, leaving Caboose and Welch was not because of group decision making but the fatigue of teaching in a white supremacy culture coupled with seven years of poor working conditions, internalized racism, institutionalized racism, and antiblackness. At the time, I thought I would never return to the classroom, but I did when I relocated to Columbia and taught my last year at Redway Elementary in the Columbia Public School district.

Final Reign: Columbia Public Schools, 8th year of teaching

Overview of the Columbia Public Schools. Located in central Missouri, Columbia Public Schools (CPS) is the fifth-largest district in the state, with an enrollment of almost 18,000 students and over 1,000 teachers (Columbia Public schools, n.d.). The district comprises 21 elementary schools, six middle schools, four high schools, a City Area Career Center, and an early childhood program. CPS Vision states that they want "to be the best school district" in Missouri. The CPS Mission describes how they will be

the best school district in the state by providing "an excellent education for all students" that align with CPS organizational goals. Along with the mission and vision also has a stated purpose and values. CPS' purpose is "to be a valuable asset for [their] community but preparing [their] children" to be a competitive asset to the world. Trust, transparency, empathy, integrity, collaboration, and grace are the six non-negotiable family principles that CPS states guide them.

The organizational structure consists of a simple hierarchy, citizens, a Board of education, and a superintendent, mixed with a dual authority structure, Chief Equity Officer, Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Education, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Operations Officer, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources, and Chief Communications Officer. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary education (DESE) is the overarching power for both CPS and KCPS. Redway is one of the 21 elementary schools a part of CPS.

Redway Elementary. Redway Elementary offers classes from kindergarten through 5th grade. Demographically, 59% of CPS students are White, 20% Black, 7% Hispanic, less than 1% Native American, less than 1% Pacific Islander, 5% Asian, and 8% multi-racial. Redway demographics do not mirror the district demographics, 30% White, 33% Black, 20% Hispanic, 5% Asian, and 12% Biracial. (Columbia Public schools, n.d.), and predominately white teaching staff. Students that attend Redway live in a marginalized community, where 99.8% of students receive free or reduced lunch.

Redway Elementary Leadership. Equivalent to the leadership at the previous schools I taught, Redway has a principal and assistant principal. The major difference in Redway leadership when I taught was a white male principal, Principal Tyson, and Latina

female assistant principal, Assistant Principal Rivas. Principal Tyson reflected the attributes of a Leader-Member exchange (LMX) leader because it was evident that certain teachers were a part of the in-group and other teachers were part of the out-group. An LMX leader has a mutual exchange of predetermined favors or requests between the follower and themself. Teachers in the "in-group" received certain advantages and access that teachers in the "out-group" did not. One of those advantages was better communication from Principal Tyson. If there was an issue with the parents, he shared it with them immediately. In comparison, I received the information a few days later. I witnessed this happen in a meeting when principal Tyson. He commented in the grade level meeting that he had shared with my colleague a few days before in a private meeting that the parent of one of my students complained about their child playing with Black children. Thankfully, principal Tyson addressed that parent, but I was not privy to this information immediately like my colleague. Consequently, during the entire school year, I never felt like my administrator knew me or took the time to get to know me as he did with the teachers in the "in" group. The "in" group consisted of all white women teachers. Therefore, the administrator could not provide mentorship or leadership to contribute to my professional growth.

My Experience at Redway. When I taught at Redway, it was my 8th year of teaching. Teaching at Redway Elementary was the most traumatizing and challenging year of my teaching career. I felt like my administration, grade level team, and other colleagues thought I was incompetent. The racial battle fatigue, the emotional and mental response after daily encounters with racism (Smith, 2004), was debilitating, and I had panic attacks before coming to work. A few things made the experience emotionally

difficult. Overall, I would sum up my experience with three points. First, I felt that I was not good enough or skilled as my white colleagues because I was a Black woman. I felt this way because I was treated differently than my white colleagues, e.g., they would laugh and joke and had a positive relationship, and I barely got a morning greeting. Second, my colleagues assumed I was angry and thought I was not approachable. Lastly, I did not like how the teachers spoke about the students in the teacher's lounge. For example, one teacher was talking about one of my students, a Black male student. She compared him to his sister and could not understand why he was behind academically and was always in trouble. In response to her comments, I explained that she did not know the situation and should not speak about my student that way. In my previous experiences in my other school, the feeling of not belonging and being viewed as incompetent seemed more underlying. However, while teaching at Redway, it was evident that I was only being mistreated because of who I was. The other Black woman teacher had a similar experience that was worse than my experience. Knowing she encountered similar interactions was validating that it was not just me. I left Redway because it was the most overt experience of white supremacy culture, complete with microaggressions, hostile racial climate, white-centered curriculum, institutionalized racism, anti- Blackness.

Organizational Analysis. Levi (2017) explains how important diversity is in team-building and describes the distinct types of diversity, which couples well with Bolman and Deal's (2019) human resource frame ideal of group dynamics. The several types of diversity are demographic, psychological, and organizational (Levi, 2017). Redway lacked diversity demographically, psychologically, and organizationally. My

colleagues and I differ in our values, belief systems, and philosophy of education. My belief system was based on Christianity and authenticity. Most of my colleagues seemed not religious or authentic. We did share some similarities in organization and student achievement, yet differed in the pedagogy of students of color, distinguishing between interpersonal and professional relationships, and completing assigned team tasks. Then our knowledge and experience in education drastically differ, and my seven years of experience in urban and parochial education compared to their one to three years of experience in suburban and rural education. Consequently, we rarely agreed about anything and only collaborated on the reading instruction structure because we were mandated to by the administration. Instead of mandating that we work together, the administration could have helped us navigate through our differences and helped to build a cohesive team.

My thoughts and expertise were disregarded and not valued throughout the school year. This was evident when instructional decisions were dictated to me but instead discussed with my other grade-level team members. Levi (2017) expounded on the problems created by diversity, such as the use of stereotypes, competition, and conflict. This was also evident in my experience with my grade level team members when the administration treated me differently, which caused conflict miscommunication and impacted how we viewed each other. We did not reap the benefits Levi (2017) describes the positive conflict, team members that stimulate team learning, problem-solving, and creativity during this school year. We did not have a psychologically safe team environment. This lack of psychological safety made working at Redway excruciating,

and I left teaching in K-12 for good. Reflecting, my leadership style greatly influenced my experience.

My Leadership Style: Authentic Leadership Theory and Practice

Being an authentic leader greatly influenced how I taught and viewed education and my administrators. An authentic leader learns well and leads very openly and honestly. Authentic leadership theory is considered a complex process that accentuates the attributes of a leader, taking the time to know themselves and what they are capable of (Northouse, 2019). Because of this complexity, authentic leadership proposes two approaches, practical and theoretical (Northouse, 2019). The practical approach comes from the literature and training merged with real-life experiences. I will use Bill George's practical approach to authentic leadership in Northouse's book on Reframing organizations. It consists of five essential characteristics: purpose, values, relationships, self-discipline, and heart (Northouse, 2019). Authentic leaders possess these five characteristics or constantly evaluate and evolve in these areas. This practical approach to Authentic leadership provides a framework to reflect on my leadership style while as a classroom teacher.

Purpose

My philosophy of education was to equip all students, especially Black and Brown students, with the tools they needed to exceed their highest dreams and aspirations. My fervent purpose, combined with my commitment to live out my philosophy of education, motivated me and inspired others. According to George's study, authentic leaders know themselves, their purpose, and trajectory. As a first-year teacher, I thought I had a firm grasp of who I was, but I learned some critical things about myself. I

knew that I wanted to be the best at everything, I did not take criticism well and took pride in my work and being the best. As an authentic leader, I was intrinsically motivated to accomplish my goals. I worked from 6 am until 7 pm some days. My purpose and philosophy of education aligned well and kept me grounded while I taught. Once I was no longer grounded in my commitment to education, I left teaching in the classroom. Nonetheless, my commitment to education evolved through research and reflection to put theory to practice and support, mentor, coach, and teach Black women in hopes of recruiting and retaining them.

Values

Authentic leaders firmly grasp their values and how they dictate their behavior toward others (Northouse, 2019). My values are honesty, caring for others, being trustworthy, and being the best in all areas of my life. Even in troublesome situations, authentic leaders will embrace the struggle to strengthen their values and beliefs. An example of this is how I chose to exercise my religious beliefs. I did not attend activities that were not spiritually grounded. Spiritually grounded activities included attending church, helping the community, communing in nature, or spending quality time with family on Friday evenings or Saturdays. For example, if an administrator asked me to pass out flyers for a school event on Saturday, I would decline. It was sometimes difficult because I would miss social events organized to build camaraderie amongst the staff. During those instances, I felt like an outsider. Northouse (2019) describes that an authentic leader is reluctant to compromise their values but allows the situation to strengthen their values.

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My unwillingness to allow other person's actions or beliefs to compromise my belief system was respected and revered sometimes, and other times I was ostracized. An example I was revered for my beliefs is when staff bonding outings were changed to days I could attend. Other times I was excluded from meetings or training held on Saturdays, and I missed the opportunity entirely. No alternatives were provided. Teaching in public education challenged my values because I was often in situations where it was easier to be dishonest, cruel to others, or do mediocre work. However, I still tried to be my best, and some days I was successful, and other days, I failed. Possessing values of honesty, caring for others, being trustworthy, and striving to be the best in all areas of my life propels me to seek the best practices and strategies to retain and recruit Black women.

Relationships

The third characteristic of applying authentic leadership is establishing solid and meaningful relationships (Northouse, 2019). Authentic leaders have the skillset to be vulnerable enough to share their life stories and listen to others. A strong bond and trust blossoms during this mutual exchange (Northouse, 2019). Building relationships deeply and quickly is an area of strength for me. I was always close with the school secretary and the janitorial staff. By sharing my life experiences with them, we would connect deeper. One life experience I often share is how my biological father disowned me, and my brother's father raised me as his daughter. Even if I do not share any common experiences, we still had a bond because there was mutual respect. I also built strong relationships with my colleagues that wanted to connect with me. Having meaningful relationships with my colleagues is quite substantial to me.

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My overall experience at the various schools I taught depended on how healthy and meaningful the relationships were. I had the most sentimental and healthy relationships at Welch, so I stayed for four years. I also noticed that my relationship with my colleagues would sometimes change if my interactions with the administrator were negative. At Redwood, I did not engage in relationships with teachers that had a close relationship with Principal Tyson. For me, if you can support a leader that I felt was the epitome of white male privilege in America, then we cannot interact. I believed he was the epitome of white male privilege because he was a poor leader, inconsistent, disorganized, had poor communication, and often missed opportunities to address microaggressions. Yet, he was promoted quickly to the principal with only two years of experience as an assistant principal. Once I knew a teacher had a close relationship with Principal Tyson, my behavior towards them changed. I felt they were supporting or promoting the negative behavior of the administrator. Witnessing the behavior of Principal Tyson and experiencing the lack of relationship fueled my desire to inform the practice of school leaders on how they build relationships with Black women to prevent their attrition.

Self-Discipline

Another attribute of authentic leadership is self-discipline. Self-discipline helps leaders to focus and achieve their goals (Northouse, 2019). Authentic leaders with self-discipline hold themselves accountable to achieve their goals and others. The self-discipline characteristic also keeps the leader energized to accomplish the task and stay "…cool, calm, and consistent" during tense times (Northouse, 2019, p.201). Determination is my strength; however, I am developing in self-discipline. I can

discipline myself for some time to achieve a goal. It is relatively challenging to remain disciplined beyond the point I must reach my intended target or assess that the goal is no longer attainable. For example, when teaching, I would grade papers, tutor students, fulfill other teachers' or teacher leader duties at the school for 10-12 hours a day, and spend another 10-12 hours over the weekend writing and planning instructional activities. Near the end of my teaching experience, I was arriving late and not entirely writing and planning instructional activities. The behavior changes directly resulted from not wanting to teach anymore and hating my job. Although I can be disciplined at times, there are other instances where I was not as focused or determined. The focus and desire to achieve my goals urge me to seek and implement ways to support Black women educators best.

Heart

The last trait of George's practical approach to authentic leadership is heart, which entails being compassionate to the struggle and oppression of others (Northouse, 2019). Leaders can develop this trait by being involved with diverse people from various ethnicities or racial groups and traveling to other countries. I have developed compassion for others by doing community service and charitable work. While teaching, I prioritized doing community service in the area where I taught. Sometimes I was a part of an organization, but most times, I was simply talking to people and praying with them. During these conversations, I learned of the hardships people faced in the community. These conversations also informed how I engaged my students and organizations' future projects, like buying groceries for families, connecting them to organizations to gain employment, and purchasing school clothes and shoes. Helping in tangible ways was effective in showing compassion, but most times, the families appreciate the

thoughtfulness of coming to their home and visiting. Using George's practical approach to authentic leadership helps me frame my experiences in the context of my leadership style and outline how each aspect of authentic leadership is demonstrated in my practice and research of combatting the influence of white supremacy culture in the attrition of Black women.

My Leadership Style Compared to the Various Administrators' Leadership Style

Leader-Member Exchange Theory as an Administration Leadership style

Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) conceptualizes leadership as a process centralized on the leader's and followers' interactions (Northouse, 2019). Before LMX theory, leadership theory described what leaders did toward their followers collectively rather than having different relationships with their followers (Northouse, 2019). LMX theory best describes the leadership style of the school board chair, superintendent, and principal because of the dynamics of the relationship. Suppose my behavior was perceived well when I performed well above these leaders' expectations. For example, my extra efforts rewarded more responsibilities, like organizing and planning the Christmas program, the school's most extensive program and the biggest fundraiser. On the other hand, I received negative consequences such as reprimands or write-ups when I only did my prescribed roles and nothing more. Typically, in LMX, followers do not oscillate between "in-group" and "out-group." In contrast, "out-group" followers do their job solely and interact extraordinarily little with the leader. LMX does describe the relationship between leaders and followers based on what each person does for the other (Northouse, 2019).

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LMX also focuses on the interactions between leaders and followers, while Authentic Leadership emphasizes a leader's qualities (Northouse, 2019). The relationship aspect of LMX theory and Authentic leadership explains why I had an intrinsic sense to build a relationship between the administration and myself. However, attempts to build this relationship were inconsistent due to positive and negative experiences. I recall the board chair inviting the principal and me to her home for lunch after church. She exclaimed how she was intentional about preparing food that met our dietary needs. Unfortunately, she did not know how to prepare the food properly for that meeting, and it was spoiled. The principal and I laughed about it afterwards because the board chair were immensely proud of the dish. I also recall when the principal and I argued for an hour about the school year and how she treated me poorly. She responded that I was disrespectful and passionate. Through their decisions, each administrator often communicated that they wanted me to be accommodating. I challenged them every time until I no longer had the energy to contend with them. Although the other teachers had similar encounters in which the other teachers shared their experiences with me, I was the only teacher getting written reprimands. In sum, the relationship was toxic and confusing and thus created an unfavorable working environment for me and why I ultimately left MPS.

LMX leadership and Authentic leadership clash at the core of the theories, which explains why Principal Tyson and I had difficulty connecting. An instance of this is when a black male was suspended for fighting in my classroom while I was absent. The substitute teacher got in between the students, attempting to break up the fight, which is not protocol, and got hit. Whereas I had another white male student who had been in

numerous physical altercations, but the principal did not suspend that student. I did not think that was fair, and I inquired about the decisions. Principal Tyson and Assistant principal Rivas explained that due to a teacher getting hit in the process, this escalated the punishment. As an authentic leader, one must have a keen sense of identity, beliefs, and values. Although it seemed the administrator had some values, such as honesty and kindness, they were not consistent throughout the school year. When I was first hired at Redwood, principal Tyson was extremely helpful, kind, and honest. Throughout the year, he became distant and dishonest. It was not until the spring that we had an open conversation with the Chief Equity Officer about my experience at Redwood. Then Principal Tyson began to see how he poorly addressed issues that lead to dishonesty, whether intentionally or unintentionally. LMX theory is different from Transformational leadership, which is evident in a school setting.

Transformational Leadership Theory as an Administration Leadership Style

Transformational leadership is a type of leadership that focuses on the charismatic attributes of a leader and the leader's ability to improve the performance of followers and develop them to their fullest potential (Northouse, 2019). These intentions are demonstrated on a leadership continuum from transformational leadership to transactional leadership to laissez-faire leadership. Transformational leadership style includes four factors: idealized influence and charisma, inspirational motivation, individualized stimulation, and intellectual stimulation. Next, the Transactional leadership style consists of two factors: contingent reward and management by exception. Lastly, Laissez-faire leadership consists of one trait, nontransactional.

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Transformational leadership factor 1 is called charisma or idealized influence, which describes strong role models leaders. Factor 2 is titled inspiration or inspirational motivation, which describes how the leader communicates high expectations. The third factor is intellectual stimulation, which explains how leaders encourage their followers to be creative and innovative. Lastly, the fourth factor is individualized consideration, which entails the leader being a supportive listener to the needs of their followers. Authentic leadership and Transformational leadership mesh well because of the attributes of a strong role model and strong morals, values, and beliefs. Both Transformational and Authentic leaders can be very inspirational because they possess high standards and a powerful sense of purpose. For example, as a transformational leader, Dr. Lois at Welch led from all aspects of the continuum, from transformational to transactional and sometimes laissez-faire. Dr. Lois's charisma was infectious, and she operated extraordinarily little in the laissez-faire realm. A phrase we, my fellow teacher colleagues, would use is that Dr. Lois "be all over the place." Evidently, she cared about students, teachers, parents, and district leaders, which exemplified her transformational side, that is similar to the relationship and heart aspects of authentic leadership. Transactional leadership is quite different.

In contrast to a transformational leader, transactional leaders concentrate on exchanging things of value with the follower to advance their agenda or the follower (Northouse, 2019). A contingent reward is the first factor of transactional leadership. It is the exchange process between the leader and follower, concluding with specific rewards. The next factor is management by exception, which entails the leader providing negative feedback, either passively or actively. The most memorable transactional leadership

experience with management, by exception, was at MPS. I had to attend a meeting two months after school started, and it was my first reprimand from the school board chair and principal. I was astonished by the context of the discussion. They informed me that some of the parents in my class were dissatisfied with my performance as a teacher. I expressed that I was talking with the parents and mending the relationship. My response, however, was not sufficient for the board chair and principal, and they continued to explain that the issue was related to more than those parents. It became clear that dissatisfied parents were a pretext to bring up that I was inexperienced and needed to perform better. I later found out that the unhappy parents I mentioned and was already working with to mend the relationship were the only dissatisfied parents. Yet, the school board chair and principal embellished the situation to attack and degrade me. This felt like an attack on my sense of value and purpose as an authentic leader. My values were honesty, kindness, and openness and this experience was devoid of that. As a new teacher, I had a keen sense of purpose for educating children, and the personal attacks damaged how I felt about my purpose. These polarizing experiences expound on how one's leadership type can complement well with their superiors or create chaos.

Being an authentic leader and educator with administrators with complementary and conflicting leadership styles can create deep and meaningful relationships and tumultuous ones. LMX leadership and authentic leadership styles had the most conflictual experiences because of the attributes of value, purpose, heart, which created a barrier for me to have a relationship. LMX school leaders can create toxic environments because of how drastically different they treat teachers depending on if they were a part of the "in" group or "out" group. Contrarily, transformational leadership and authentic

leadership can couple well in the areas of value, purpose, relationships, and heart. It depends on if the leader is more transformational than transactional or laissez-faire. Every experience with each leadership style impacted my teaching experience and was subtly complicit with the white supremacy culture that pushed me out of the classroom.

Summary

America has successfully created "the whitest teaching force possible" (Foster, 1997), and the education system is suffering. One of the most important implications for research in the practitioner setting is a better understanding of attrition, which can assist in implementing more intentional practices to retain Black women and global majority educators. As a former K-12 classroom educator, I have experienced the nuances of the myriad of issues in the K-12 system from various schools and educational organizations. This section briefly outlined my teaching experiences in four different schools in four other districts or institutions, navigating a white supremacist culture. Each entity had some common themes and common leadership styles, LMX or transformational theory. Having administrators with those leadership styles that did not mesh well with my leadership style, authentic leader, impacted my teaching experience and ultimately contributed to my decision to leave the teaching profession. Considering the implications of leadership theory and practice using scholarly work coupled with my experience provides a practitioner's lens to the problem of Black women educator attrition.

Section Three—Scholarly Context for the Study

The contributions and resiliency of Black women educators are needed and wanted in schools and society, yet we are 60% more likely to leave the profession than non-Black teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Black women educators 'experiences are nuanced and layered due to societal views of Black women coupled with Black women educators' experiences in the workforce. Current scholarship is developing around the impact of hostile racial climates on the retention of global majority educators (Kohli, 2018; Grooms et al., 2021) and focusing more on the unique experiences of why Black women educators leave education (Farinde-Wu et al., 2020). However, this scholarly review focuses on unpacking the intersectional oppression of Black women educators working in the racially hostile climate of K-12 education and how it impacts their attrition from the teaching profession.

Researchers have studied the topic of the Black women educator retention and recruitment and the impact of gendered and racialization oppression on teachers of color (Kohli, 2018; Lisle-Johnson & Kohli, 2020; Pizarro & Kohli, 2018) and Black women educators (Acosta, 2019; Gardner et al., 2020; Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2017; Hill-Brisbane, 2005; Jackson-Hill, 2017). Scholars have sought to understand why Black women educators stay in the classroom and why they leave, but few explore the intersections among Black women educator attrition and hostile racial environment (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018; Kohli, 2018), job satisfaction (Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2018), and the impact of white supremacy culture in K-12 education (hooks, 2012). My review of the research demonstrates that several themes emerge throughout the literature in the context of this study: white supremacist thinking and action, racial

macro/microaggressions, hostile racial climates, internalized racial oppression, and Black women educators' decision to leave the education profession. Thus, I organized these themes and titled them as such (a) Historical Overview of The Migration of Black Educators; (b) Intersectional Oppression and Controlling Images of Black Women; (c) Impacts of Racism on the Retention of Global Majority Educators (d) Black Women Educator Attrition.

Historical Overview of the Migration of Black Educators

Black educators have been essential to the field of education since the 1860s, but informally, much earlier than this. Still, they have historically and continually resisted their displacement and denial of their criticality to the education system. Hill-Jackson (2017) outlines the causes of the mass "exodus" of Black women educators, specifically from the U.S. education system, noting "the exodus of Black women from the teaching profession is so pronounced that it invites a separate and distinct conversation within the field (p. 10). To expound on this notion, Hill-Jackson (2017) compiled a figure to illustrate the Historical review of Black Women Teachers' representation in American schools (p.12). The three historical phases of Black women educators' representation in the teaching profession include reconstruction, integration, and exodus. I will use *reconstruction and integration phases* to frame a historical overview of the Migration and displacement of Black Educators.

Reconstruction Phase (1865-1954)

Historically, Black women have had better access to education than Black men and thus became the forerunners of education in the Black community (Shipp, 2000). During the Colonial period and the enslavement of Black people in the U.S. from 1619-

1865, this was not the case for Black women. They suffered "triple victimization" by being forced to give free labor in domestic and agricultural work, brutally raped, and having their children stolen (Davis, 1981; Hill-Jackson, 2017, p. 12) while being denied fundamental human rights, including education. It was illegal for Black people until 1862 to receive any education, but there are accounts of Black children and people receiving education secretly during the early pre-Civil War and specifically by Black women (Collins, 1997). Milla Granson is one such example of an enslaved Black woman who executed a "midnight school in the slave quarters" with some of the students writing "their own freedom passes" (McCluskey, 2014, p. 5). As Black literacy increased, so did slave rebellion, which led to anti-literacy laws (Hill-Jackson, 2017). Civil War was inevitable and ended in 1865 after almost 300 years of slavery in America (Elliot, 2019). After the Civil War, three vital amendments to the Constitution became law, the 13th (i.e., the end of slavery), 14th (i.e., Equal Protection Clause, which means rights cannot be taken away), and 15th (i.e., all men received the right to vote), which indirectly affected U.S. education. At the end of the Civil War, freed Black people now had legal access to education, and 90% were illiterate (Hill-Jackson, 2017). With such a high illiteracy rate, there was a dire need for teachers to provide formal education for freed Black folk, and Black women educators were willing to be some of the first teachers (McCluskey, 2014), and often supported their communities through providing and advocating for educational access through opening schools (McCluskey, 2014; Yee, 1992).

Black women were eager to be some of the first educators to teach their own. One of the first legally recognized Black women educators was Charlotte Forten (Hill-

Jackson, 2017). In 1862, Charlotte Forten taught in the Sea Islands of South Carolina, and her efforts helped build a robust Black teacher workforce of 60,000 Black educators, most of whom were Black women (Foster, 1997; Hill-Jackson, 2017). Black women educators have also been responsible for establishing a number of schools; such as Lucky Craft Laney who created the first school for Black children in August, Georgia (McCluskey, 2014); Nannie Helen Burroughs developed a training school for Black women and girls after being denied a teaching position (Person, 2021); and after the school where Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown taught was closed by the American Missionary Association, Dr. Hawkins Brown would open her own school for rural Black children providing agricultural and vocational education and later becoming a private school with a college preparatory curriculum (History, 2023). Black women were also instrumental in creating educational opportunities at the post-secondary level for Black people. Mary McLeod Bethune assisted her son in opening a literacy and industrial school for girls in Florida, which later became a college, merging with Cookman Institute, becoming Bethune-Cookman College (McCluskey, 2014). The work of Black women educators has been instrumental in creating a growing Black educator workforce through their creation of schools and participation in higher education institutions specifically for Black folks to equip them to enter the teaching workforce and other vocations.

The American Reconstruction Era also included establishing one of the first schools for Black people, the African Institute, later named the Institute of Colored Youth, in 1837 (Patterson, 2010), finally becoming Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, the oldest Historically Black College or University in the U.S. (The First HBCU, 2023).

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The original institute was established by William Humphrey, a philanthropist, and Quaker, who founded the school to educate Black people. Within the original institute, Grace A. Mapps, recognized as the first African American woman college graduate from a four-year program, was hired to head the Girls' Department within the institution (Smith, 1996).

Post-Civil War in 1865, Black women educators were eager to teach freed Black people, in part because they believed that education would challenge the inferior treatment of Black people, dispel racist myths, and provide social mobility (McCluskey, 2014). Black women educators traveled along with white abolitionists who wanted to help educate Black people (Hill-Jackson, 2017). Furthermore, Black women educators, whom we do not have records of all their names due to the lack of personal documents like journals and diaries of Black freewomen, led the Negro Education movement, which gave birth to The Freemen's Bureau of 1865 (Frankel, 1997). The Freemen's Bureau was a fund created by President Lincoln that allowed formerly enslaved people to advance economically through education. This effort began one of the first pipelines for Black educators and provided economic mobility and professional and vocational opportunities for Black people. Despite a lack of resources and inadequate funding, all-Black schools taught by all-Black teaching staff and administrators thrived academically (Fenwick, 2020; Shipp, 2000). Under the Freemen's Bureau, schools for Black children multiplied, including several higher learning institutions.

By 1896, the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* legal case created a significant and fundamental movement to recodify racial divisions historically placed during slavery and legalized the ideology of "separate but equal." *Plessy vs. Ferguson* was a Supreme Court case

involving a Black man that did not want to sit in the Black section of the train. The Supreme Court ruled that it was constitutional to have "separate but equal" in every aspect of in society, including but not limited to public transportation, water fountains, schools, and restaurants. White supremacists used this legal grounding and Jim Crow laws to maintain racial segregation and oppression. Segregated schools taught by Black women educators received extraordinarily little funding from school districts, with financial resources being funneled into white schools. Resources were so meager that Black families had to house Black teachers to accommodate their minuscule salaries (Hill-Jackson, 2017).

Integration Phase (1954-the 1970s)

The 1954 Supreme Court landmark decision *Brown vs. The Board of Education in Topeka, KS,* ruled "separate but equal" unconstitutional in schools specifically but impacted all public places and overthrew *Plessy v. Ferguson.* Black teachers who once had secure jobs even with meager salaries were left unemployed (Hill-Jackson, 2017). There were mixed emotions about the seeming victory and the closure of Jim Crow schools. Desegregating schools to increase Black educational advancement converged with the interests of white liberal. This calculated convergence of interest[1]

> "…received criticism because it was shaped not by the intentional coalescing of a transforming social movement that reached across boundaries of race and

[1] Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theory originated from legal scholars Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, and others about how American racism has embodied public policy and is being used as a tool to create division amongst people of color and non-people of color, particularly in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT has several tenets, and Interest Convergence is one of the tenets. Interest convergence postulates that Black people only gain advancement in civil rights when white and Black interests coincide, i.e., converge (Guinier, 2004).

> economic class but by the calculated convergence of interests between northern liberals, southern moderates, and blacks. The resulting alliance was temporary, lacked deep populist roots, and built on a tradition of treating black rights as expendable" (Guinier, 2004, p. 94)

Some of the substantial ramifications of the *Brown* decision to desegregate schools was the creation of the achievement gap, closing every All-Black school, displacing Black educators and administrators, and the internalization of racialized oppression in Black children and Black educators in white-dominant schools (Emdin, 2021; Fenwick, 2020; Jackson-Hill, 2017; Tillman, 2004). Integration was not a short process, as many white people did not want their children to have a Black teacher (Hill-Jackson, 2017). They utilized numerous stalling tactics to resist integration that lasted almost 20 years. During this integration period, the Black teacher workforce went from 90,000 to nearly half by 1965 (Fairclough, 2009). Simultaneously, the workforce was still highly divided by race and gender; something educators like Carol Kind were mindful of as they continued to provide educational access in hopes to challenge the notion that Black people and Black girls, and women should be relegated to specific kinds of work (Harrison, 2001).

Before the *Brown vs. Board* decision, there were looming debates about the integration of schools. The Dean of Louisville Community College, for example, expressed that integration would sacrifice the jobs of faculty of color (Fultz, 2004). Alarmingly, in Louisville, 70,000 Black educators would be laid off. White schools only allocated a significantly small number of positions for Black educators, including administrators. With few teaching positions in white schools, Black educators forcibly

abandoned their teaching careers to work in other fields (Fultz, 2004), being the leading cause of the "mass exodus" of Black women educators from the U.S. education system (Jackson-Hill, 2017). Black educators, mostly Black women educators, were displaced after closing every all-Black school. Will (2019) details a specific incident in central Missouri after *Brown vs. Board* that speaks to the reality of the negative impact of the monumental supreme court decision. The incident was in Moberly, MO school district dismissed 11 certified Black educators, one of whom held a Ph.D. in 1959, compared to white teachers with less experience and education who remained employed. Black students and teachers experienced deliberate retaliation from the white community. Consequently, internalized and adopted white symbols of pride and accomplishments attacked their Black identity (Fenwick, 2020). The displacement of Black teachers and administrators was catastrophic post-*Brown* in the United States and foundationally began the evolution of covert racism in K-12 education (Cole, 1986; Fenwick, 2020; Fultz, 2004; Tillman, 2004). The experiences of Black women educators sits in the intersection of racism and sexism equally.

Intersectional Oppression and Controlling Images of Black Women

Intersectionality

Black women's oppression is different because we have two marginalized identities, race, and sex, which is at times also heightened in the context of socioeconomic conditions, sexual identity, and so on (Lorde, 2007; Collins, 1990). Black women's experiences are centered in the intersecting patterns of racism and sexism and are usually not considered in the discourse around these respective forms of oppression (Lorde, 2007; Collins, 1990). Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) coined the term

intersectionality to expose how anti-discrimination laws did not address the unique experiences of Black women. Anti-discrimination laws either addressed sexism or racism but not the intersection of both. Crenshaw (1991) illuminated the flaws and limitations in antiracism and feminist theories in addressing the intersections and marginalization concomitant with race and sex to create a broader focus. In doing so, Crenshaw (1989) provides a lens and analytic tool to explore the phenomena of overlapping and interconnected manifestations of domination and oppression. While Crenshaw (1991) focuses on battered women and women experiencing violence, the racialized and gendered trauma Black women have faced in K-12 (Farinde-Wu et al., 2020) and higher education (Smith, 1999) is similar. First, I will consider experiences outside of education and then later focus on experiences in K-12 education.

Controlling Images of Black Women

Negative Sociological Perceptions. Misconceptions and biases towards Black women date back centuries (Collins, 1997). This section reviews the most prominent controlling images and stereotypes of Black women that contribute to racially oppressing Black women: sapphire, mammy, and jezebel (Harris-Perry, 2011). These three dominant, recurring stereotypes, mammy, the domesticated Black woman; jezebel, the promiscuous and overly sexual Black woman; and sapphire, the educated and aggressive Black woman have negative impacts and implications for Black women in all dimensions of their lives. These prevalent and negative sociological perceptions of Black women translate into racialized and gendered microaggressions towards Black women. Thus, Black women educators experience victimization by the assaults of others based on

flawed ideology and belief systems. Although incredibly problematic, these behaviors become normalized and acceptable (Smith, 1999).

Mammy. The Mammy stereotype of a Black woman is the subservient "faithful, obedient domestic servant" (Collins, 2000, p.80). Harris-Perry (2011) describes the Mammy image as exemplifying the intersecting oppressions of race, gender, sexuality, and class. The Mammy image also stands as white supremacist's ideal of the relationship between Black women and white men (Collins, 2000). Furthermore, the mammy image seeks to control Black maternal instinct (Collins, 2000). In a study that investigated how the media presentation of Black women swayed the social assumptions and judgments of Black women in decision-making roles, Brown-Givens and Monahan's (2005) hypothesis was accurate that participants stereotyped the mammy as nurturing and the sapphire as aggressive.

Utilizing the mammy image was also a pervasive tool to pacify the economic exploitation of Black women's labor in a capitalistic and political U.S. economy (Collins, 2000). Historically, being instructed by white men, Black women taught their children to *know their place* and become efficient conduits of perpetuating white supremacist thinking and action (Collins, 2000). Collins' (2000) description of the relationship between Black women and white men can be compared to the dynamic in K-12 education between white male principals and Black women educators. For example, Black women educators typecast as mammies are expected to indoctrinate Black children to conform and assimilate to the dominant white culture.

Sapphire. The sapphire stereotype implies the belligerent Black woman who agitates white patriarchal characterizations of Black femininity (Collins, 1986, Brown

Givens & Monahan, 2005). Harris-Perry (2011) describes sapphires as assertive and sassy Black women who challenge patriarchy's status quo. Additionally, Collins (1986) explains that by owning the stereotypical view of sapphire, Black women can resist by embodying these attributes and challenging the externally-defined controlling images. Smith (1999) details her experience of being categorized as a sapphire in a law school, "presumption of incompetence that inflexibly presumes that all professional Black women are angry, threatening, intimidating, and unintelligent" (p. 55). According to Smith (1999), Black women in academia are presumed and stereotyped as sapphires who are hostile, incompetent, and cannot navigate educational institutions. As such, Black women are isolated and victims of a gendered-racial hostility. Although Smith is speaking from her own experience, her reflections and analysis speak to the experiences of Black women in other educational disciplines in higher education who must contend with racially gendered tropes and stereotypes (Blockett et al., 2016; Jones & Wilder, 2013; Minnett et al., 2019; Patterson-Stephens et al., 2021). Even after Black women earn credentials, they are questioned in the workplace. Pizzarro and Kohli (2018) share the story of Liza, a Black woman educator, who was repeatedly barraged with racism that left her feeling hopeless and depressed until she shut down emotionally. Unfortunately, Liza had a nervous breakdown and quit teaching for several years before returning to the classroom. Unfortunately, Black women combat "unfair expectations, unique challenges, and biased assumptions" in the workplace that are drastically different from women from other racial and ethnic groups (Frye, 2019, para. 7).

The Retrenchment Generation, a term coined by Smith (1999) is various groups of people from multiple age groups, ethnicities, and professions that think and act under

the belief of the sapphire stereotype in the past and presently. Black women educators experience being perceived as Sapphires in K-12 education and thus receive covert and overt actions of retaliation consistently and constantly (Kohli, 2018).

Jezebel. Another prominent controlling image is the jezebel, contemporarily one might also conceptualize this as "thot." Historically, jezebels reflected the perversion of Black women's sexuality (Harris-Perry, 20110). Black women were over-sexualized in order to justify mistreatment, and sexual abuse. Within intersectionality, the jezebel's sexuality is analogous with the Black male stereotype of sexual deviancy (Davis, 1981). Thus, Black women are victimized more viciously than any other group, while simultaneously not treated as individuals who have suffered at the hands of others (Crenshaw, 1991).

In the K-12 setting, Black women educators' attire is questioned and even overly sexualized like the social media phenomenon, #TeacherBae. Patrice Brown, a teacher's aide in Atlanta, posted photos on her Instagram, and they went viral as individuals deemed her dress inappropriate and even provocative, thus the name #TeacherBae (D'oyley, 2016). Some would describe her attire as "clubwear" and question her competency and professionalism (D'oyley, 2016). Yet, there are few stories about white teachers in similar attire trending or going viral.

Gender Wage Gap

The intersection of oppression in racial and gender identities and stereotypes can be unique to Black women in several ways, including gender wage gaps (Frye, 2019), negative sociological perceptions of Black women (Smith, 1999), and lack of opportunities for promotion and leadership (Moorosi et al., 2008). The most remarkable

difference in earnings is between white males and Black women (Frye, 2019). This gender wage gap trend is happening across the U.S. (Hekker, 2021), and in some areas, there is an average gender wage gap of $12,000 (Fox et al., 2019). Frye (2019) describes how intersectional oppression racism and sexism wage gap impact Black women, highlighting that "Black women experience both a race and gender wage gap that reflects the intersectional reality of their daily lives…earnings differences are between Black women and white men…[and] wage disparities when compared with white women and Black men" (para. 4). Over a 40-year career span, white men can make almost $100,000 more than Black women (Frye, 2019). These national numbers also reflect what is happening in K-12 education. An example of this is a Black woman administrator who shared that she makes significantly less than other white administrators who have less experience and less education.

Lack of opportunities for promotion and leadership

Black women also have fewer opportunities for promotions and leadership positions for many reasons. Albeit, how society views Black women's labor is the foundation of the dearth of opportunity and professional upward mobility (Davis, 1981). The ramification of the flawed belief that Black women's work is not labor, but that this labor is her duty to her family and community; Black women's labor is undervalued and underpaid (Collins 2000). This notion is exacerbated in education because Black women educators work in a white-dominant profession. Examples of this are the lack of promotion and leadership opportunities offered to women, especially Black women (Curtis, 2017). Historical accounts often negate Black women leaders' numerous

contributions in the Civil Rights movements, Black Panther Party, and other social justice or racial solidarity movements, including education (Jean-Marie, 2006).

Agosta and Roland (2018) conducted a literature review examining intersectionality and educational leadership. Their findings concluded a dire need for leadership at all levels and in various sectors to ensure that Black girls have more equitable access to leadership. Furthermore, that intersectionality in educational leadership is helping to expose the inequities in K-12 education (Agosto & Roland, 2018). Likewise, this current research seeks to bring more awareness to how the intersectionality of racism and sexism is usually not contemplated in the discussion around the experiences of Black women teachers or the impact on their wages. Scholars Fuller, Hollingworth, and An's (2019) research clarified why there is an increase in the diversity of K-12 school leaders. There is a false sense that the diversity of school leaders is increasing because there is a decreasing percentage of white men educators and an increasing percentage of Latina educators. Surprisingly, in Fuller et al.'s study, Women of Color, including Black women, had the lowest odds of being hired in any position relative to white male educators. This supports one of the main reasons for Black women educators 'attrition.

Impacts of Racism on the Retention of Global Majority Educators

As noted earlier, numerous overt racist actions make up the foundation of the United States dating as far back to European settlers taking and occupying the land from Indigenous people and enslaving Africans to build the country's infrastructure and White men's wealth. U.S. education was no different. In 1957, angry white people bombed Hattie Cotton Elementary school the same day of the integration of the first grade in

white schools in Nashville, TN (Phillips, 2017). The global majority, is a collective term that speaks to the experiences of people historically socialized as racialized ethnic minorities (Campbell-Stephens, 2021) Although the K-12 system has few incidents of overt racist acts like segregation, bombings of schools, white gun groups blocking the doors of schools, or white people spitting on Black individuals attempting to attend a white school (Kunzia, 2017), there is a "new racism" that has replaced it (Kohli et al., 2017). Solórzano (2012) describes "new racism" as "…more subtle forms of racism that exist in daily life, which may be hard to pinpoint as racism, but causes harm nonetheless" (p. 6). These subtle insults that degrade or demean an individual based on racialization are microaggressions and can be as indirect as mispronouncing an individual's name and not seeking to correct/learn pronunciation (Kohli et al., 2017). More direct examples are guidance counselors discouraging students of color from applying to four-year universities but insisting that community college or 2-year programs are more feasible (Kunzi, 2017). Thus, microaggressions can be harmful to the well-being of students of color but also to the global majority educators that teach them (Kohli, 2018). Global majority educators bridle these microaggressions and even defend or debunk these stereotypes with their nonwhite and white colleagues (Kohli, 2018; Pizzaro & Kohli, 2020).

Professional development in K-12 education is a means to develop teachers professionally. Unfortunately, school districts are not providing adequate, consistent, and differentiated professional development to address the lack of culturally responsive pedagogy; teachers of color pay an "invisible tax" (King, 2016). This tax dictates the behaviors of educators of color, especially Black educators, while simultaneously

communicating to Black students how to behave and assimilate to white supremacist thinking and action (King, 2016; Kohli & Solorzano, 2012). Post-*Brown vs. the Board of Education,* Black teachers were expected to train and coach Black children to assimilate into white schools (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012). Assimilation evolved into behavior management like zero tolerance school policy and mediation like restorative justice (Daneshzadeh & Sirrakos 2018). Black educators then became the sole mediator between black students and their families and white administrators and teachers. Therefore, Black teachers deal with the microaggressions of their colleagues directed towards them and students and the microaggressions and negative stereotypes their white colleagues attribute to Black and other students of color (Duncan, 2019). Consequently, educational leaders heavily recruit teachers of color into urban areas with hostile racial climates, as treatment plans to diagnose and fix students of color (Kohli, 2018). Although Kohli's qualitative study, along with others (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018), outlines the impact of racism in the retention of global majority educators, it does not explicitly address the impact of racism in retaining Black women educators.

Impact of hostile racial climate on Black Women

The average educator in the U.S. teaching workforce is a middle-age, middle-class white woman (Taie & Goldring, 2020), while the average administrator is a white man (Fuller et al., 2018). Specifically, 80% of educators are white compared to the 7% of Black teachers (Ingersoll & May 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2017). This racial mismatch of white and Black educators impedes the academic achievement of students of color (Grooms et al., 2021) and negatively impacts the well-being of global majority educators (Kohli, 2018). While diversifying the teacher workforce increases

students of color's academic achievement, it also creates a more socially just and equitable public school system (Grooms et al., 2021) that helps better retain global majority educators (Kohli, 2018). Instead, white supremacy thinking permeates public schools and creates hostile racial climates (Kohli, 2018).

Hostile racial climates consist of institutional and individual thoughts and actions rooted in racism that negatively impact those who receive this oppressive behavior and ideology (Kohli, 2018). Budding data exemplifies how racism in urban schools destroys the well-being of students and teachers of color. This degradation of the global majority is both physical and psychological. In her Black feminist critical autoethnography, Durham (2021) shares how U.S.-born Black women endure "lifetime racism," systemic and institutional racism in the workforce, healthcare, schooling, housing, and aspects of society that correlates with the growth of fibroids or uterine tumors. Black women's health issues are consequential to their experiences with racism and microaggressions (Keith et al., 2017). In other words, Black women's bodies are slowly dying due to the exposure of "lifetime racism." For the Black woman educator, encountering the toxicity of hostile racial climates with a dying Black body forces her out of her purpose and passion for teaching (Kohli, 2018). To illustrate the detrimental impact of a hostile racial climate, Pizarro and Kohli's (2018) study begins with a narrative by Ms. Shakur, a Black woman educator. Ms. Shakur recounts that she was conversing with a Black girl student, and a white male colleague assumed that she needed help. Ms. Shakur stated that the white male teacher thought there was an issue and that she needed assistance because the conversation was quite lively. The researchers negated to expound on how Ms. Shakur's experience is unique as a Black woman in a white-dominant field. Then, to what extent

did her identity impact how she internalized an overabundance of racism during her 6-years of working with a predominately white staff?

Yet, in later research, Lisle-Johnson and Kohli (2020) address some of the intersectional oppression Black women educators face by "explicitly focus[ing] on the experiences of critical Black women educators, centering their racialized, gendered and ideological marginality in the struggle to transform schools" (p.3). One of the key findings from Lisle-Johnson and Kohli's work describes the dual impact of working in a hostile racial climate and how embedded intersectional racism in K–12 schools negatively shape the professional lives of critical Black women educators. Furthermore, being systematically underrepresented in K-12 schools, Black women educators are ostracized and heavily relied upon to do racial justice work. Consequently, as shared in the stories of three of their participants, Black women educators are exhausted, isolated, and in some cases, leave their jobs as a result (Lisle-Johnson & Kohli's, 2020). Despite contending with racialized and gendered oppression, Black women educators use critical professional development as a vital lifeline to survive (Lee & Thomas, 2022), grow and transform the white supremacy culture of K-12 education (Lisle-Johnson & Kohli, 2020)

Furthermore, the impact of racism on educators of color proves to be detrimental psychologically (Lee & Thomas, 2022). Over time, teachers of color in racially hostile environments begin to internalize racism, and believe racially oppressive notions, act out these negative stereotypes, and disregard any positive African or Black American culture ideals (Brown et al., 2017). Bailey et al.'s (2011) article focused on compiling and substantiating the Internalized Racial oppression scale (IROS) for Black individuals. The IROS evaluated five proposed dimensions of internalized racial oppression, (a)

internalization of negative stereotypes (INS), (b) self-destructive behaviors (SDB), (c) devaluation of the African worldview and motifs (DAW), (d) belief in the biased representation of history (BRH) and (e) alteration of physical appearance (APA). These dimensions are supposed to articulate the notions of self-hatred and identification with racial stereotypes. The findings point to the importance of more research on the impact of internalized racism on Black women educators in racially hostile environments and how this correlates with the recruitment and retention of Black women educators.

Black Women Educators' Attrition

Retention

Farinde-Wu (2018) and other researchers (Farinde-Wu, & Fitchett, 2018; Farinde-Wu & Griffen, 2019; Farinde, Allen & Lewis, 2016) disclose recurring themes regarding the retention of Black women educators from pre-service to in-service teachers. Black women educators predominately teach in urban schools and their commitment to these schools lies in: (1) the diversity in urban schools, (2) their educational background, and (3) their desires to fulfill the urgent need for highly qualified teachers in many under-resourced, urban schools (Farinde-Wu, 2018; Gardner et al., 2020). Black women educators perceive their students' classroom behaviors through a cultural lens, along with the previously mentioned themes. Black women educators' perceptions of students' classroom behaviors through a cultural lens entails Black students being less likely to be referred to special education services than they are currently, fewer discipline referrals, and more understanding of behaviors perceived as argumentative and disruptive (Duncan, 2019). Subsequently, in Gardner et al.'s study (2020), in-service Black women educators and Latina educators share their thoughts on and preference for working in urban schools

because students of color need them, and they view their work as highly necessary to advance the lives of their students of color and increase their academic achievement (Farinde-Wu, 2018). Simultaneously, pre-service teachers share that their traditional teacher education program did not fully prepare them for their roles as classroom teachers—the lack of preparation and other reasons aided in their attrition. Gardner et al. (2020) noted that two Black women educators attended a predominately white institution (PWI) as the only Black students in their program. Both felt a sense of not belonging and not being understood. They also shared that the teacher preparation program was white-centered and taught white-centered pedagogy.

Another factor that encourages Black teacher retention is school placement. Black teachers are more likely to teach in high poverty and high needs with students from marginalized communities (Ingersoll & May 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2017). Hills-Brisbane (2005) describes "they [Black women educators] evolve out of the experiences with and developing consciousness of race-, gender-, and class-based oppressions and affirm the importance of grounding Black women's activism, in this case, seen in their teaching practices, within their cultural heritage" (p. 12). Black women educators will stay when treated as valued professionals (Farinde et al., 2016). Farinde et al. (2016) detail how administrative support, salary increases, and professional advancement impact Black women educators' intentions to remain in the classroom. Furthermore, Farinde et al. (2016) use Black Feminist Thought to frame the findings from the study, expressing that Black women educators' administrative support, salary increases over time, and professional advancement are necessities. Their retention can be impacted from the lens of intersectionality, specifically, how Black women educators

self-define, self-value, and resist oppression. Furthermore, Black women can share their lived experiences in K-12 education that emphasize supporting and expanding their retention.

Attrition is costly to institutions financially due to the human and institutional price tag (Fleener & Dahm, 2007). Institutions invest a lot into their teacher workforce beyond salary and benefits. The lack of retaining educators makes attrition a sizable issue in education, especially with teacher shortages being a considerable problem (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Garcia and Weiss' (2019) report details that teacher shortage is a critical and dire issue that most impacts high-poverty schools because these schools have the highest shortage of credentialed teachers. A substantial amount of literature highlights that teacher attrition is most common during the first three years as novice teachers or between 20-30 years in the classroom with veteran teachers (Tye & O'Brien, 2002). Historically, teachers who have taught 5-10 years are more likely to remain in education, but now trends show that these teachers are leaving too (Tye & O'Brien, 2002). Tye and O'Brien's study reveals growing trends in educators with 5-10 years of experience who are discontent and leaving the profession. Current scholarship reveals how Black women educators are recruited well but not retained, i.e., through attrition (Ingersoll, May & Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 2011; Ingersoll & May 2011; Ingersoll, May & Collins, 2017). This study seeks to add to the body of scholarship on the experiences of Black women educators 'attrition due to the underlying impact of the white supremacy culture in K-12 education.

Teachers of Color and Attrition

Reclaimin' My Crown As A Black Queen

There is limited research on the attrition of Black women educators (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Current studies pinpoint that Black women educators are leaving due to dissatisfaction with salary, lack of resources, job security, lack of classroom autonomy, and lack of collegial support (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond's (2017) study leads the discussion on Black women educator attrition. Their quantitative study utilizes data from the (year) U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics Schools and Staffing Survey, and Teacher Follow-up survey to study teacher attrition and turnover rates. Their findings included the main reasons Black women educators are leaving the field: dissatisfaction with salary, lack of resources, job security, lack of classroom autonomy, and lack of collegial support. In addition to outlining the reasons, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) provide strategies to reduce Black teacher turnover and attrition. Farinde-Wu and Fitchett's (2020) study explores Black women Educator's job satisfaction and attrition rate. The results reflect that job satisfaction correlates with teacher retention and attrition, especially in urban education. Yet, the study's limitations are the lack of exploration of the impact of a racially hostile environment and job satisfaction of Black women educators. However, the study does begin to acknowledge the intersectionality of Black women educators' retention and attrition.

Other reasons for general teacher attrition are retirement, school staffing action, family, personal issues, leaving to pursue another job, and dissatisfaction (highest percentage) (Ingersoll et al., 2017). Dissatisfaction includes, but is not limited to, conditions related to teachers' classroom autonomy and involvement in the school

decisions, especially regarding standardized testing and other accountability measures (i.e., teacher evaluation, accreditation, etc.) (Ingersoll, May, & Collins, 2017). The study further specified that the increase in recruitment of teachers of color is not reflected in schools because the growth is not across diverse types of schools. Numerous research studies outline strategies to increase representation of minority teachers and prevent attrition (Ingersoll & May 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2017). These strategies include providing comprehensive compensation packages that entail: housing and childcare; addresses the dissatisfaction with the lack of compensation for Black women educators; districts and state education department support programs that specialize in high-retention preparation programs of Black educators; and supporting the ongoing development of Black women educators through mentoring, improving working conditions and opportunities for professional development.

Summary

There is limited research on first-person account from a Black woman teacher who left the classroom and her experience teaching in a K-12 white supremacy culture. Black women educators' experiences range from surviving to thriving in the hostile racial climates of their classrooms and schools (Kohli, 2018), while navigating the interwoven oppression of IWSCP. This unending and interwoven system of domination in U.S. education forces Black women educators to maneuver internalized racism in various aspects of their personal and professional lives (hooks, 2013). Additionally, encounters with macro and microaggressions, implicit biases, and white supremacy thinking are present in the workplace and U.S society. (Brown et al., 2017; Kohli, 2018).

Reclaimin' My Crown As A Black Queen

Although research has sought to grasp why Black women educators stay or leave, few uncovered the intersection of Black women educator attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017), hostile racial environment (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018; Kohli, 2018), Black women educators job satisfaction (Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2018), and impact of white supremacy culture in K-12 education (hooks, 2012). In this initial review of the relevant literature, several recurring themes are present. First, is the impact of racism on the retention of global majority educators in K-12 education. Next, is the intersectional oppression of racism and sexism, among other forms of oppression that shape the lives of Black women in the workplace and contribute to their marginalization and dehumanization. This often occurs through racially gendered ideologies, tropes and controlling images that shape not only Black women's experiences and interactions but others too (Garza, 2019). Additionally, the historical context of education demonstrates that it operates in and is grounded in whiteness, which is often conveyed through the practices, policies, curriculum, and pedagogy in K-12 schooling Finally, all these factors point to the retention and attrition of Black women educators. This demonstrates a need for increased research, specifically based on the accounts of a Black woman who has departed this setting, given the ways Black women's voices and experiences have been invisible and silenced. Black Feminist Thought provides a theoretical framework to argue for more research from Black women educators on the impact of our attrition after teaching in a K-12 education white supremacist culture. In the next section, I provide an introduction and first chapter of the self-recovery book for Black women educators. The book relays the findings, discussions, and recommendations of my self-inquiry, with each chapter entailing a theme, personal narrative, and self-recovery tips for Black women

educators. I also provide strategies for educational leaders and policymakers wanting to retain, support, and create equitable workplace communities for Black women educators.

Reclaimin' My Crown As A Black Queen

Section Four—Contribution to Practice

Reclaimin' My Crown: A Self-Recovery Book for Black Women Educators

Preface

My first Queen was my mommy, and she shared with me stories that she used to tell my brother and me every night. She would just make them up on the fly. My momma gotta be the most innovative, intelligent, and creative person I know. These stories had very familiar characters and lessons we could apply to our lives. It was like these stories spoke to our souls and compelled us to be and do better. My momma's stories gave us our history, our stories, and our purpose. They gave us…us. I guess that's why I love to tell stories or just talk in general. Sharing, thinking, and processing can be a simultaneous occurrence for me. Only during the dissertation journey did I realize this skill's usefulness and reward in conducting research and embarking on my healing journey. My dissertation, a Black feminist critical autoethnography, explored why I left the classroom and the impact of white supremacist culture on my attrition in the K-12 setting. Inspired and moved by the works of S.R. Toliver[2] and Cynthia Dillard, something deep within me yearned to be true to Black storytelling. I spoke aloud my life's story, unraveling myself to uncover why I left teaching; and, furthermore, what the impact of white supremacy has been throughout my life, specifically the impact on my teaching experience.

Reclaimin' My Crown means owning and loving me. That's owning and loving my strengths, weaknesses, beauty marks, and scars. All of me! Mommy was the first person to tell me I was her beautiful Hershey chocolate crunch baby! And I believed her

[2] Quick note: I am not using APA style citations but following the method in which bel hooks uses in her writings for citing the intellectual property of others. This method seemed to align better with how I want to write this book.

hunty. Until white supremacy punched me in the face. As Black women, we are donned as Queens in Black culture, which is heavily tied to our identity, value, and worth. Nonetheless, white supremacy continually seeks to remind us that we are far from royalty. This is why I needed to see myself, telling myself, that my lived experience was real. Black women's experiences are often erased, rewritten, controlled, or ignored. Patricia Hill Collins revealed this to us through her book, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. She captured the ways that Black women's activism, perspectives, thinking, and experiences as sources of knowledge, although discounted and made invisible, contributed to a larger field of knowledge amongst us as Black women.

This book is an act of continued reclamation of my experience as I recognize how I have internalized white supremacy and contributed to my own silencing. I have always allowed others to control my life by allowing them to dictate my thoughts, feelings, and actions. Despite the affirmations and love demonstrated by my mommy, I did not feel comfortable being myself fully and authentically. My demeanor and disposition exuded freedom and independence from the judgment and acceptance of others, however, inwardly, my expression lay captive to that very acceptance. Thankfully, therapy helped me put strategies in place to combat the need for acceptance, which was the beginning of my healing and self-recovery.

I was first introduced to the term *self-recovery* by one of my scholar-sistas and prolific scholar, Stephanie Hernandez Rivera. As I shared with her my work, she highly recommended the powerful work of bell hooks *Sisters of the YAM: Black Women and Self-Recovery*, as a point of connection for my healing journey. hooks pens, "Though

many of us recognize the depth of our pain and hurt, we do not usually collectively organize in an ongoing manner to find and share ways to heal ourselves." hooks' words spoke to my soul and what I experienced these past four years in my doctoral journey. This offering that I was curating for Black women educators was more than self-care, it was self-recovery through radical healing. hooks leaned on the words of Audre Lorde from the essay titled, *Eye to Eye*, and the necessity for us, as Black women, to move beyond superficially loving ourselves and going deeper in our understanding by actively engaging in a process of reclamation. Through self-defining and self-valuing who we really are, we can come into closer alignment with our truest and most authentic selves; something Black women have often been denied the ability of. Feeling empowered and called to do this work, this book is the intentional act of reclaiming my being and owning who I am; a pursuit of self-recovery. This is a return to the beauty momma had affirmed in me; the beauty I once believed in. It builds on the work of hooks and her call for Black women to engage in disentangling ourselves in the pursuit of healing. This is not just for me, but for you too, *sis*. May this book be a conversation between us, a reclamation of ourselves, a journey together to seek peace, wholeness, and joy. As you read, may you hear and feel through my words the powerful proclamation of Congresswoman Maxine Walters, aka Auntie Maxine, "I am reclaiming my time."

Introduction

What Had Happened Was?

Black educators, mostly us, have been influential in advancing the education of Black people throughout history. Catastrophically, and I believe intentionally after the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* 1954 deemed "separate

but equal" unconstitutional, our Black children were forced to attend white schools with white teachers. Black teachers and school leaders were forcibly displaced and massively laid off as Leslie Fenwick details in *Jim Crow's Pink Slip: The untold story of Black Principal and Teacher Leadership*. Few Black teachers and administrators were allowed to teach in these white spaces. And the few that were allowed in these all-white spaces extensively wrestled with being treated equitably and as well-trained professionals, and much hasn't changed today. Black administrators were demoted to teaching positions even if they had doctorates. Unsurprisingly, Black folk aren't interested in teaching. By the 90s, roughly 26,000 Black women teachers had left as Valerie Hill-Jackson breaks it down in her writing of *And Then There Were None: Reversing the Exodus of Black Women from the Teaching Profession* about the considerable decline in the Black women educator and teacher workforce. Now, only 5% of the current teacher workforce are Black women. Historically and presently, there are reasons for this disruption in the Black teacher pipeline. Black students and teachers experience deliberate retaliation from the white community in integrated schools. Consequently, our Black children can internalize and adopt white symbols of pride and accomplishments that attack their Black identity. Or contrastingly, they can seek to resist whiteness so much that they come to believe that academic achievement is associated directly with whiteness, inevitably resisting against both. The detrimental decline of Black women teachers was not accidental and the ramifications of this are evident in the lives of Black folks, and everybody else too, especially in the area of academic achievement.

Making a Long Story Short

Notable researchers and scholars like, Abiola Farinde-Wu, Ayana Allen-Handy, Desiree Carver-Thomas, Linda Darling-Hammond, Rita Kohli, to name a few, have laid the foundation on why Black women educators stay or leave. In this book, I add to their work and others by deeply uncovering the intersection of being a Black woman teaching in a white supremacist culture in K-12 education. My research introduces a first-person account of a Black woman educator—that's me—and the impact on my attrition after teaching for eight years in a K-12 white supremacist culture. Through Black feminist critical autoethnography, I investigated the context of beliefs, thoughts, experiences, and motivations perpetuating gendered and racialized oppression towards me, a Black woman educator. With the help of this deeply reflective process, I better understand myself inside and outside the white supremacy culture within K-12 education. I wanted to share this with my fellow sistas in education. I am sharing my story to help fill some of the gaps of understanding about Black women educators' experiences and the intersectionality of racial and gender oppression.

My fellow Queens, this piece is for you! FUBU! I engaged in this exceedingly difficult work to share my reflective process with Black women educators, specifically those who may not have the time, resources, or desire to go on to pursue graduate education. From the depths of my soul, I want my work to create something I wish I had and needed; a guide and a medium to process, reflect, cope, heal, and care for myself as an educator. An unveiling of self-recovery. My hope and prayer are that this self-recovery guide provides healing and restoration for you, *sis*. We, as Black women educators must care for ourselves and each other.

Reclaimin' My Crown As A Black Queen

This book is a bearing of my soul and marrying of practice and theory. I share parts of my life's story and the three major themes I uncovered from my deep reflection and contemplation to conceptualize my experience as a Black woman educator, and the intersection of my Blackness, womanhood, and faith, and how it shaped my teaching career. In this book, I provide a section about my actual teaching experience. I assume inquiring minds would want to know. I share my story and how it aligns with current scholarship on why Black women educators are leaving the profession. I loved teaching, and still do! I loved my students, of course! I will always love my babies. They are not and never have reflected my departure from the field, something I wrestled with in writing this too. Nonetheless, my teaching experience was comprised of joyful and exceedingly challenging times. There was always an underlying and seemingly unseen force working against me, which I later learned to be white supremacy.

Within this book, I reflect, name, and describe our reality in education and how we can resist and reclaim our stories to heal. I ask reflective questions for deep reflection to journal and process. I share songs and quotes that spoke to me and to provide an extra layer of connection from which you can engage in reflection and potential healing. Lastly, I share some of my favorite strategies in engaging in self-recovery and self-care. 'Cause you can't do self-care if you ain't healed! Let's begin with naming that feeling, you know it. It's the not being enough, not being valued or appreciated, being overlooked, and overworked. Folk talking about you. You wondering why "they", basically everybody but you, don't see you and definitely don't treat you like they treat white women or even Black men. You keep asking yourself, 'why me?' Girl, grab your

coffee, tea, water, or your adult beverage, because I am about to tell you how to heal, self-recover and reclaim 'Yo Crown', Queen! *Buckle up, fam!*

Chapter 1: Name It but Don't Claim It:

Owning Our Identities & Intersectional Oppression

I refuse to be complicit in my own oppression! Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley

Suggested Songs: "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill" by Lauryn Hill &

"This is Me" by Keala Settle

Before we begin, press play on *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* by Lauryn Hill. This song sets the tone, because Queen L-Boogie talks about how the answer she was looking for was within her. She only had to own it. Let's look deep within ourselves and see what we find. The history and experiences of Black women is a foundational basis for us to begin to understand, the ongoing question, *why us?*

So, I am sitting in church, So Amazing Life Today (aka S.A.L.T), at the Armory in Columbia, MO, listening to a clip of a sermon by Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley titled, *Say No: A Call to Duty Part 2*. He was talking about Vashti! Y'all know she was the queen before Esther, but the king gave her dem walkin' papers because she wouldn't appear before the king and his homies after they have been partyin' and drinkin' for like weeks or days or something. Not giving a Bible study, I was just intrigued, because I never really fully understood why Vashti was like, "naww, I'm good." Apparently, these feastings were WILD! Kind of like them teacher hangouts that we don't go to 'cause we know somebody gonna get a call from HR on Monday, yeah one of those. Vashti was like, naww boo, I'm good! I am not about to come around prancing naked around drunk and disorderly men that see me as sexualized property, even if the king summons me. In

other words, she *knew* her worth, her oppressor and how he viewed her. She refused to be complicit in continuing her oppression by living up to what her oppressor said she was. As Black women in education, we have to know our worth and own it wholeheartedly and fully. We are usually the most educated, most experienced, the best dressed, and best fit for the task. And more than likely, we have worked overtime in all of these areas to be perceived as capable. We have to name the oppressor, *whiteness*[3] , the social construct of white superiority that someone with a lighter hue is human, superior and privileged, which furthers *antiblackness*[4], that belief and practice more melanin denotes inferiority, and subhuman. Within *white supremacy*, that those with less pigmentation are superior and should dominate society, economy, government, and all aspects of culture and belief systems. We must name this ideology and its impact on our lives and being, to then reject the lies and falsehoods around Black women and Black womanhood. We are not inferior and do not need to be controlled or dominated. Shine your Black Brilliance and Radiance, *sis*, and define who and what you are. Then like our sis Queen Vashti, reclaim your worth and value, so that we can then do so as a collective.

Addressing and naming Black women's oppression is convoluted, because we have two marginalized identities not including socioeconomic conditions and other marginalizing forces. Intersectionality. Intersectionality is a theory officially coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, but was birthed from the writings, activism, and intellect of many Black women, including Patricia Hill Collins, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Angela Davis,

[3] Read Brian Jones *The Social Construction of Race* https://jacobin.com/2015/06/racecraft-racism-social-origins-reparations/ to learn more about the social construct of race

[4] Read Michael Dumas *Against the Dark: Antiblackness in Education Policy* to learn more about AntiBlackness

Sojourner Truth, The Combahee River Collective, and many other women and political groups. This very nuanced theory cannot be conceptualized in just a few sentences. However, for this work, intersectionality is used to describe the intersectional oppression of racism and sexism as described in Crenshaw's work, where she outlines the interconnected and mutually reinforcing nature of racism and sexism around the experiences of Black women in a discrimination case. The law did not account for this intersection or the power dynamics and systems of domination that impact Black women differently. It's an age-old question, "why are Black women hated so much?" Furthermore, how do we continue to be so visibly-invisible. Black feminist scholars, such as Angela Davis, in her text *Women, Race & Clas*s, answers this beautifully by explaining in depth the nuances of Black women's history prior to enslavement and the horrendous abuse and attempted destruction of the Black woman's mind, body, and soul. In the words of Miss Celie from *The Color Purple*, "But I'm still here." It is Black women's legacy of resilience and resistance which has allowed us to not accept victimization, oppression, and domination. It is as enduring as it is tiresome. This emphasizes the importance of our ability to be soft with ourselves, to engage in the work of self-recovery in the face of a society where we are dehumanized and expected to overcompensate with an unwavering strength.

In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins details the importance of Black women's self-definition and self-valuation as efforts to address and heal from the detrimental effects of internalized psychological oppression on Black women's self-esteem. Self-definition is characteristics or attributes to oneself, while self-valuation is giving value to the identities and characteristics. Black women's self- definition and self-

valuation are critical because it encourages us to combat the damage of internalized psychological oppression on our self-esteem. This oppression has in part been the result of controlling images, that creates a double bind in which Black women continuously exist. Melissa-Harris Perry explores these images of sapphire (an aggressive and overly masculine Black woman, dumb, ignorant, need to be controlled or bossed Black woman), mammy (docile and subservient Black woman) and jezebel (hypersexual and promiscuous Black woman) in her text, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*. One of the most controlling images of Black women, is that of the angry Black woman. Whether they are or not, Black women are often perceived as upholding these images, while simultaneously being forced to continuously challenge them. Furthermore, these one-dimensional notions of Black womanhood result in shame and even shaming when Black women exemplify the stereotypes. The degree to which Black women internalize frequent assaults of controlling images and the negative and often socialized views of Black women requires inner strength. The cost of the inner strength that Black women subsume to challenge and contend with this controlling imagery can be more than we can pay. As a result, it is powerful when Black women define and create our own standards for Black womanhood.

I recall a few fond memories that helped me reimagine my identity as a Black woman which allowed me to place value on attributes about myself that I found meaningful. Growing up, down south, I remember the pressures of embodying what cultural and societal norms dictated I *should* be. I would even say I was somewhat conditioned to think my womanhood equated to "*having a hat on, being well spoken, being neatly dressed. Hair being neatly put together. All things about being that being a*

southern woman. At least how I was socialized to think… to emulate." Sadly, I did not always live up to this, and grappled with my identity. Attending a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) was imperative in helping me understand who I was and wanted to be. Attending an HBCU brought me joy and provided a space that valued and honored all of my identities. Reminiscing about my time at Oakwood I shared,

> *Attending an HBCU was all things that I needed it, it was the one place where the intersection of all my identities Black, a woman, a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, all came together in beautiful harmony. I got to be on campus where praying was encouraged and accepted. I was on campus where I was surrounded by Black brilliance, Black excellence. And it was awesome I loved it. I love that there was a sense of God's presence on the campus. I love that faculty would pray with you and invite you to their home to eat food. That God was not an afterthought but a forethought. That you could be so unapologetically Black and Adventist all at the same time. And it was awesome! I loved it!*

Nonetheless, this felt context specific, as I soon realized that this feeling of authenticity could not easily be translated to my teaching career. Not having a solid foundation for my identity, or rather how I claimed and valued my identities continued into my teaching career. Combined with white supremacy culture in K-12, made my teaching experience difficult and life-altering. Naturally, I began to internalize intersectional oppressive ideology.

Internalized intersectional oppression is when one believes the negative and often socialized views of Black women, including controlling images and stereotypical messaging. Throughout my life I battled these controlling images and stereotypes. When

retelling my childhood experienced, I recognized how much I grappled with my identity, sharing, *"I know I felt like I couldn't be me and I was trapped and oppressed. I'm sure I didn't encourage students to be themselves enough. We all were in enslaved to the system…"* Internalizing the beliefs and ideologies associated with my identity even made me feel that I had to return to an oppressive situation just to confirm it was not. This emerged during my last year of teaching: *"Oh, I forgot. I came back here [Redway] to do my internship for admin and no, he [principal] couldn't commit. But I tried. I tried. I tried to be a bigger person, but man, it's so hard to be a bigger person when the person you're dealing with is trash…they did not hold their end of the bargain, they dropped the ball and I didn't have much to give, but I just needed to finally be resolved that it wasn't a me problem. Let's say it's a 'them problem.'"* It was imperative to have support through mentorship and community to help navigate teaching as a whole, but especially when dealing with internalized intersectional oppression.

I yearned for mentorship and advising through my collegiate years and teaching experience. At Oakwood University, I remember thinking,

> *there was another Black Professor, who actually had taught…taught us methods of teaching English language arts…she was a lot nicer, and a lot more approachable. And she was coming from a lens of she taught real kids. I really love being in her class and how she gave us so much room to explore and express ourselves…and she promoted Black literature. So that was huge…I hadn't really seen up until this point in my program, an emphasis on using Black literature or characters with Black folk in them.*

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Even though it was only for a semester, the experience I had with a Black woman professor was profound. I needed more of this mentorship once I started teaching. As I conveyed in reflection, *"My kids were great, extremely well-behaved. I had no issues. But I wanted a mentor that could show me the way."* Fortunately, I finally met the best mentor, Mrs. Sandra K. Dixon. She is kind, thoughtful, generous, loving, supportive, and much more. Tears fill my eyes when I think of the magnitude of her love and support. She held me accountable and still does. A fond memory of the two of us:

> *So, then we, Dixon and I transitioned from teaching fourth grade together to teaching fifth together. And that probably was the best teaching year ever. Teaching side by side with my mentor, across the hall from each other. Man, we had full autonomy on how we taught and what we did. We had looped with the kids. We were winning science awards. We were rockstars and I loved it!*

Everyone needs a Sandra K. Dixon in their life and a part of their teaching career. Don't quit until you find her or be her! Mentorship while in the classroom is grossly important and having a supportive community is as well.

Building community is especially important to me and one of the first things I do when I am in an unfamiliar environment. When I started the EdD journey I intentionally built relationships with some of the dopest women of color scholars in PhD and EdD programs. I affectionately calling them my *doc sistas*. Patricia Hill Collins writes that, "The definition of community implicit in the market model sees community as arbitrary and fragile, structured fundamentally by competition and domination. In contrast, Afrocentric models of community stress connections, caring, and personal accountability." My doc sista scholars were the caring, loving, and supportive

connections and accountability I needed. These women of color, specifically Black women and Latina women are my sister-friends. They provided me a space to theorize intersectional oppression and engage in a practice, activism, and acknowledgment of our racially gendered experiences. Furthermore, they affirmed my ability to be, supporting me in naming the oppression, without allowing its impacts to hold my pursuit of self-definition hostage. I cannot imagine navigating life without them, especially higher education. Along with the community, understanding my identity and its intersectionality is paramount. One can struggle to find community without knowing oneself. Steadfastly I searched for connections and relationships because having people to journey alongside me outweighed dwelling on what I should have. The experiences with Black women leaders who did was quite impactful.

Bonus Section: How to build community when it's just you. One of the ways I build community is by putting myself out there. Attend events that speak to your soul and talk to people after the events to see if there is a connection. Volunteer! Find volunteer organizations that speak to your soul and get involved. Not only will it make you feel better, but again you will meet people that may share some of your values and identities. You also work towards self-definition as you identify a purpose that is meaningful to you and on your own terms. My other favorite spot to meet folk is in church or a religious activity. The church is such a pinnacle in the Black community that I feel like you will always find your people. Again, you do not need 10,000 friends. My mentor would always tell me that in life if you have one good friend then you are blessed. *Sis*, go get your one good friend and you'll be good!

Reflective Prompt and Questions:

Reclaimin' My Crown As A Black Queen

1. Tell your story and speak the truth! Tell of your experiences, traumas, feelings, hopes, and desires. You can journal, draw, audio record, Zoom record, select a song or songs that illustrates your life, write a poem, or engage in another artistic activity. Get that story out! It is the first step to self-recovery to acknowledge and own your story. Who are you? Describe yourself and your thoughts about Black womanhood. List characteristics of yourself and how you value these characteristics. What has brought you to where you are today? And what has kept you?
2. Critically examine your behaviors! List your most common behaviors and practices. Consider getting insight from those closest to you and even those with whom you have little interaction; it can give perspective. Then write beside them, your perspectives on these behaviors. How do you honestly feel about them? Are there ones you feel ashamed, proud, embarrassed, or guilty about? If so, attempt to connect to the why? After doing this, construct critical affirmations around each behavior, yes, even the ones that don't make you feel great. For example: I seek approval from others. Constructive critical affirmation: At some point, I felt that I needed to seek approval from others to be happy and survive and that is okay; as I work to heal, I am now focusing on doing what reflects my beliefs, morals, and convictions so that I may honor my worth and brilliance because it is valuable and enough!

Self-Recovery Tips for Black Women Educators:

Reclaimin' My Crown As A Black Queen

1. Engage in one exercise/activity this week from Self-*Care for Black Women: 150 Ways to Radically Accept & Prioritize Your Mind, Body, and Soul* or do one thing that helps you relax.
2. Identify potential therapists!

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Section Five—Contribution to Scholarship

Executive Summary of the Finding, Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

Using Black feminist critical autoethnography, I critically reflected on my experiences as a Black woman educator in a K-12 white supremacy culture and my decision to leave the classroom. Typically, in this section, it is a journal-ready document about the research. Instead in this next section, I will outline the findings, discussions, and recommendations in an executive summary format. These provides a means to summarize the data in a more traditional way. In comparison, the final product, a self-recovery book for Black women educators is more fitting for the topic and my passion and purpose as a practitioner. This entire work is an intentional act of reclaiming myself and owning who I am through storytelling and qualitative research.

To explore my experience as a Black woman educator and the factors that contributed to my departure from the K-12 setting, using the lens of Black feminist thought, I ground my inquiry in the following research questions: What was my experience as a Black woman in a K-12 white supremacy culture? What oppressive factors and dynamics ultimately influenced my decision to leave the classroom? The findings I uncovered are recurring themes of my experiences: (1) Oppression Based on Intersectional Identities, (2) Reoccurring and Persistent Effects of Trauma, (3) Liberation, Freedom, and Decolonizing My Mind. These themes conceptualize my experience as a Black women educator and the intersection of my Blackness, womanhood, and teaching career. Likewise, the discussion section will detail how scholarship and my story both illustrate commonalities amongst Black women teacher experience. These commonalities

are white supremacist thinking and action, Racial macro/microaggressions, Hostile racial climates, Black women educators' decisions to leave the education profession, such as poor working environment, burnout, and white supremacy culture. Based on my study's current research and summary of the findings, I then list recommendations for PK-12 educational leaders and policymakers to retain Black women educators better.

Key Findings

There were three major recurring themes, and each theme had several subthemes that, among them, share pertinent pieces of my story. The three themes that I uncovered from my story are:

1. Oppression based on Intersectional Identities
2. Reoccurring and Persistent Effects of Trauma
3. Liberation, Freedom, and Decolonizing the Black Woman's Mind

Oppression Based on Intersectional Identities. Being a Black woman educator, I am viewed through a bilateral view of societal ideations of negative stereotypical images and implicit biases (Collins, 2000) about the identity and value of Black women and their roles and contributions to society, education, and their families. These harmful practices of hate and discrimination based on skin hue and gender result in a complexity of Black women grappling with identity, worth, and the value of their work. Speaking to this complexity, grappling, and its impact on my teaching, I shared, "I know I felt like I couldn't be me and I was trapped and oppressed. I'm sure I didn't encourage students to be themselves enough. We all were enslaved to the system..." (B. Fatoma, Self-Interview Part 1 Childhood Experience, May 20, 2022). This quote explains how I felt trapped in education and oppressed by the K-12 white supremacy culture. Furthermore, I also

realized that I too, have perpetuated white supremacy by oppressing my students through white supremacist thinking and action. For example, I often corrected my Black and other students of color to use "proper English". I would correct them to use white supremacists' definition of standard English instead of the African American vernacular. Instead, I could have celebrated their language and taught them why their language was beautiful and meaningful and how it is similar to what white supremacy deems standard English. Another example is being overly critical of my students and their behavior by reminding them that they are not free to be children and make mistakes like their white counterparts. Instead, I could have explained how to disrupt the double standard, not uphold it.

To add, Black women and their experiences are too often erased or made invisible (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1981, hook, 1993) and education is not the exception. In the field of education this happens often and unfortunately it can begin in teacher preparation programs (Farinde-Wu & Griffen, 2019). Black women are not acknowledged and celebrated in society; thus this is reflected in education, a system that maintains societal norms. I recall the experience of one of a Black woman principal who I absolutely adored and how I witnessed her intersectional oppression and its impact on me.

> I remember my interview, the principal at the time. I loved her! I loved, loved, loved her. She just embodied what it meant to be a Black woman educator. I mean, they tried to destroy her. And I think that taught me really early on that I don't know that I could do this, be an administrator, or even continue in the field of education, because she did nothing wrong. She led. She turned the school around. And the gratitude for her labor was you don't have a job. And they gave a

> bull crap excuse about not turning the school around fast enough, blah blah blah. But it was bull crap because I'm like, 'You haven't even been to the school recently. If you haven't been in the school recently, then you can't tell us if it's been turned around or not.' So, let's start there. And it was disappointing. It was disappointing because it wasn't white folk, right? These were Black men removing her from her position. And it was just evident. You don't see her, you don't see her labor, you don't see her value. And I think that is indicative of not only the Black woman experience but also the Black woman experience in education. (B. Fatoma, Self-Interview Part 3 Teaching Experience, November 11, 2022)

Witnessing a Black woman be devalued and brutalized by the education system was heartbreaking as well as a living example of the detriment of intersectional oppression. Although, I did not intend to internalize her experience I did. I knew that if they did not value or see her than they did not value or see me. Not only did the system perpetuate intersectional oppression but used Black men to do it. Again, it illustrates the diabolical impact of intersectional oppression, because even if one shares one marginalized identity, Blackness, it does not alleviate the oppression from the other marginalized identities, women. This is the yoke of racism in schools and how it can weigh on Black women educators and positioning her in the intertwining system of imperialist white supremacist patriarchy (IWSCP) based of the societal views and beliefs around Black women and the value of their work (Collins, 2000). This theme, Oppression Based on Intersectional Identities, helped me to name what I was experiencing and

witnessing in other Black women in education and its divisive and lasting harm in white supremacist culture in education.

Reoccurring and Persistent Effects of Trauma. Throughout the retelling of my story, I noticed several reoccurring traumatic experiences spanning from childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. These traumatic experiences have impacted my life, including my teaching experience because my students' experiences were triggering me and did not realize it. For example, when one of my students came to school with marks on her neck from her mother's boyfriend slamming her down on the ground by her neck, it triggered hurtful memories of domestic violence from my childhood and adolescence. While listening to my student tell me what happened, I was instantly taken back to my own experiences with domestic violence. Like a caring and supportive teacher, I provided space for my student to process what happened to her, but I did not afford myself the same space to process what she shared or how her experience impacted me. Retelling my experiences helped me understand why I needed to provide a listening ear and a big hug. I recall,

> The traumatic experience of my childhood is what really shaped me to be an educator that really wants to work with students that have experienced trauma. Like I wanted to support my students. They just needed teachers that look like them and know what they'd gone through. So, I wanted to be that to my students. (B. Fatoma, Self-Interview Part 1 Childhood Experience, May 20, 2022).

As altruistic as that is, it is also deadly, especially for Black woman, when they do not process through their personal trauma, self-recover, and heal. This especially applies to racialized trauma from living in a white supremacy culture (hooks, 1993). While I

thought I was helping my little Black girl student by listening, I never modeled how to truly heal from traumatic experiences. Which is harmful to my students as well as myself.

Another time I was devastated by a student's traumatic experience of his mother being incarcerated. Like me, the student learned to not show emotion and push through the hurt and pain. I recall,

> so, we teachers were just going through like the kids. I remember another kid, he was actually one of my well-behaved, high performing kids. He struggled. He struggled because his mom was in jail. He was staying with the mom's boyfriend. He wanted to be with his daddy. He was literally taking my classroom apart" (B. Fatoma, Self-Interview Part 3 Teaching Experience, November 11, 2022).

The student began to be destructive, not because he was destructive or even wanted to destroy the classroom, he loved school, but he was hurting. It was challenging to watch any of my students struggle but it was exceptionally difficult when there was a progression. The student would start off happy, excited, and engaged in school but as their situation began to impact them mentally and emotionally. It was evident by their behavior that the difficult lived experience was too much of a burden. That day I tried to talk to him, but he refused to talk. Earlier that week, he just stood as I hugged him and never shed a tear. I did not cry wither outwardly but inwardly. I was reminded on the times in my childhood where I was powerless to my situation. Again, internalizing the trauma but not addressing it or healing from it. Exploring my reoccurring traumatic experiences helped me to uncover the of role trauma and healing as it is intertwined in my passion and drive to create change the education system that is based in white supremacy.

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Yes, students need teachers that share the same racial/ethnic background and lived experiences (Black Teacher Collaborative). However, if the teacher has not processed and healed from the trauma it can be detrimental to both the teacher and student, which was my experience. In some cases it can cultivate a culture of antiblackness and comparison to whiteness instead of healing from the racialized trauma (Dumas & Ross, 2016). Trauma coupled with the racialized trauma while living and working in a white supremacy culture can be destructive to the individual. I describe in analyzing my self-interviews and photographs, my mornings every day during my last year of teaching, "I would have full-blown panic attacks, meltdowns, because I did not want to come here [Redway school]. I did not want to come here, I did not want to be here, because I felt like I was not valued, I was not seen, and I was most certainly not appreciated" (B. Fatoma, Self-Interview Part 3 Teaching Experience, November 11, 2022). The racialized trauma of teaching in K-12 white supremacy culture was detrimental to my mental health and further created recurring and persistent trauma for me personally and professionally. Ultimately, the lack of healing from these experiences made it impossible to remain a teacher in the classroom. I had to leave for my survival. Although triggering and hurtful exploring my reoccurring traumatic experiences has helped me to uncover the role trauma and healing intertwined in my passion and drive to change the education system.

Liberation, Freedom, and Decolonizing My Mind. Deeply analyzing my story assisted me in crafting and making meaning of my experiences to redefine my life and purpose. I begin to experience liberation, freedom, and decolonization of my mind once I began to understand what oppressed me. Decolonization is recovering from the struggle of oppression, exploitation, and demoralization to dismantle patterns of thinking and

behavior that are dangerous and a threat to one's survival (hooks, 1993). Even though, I did not learn explicitly how to disrupt or challenge the current white supremacy k-12 culture, I innately knew and wanted to begin to liberate and decolonize my mind. During my third year in the classroom, this innate feeling of decolonizing and liberation began, I share in my awakening when I thought, "I wanted our kids just to receive just as much, if not more. I understand that they were dealing with parents that were teen moms, working parents, foster care, and parents that were getting assistance from the state, but that doesn't matter. Black children deserve the best the system has to offer." (B. Fatoma, Self-Interview Part 3 Teaching Experience, November 11, 2022). In this quote I am rejecting antiblackness thinking, a belief system that Black is evil, subhuman, and deserving of oppression and domination, and acknowledging what Black children deserve. Black children have always deserved the best the education system has to offer regardless of their circumstances, but white supremacy culture in K-12 dictates otherwise. Although the process of liberation started while I was still teaching in the classroom, during this study, I continued decolonizing my mind and healing from my teaching experiences in K-12 white supremacy culture to reclaim my identity and power.

I had to leave teaching in the classroom because I needed to escape the K-12 white supremacy culture. Again, I could not name it as such at the time, but attaining a doctorate provided space, time, and resources to uncover this. While working there, I understood that I could not change the K-12 education system, so I proclaimed, "And as a teacher, I just didn't see how I could break those chains from within. And so, getting a doctorate, beyond just it being the highest education or degree possible. But it adds not only letters behind my name but more power to what I'm saying. And we'll open doors

that I hope will be able to finally break these chains." (B. Fatoma, Self-Interview Part 4 Educational Leadership outside the Classroom and Graduate School Experience, January 22, 2023). Breaking those chains means eradicating white supremacy and its ramifications. For me, this looks like gaining my social capital and power to be in spaces that are making decisions about the K-12 education system. As meaningful as the classroom teacher's role is, it does not always translate to dismantling a white supremacist culture that harms everyone, especially those most marginalized. Being in a position of power and influence, I believe I can exact change. This study does that in several ways. One, by adding to the body of scholarship by providing a counternarrative to the pervasive societal beliefs and ideologies about Black women in education and addressing the interlocking oppression of Black women in education. Consequently, it also liberates and brings awareness of the oppression of Black men and white women. Hopefully, it impacts the attrition of all teachers because it addresses the most marginalized teacher, the Black woman educator. White supremacy undergirds oppression and domination and breeds white supremacist thinking and action, and this is detrimental to everyone. Liberating and decolonizing my mind is quite beneficial to me but it helps decolonize the minds of others and liberate them too. Reflecting, I remember having a conversation with another Black women teacher that was my colleague that being a K-12 educator was not sustainable. Again, I could not name the or understand why I knew I would not be able to teach long, specifically, I shared I would last five years. Through research and deeply reflection, I expound on internalizing racial oppression and leaving the first school I taught. I reflect and confess,

> And so, it's hard to reconcile that I became what I did not want to be. And I think ultimately that's why I left because although my students enjoyed themselves, they could not see the impact of the internal turmoil of me being in a place where I didn't feel safe, I didn't feel valued. I didn't feel like I can be my authentic self, that's why I left...I wanted to feel valued. I wanted room to be myself or even room to figure it out. And I wanted support. And now I'm realizing because of that experience, that's what I was looking for throughout my whole teaching career. And ultimately, when I did find it, it was too late. I was burnt out. So this is where it all started. This is where it all began." (B. Fatoma, Self-Interview Part 3 Teaching Experience, November 11, 2022).

During my tenure in the classroom, I began the journey of decolonizing my mind and did not know it back then. It is a journey, but I am progressing, and this body of work was a major conduit of the process and journey. Likewise, while also learning and reflecting on my experiences and critically evaluating and analyzing scholarship through this process I continue to experience deeper freedom and liberation. This study provided the means to analyze my story utilizing core themes from Black Feminist thought as an analytic tool. Now, I am experiencing freedom and decolonization of my mind, thoughts, and actions. Similarly, I can help others experience this as well and continue to build upon current scholarship. The themes and analysis of this study strongly agree with the current literature on this topic.

Discussion

Current scholarship is developing around understanding and unpacking why Black women educators leave education (Farinde-Wu et al., 2020) and their experiences

in teaching in the white supremacist culture in K-12 education (hooks, 2012). Several themes emerge throughout the literature in the context of this study and strongly correlated with my lived experience. The themes from the literature review were:

- white supremacist thinking and action (Fultz, 2004; hooks, 2012)
- Racial macro/microaggressions (Solorzano,2012)
- Hostile racial climates (Kohli, 2018)
- Internalized racial oppression (Collins, 2000)
- Black women educators' attrition (Campoli & Conrad-Popova, 2017; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017)

During my eight years teaching in the classroom, there were distinct experiences of white supremacy and racial microaggressions and macroaggressions that created hostile racial climates. Consequently, I internalized these racialized and gendered assaults and believed them. After those eight years of a culmination of degrading abuse, I left teaching. Although, I did not have the verbiage to name these things I had the thoughts, feelings, emotions, and trauma from these experiences. Ultimately, I did leave teaching because of the ramifications of white supremacy culture. This section will expound upon how my lived experiences teaching in the white supremacist culture of K-12 education aligns with the current research.

White supremacy was presence was felt in the words, actions, and culture of the schools I taught at and attended growing. Naturally, I did not know it was white supremacy, but I knew I felt schools regardless of the location or level was not welcoming to me. I felt I did not belong. Recalling the impact of white supremacy in my

childhood experiences, I share, "When I say the institution and I'm talking about whiteness and white supremacy and saying this not cultivating individuality, not cultivating space for the students to be authentically and unapologetically themselves" (B. Fatoma, Self Interview Part 1 Childhood Experience, May 20, 2022). During this study I learned to name the impacts of white supremacy. One particular impact is the promotion of behaviors associated with whiteness (Dillard, 2020). Which then leads to tokenization and microaggressions towards Black students (Allen et al., 2013), criminalization of Black youth (Garza, 2014). That was my experiences as a student in K-12 and a teacher. I thought that as a teacher, I was being a good teacher if I taught my Black students specifically how to assimilate in speech, behavior, and dress. It is through this study I have unpacked the meaning of my experiences and how I had internalized the hate of blackness, my blackness. The mental anguish (Lee & Thomas, 2022) of internalizing someone else's hate was unbearable and I had to leave teaching.

First, I became what I did not want to be. I became the same teacher I had in K-12 schools. Teachers that promote behaviors associated with whiteness (Dillard, 2020), tokenization and microaggressions towards Black students (Allen et al., 2013), criminalization of Black youth (Garza, 2014). I can argue that I was not nearly as offensive as my white counterparts but it was enough that it created internal turmoil. I did not feel safe or valued, likewise I could not create a safe environment that saw my students as they are not who I was forcing them to be. Although, as my teacher career progressed it was difficult to heal from the initial trauma of my first school. My teaching pedagogy evolved to be see students as individuals that needed room to cultivate their

brilliance, gifts, and talents. Again, not fully healing from my first year of teaching led to the continuing of harmful practices in my pedagogy.

Another example of the impacts of white supremacy in K-12 creating racially hostile working environment with microaggressions and lack of sense of feeling safe and seen. I am expounding on how I felt at my fourth school, where I had the best Black women teacher mentor in the world and the most supportive Black women principal in the world. Yet, even with such great support and love the impacts of white supremacy is still felt when I share,

> *"But it also bothered me that the system was still so broken and that after all the stuff that we were doing, it didn't matter because of test scores. It didn't matter because we were trying to get provisional accreditation while the district worked on accreditation. It just always felt like what you did was never enough"* (B. Fatoma, Self-Interview Part 3 Teaching Experience, November 11, 2022).

At this point in my career, I am a 5^{th} or 6^{th} year teacher, and I have managed to stay in education beyond the time people typically leave. This is my 4^{th} school and even though we, Black women teachers and principal are working tirelessly to ensure students are achieving academically, my work and my effort does not feel like it is enough. The notion of not feeling like my work is not enough is layered with years of intersectional oppression, white supremacist thinking and action, racial microaggressions, racially hostile working environments and other attending school and teaching in white supremacy.

Research has sought to grasp why Black women Educators stay or leave, few have uncovered the intersection of Black women Educator attrition, hostile racial

environments, Black women educators job satisfaction, and impact of white supremacist culture in K-12 education. I share my experience that includes the intersection of being Black, women, and educator in K-12 white supremacy culture. Black Women Educators encounter white supremacy at work, home, and community (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2012. As a matter of course, this constant interaction greatly transforms Black Women Educators' lives and affect their attrition in the education workforce. It did for me.

Recommendations

Based on my critical Black feminist autoethnography and in alignment and support from existing research, I am providing recommendations for educational leaders and policy makers. In order to increase the retention of Black women educators the following is required and greatly needed:

1. Educational leaders, and policymakers wanting to retain Black women Educators should:
    a. Provide opportunities for Black women Educators to create and build their own community
    b. Create space and an environment for Black women to be authentic without whiteness oversight. These should be social and professional spaces.
    c. Hire and retain Black Women administrators and mentor and give space for her to find one that she feels provides what she needs
    d. Acknowledge and actively work on your implicit biases.
2. Recruit Black women educational leaders because they will:
    a. Support the Black woman educator

   b. Show up for the Black woman educator which can include being a literal barrier of protection, shielding her from the impact of white supremacy.
   c. Advocate for themselves and others to address their trauma to be healthy and whole Black women educators.

3. Black women educational leaders and administrators address your trauma and heal in order to be healthy and whole Black women leaders. Black women hurting other Black women is a direct result of internalized intersectional oppression.
4. Non-Black women educational leaders and administrators:
   a. Do no harm! Trauma can last in the first few years of teaching.
   b. Address your own implicit biases and continually and consistently address them.
   c. Aim to leave a positive experience or impression, not a traumatic or oppressive one.
   d. Proactively shield her from the impact of white supremacy.
   e. Address their trauma to be healthy and whole Black women leaders.

Conclusion

Intersections of my experiences and the recurring themes from the research detail why I left teaching and provide additional context on why other Black women educators leave the teaching profession. Racism in schools is covert and unassuming, making it hard to identify racist actions (Kohli et al., 2017). The subtlety of this *new racism* destroys K-12 and greatly affects students and teachers of color (Kohli et al., 2017), especially Black women teachers. Highlighting some personal accounts of how my story shows how literature aligns with the experience of Black women educators. Specifically,

how poor working environment, burnout, white supremacy, white supremacist thinking and action, and hostile racial climates negatively impact the attrition of Black women educators. Furthermore, sharing my story provided a personal and human lens to what the literature is uncovering and exposing about the experiences of Black women teachers and why they leave teaching in the classroom.

Reclaimin' My Crown As A Black Queen

Section Six— Scholarly Practitioner Reflection

Introduction

I am a Black woman, educator, and authentic leader, and I have been greatly influenced by my upbringing, socialization, K-12 and higher education educational experiences, and my career. This influence has shaped my identity and, thus, my practice as an educational leader and my scholarship. Race is a social construct designed to maintain white supremacy and domination socially and economically. Womanhood is also viewed as being inferior or less valuable as a man. Authentic leadership consists of a leader that knows themselves well and authentic leaders are constantly learning, and very transparent about who they are and their capabilities. Conducting a Black feminist critical autoethnography provided the research-based framework to deeply reflect on my life and the intersections of being a Black woman in K-12 education. In this section, I will share how the dissertation process has helped me to name and heal from my experiences from my intersectional identities and thus influenced my leadership.

Owning My Intersectional Identities and Leadership

The dissertation process has provided a means for me to further understand myself and own my multiple marginalized identities to inform my leadership. Specifically, this dissertation journey has greatly aided in my self-recovery and naming and healing from traumatic experiences in living and working in a white supremacist culture. Being a Black woman is multifaceted and layered. I grapple with who I am, whom society says I am, whom my family thinks I am, and how the world has been socialized to view and value me. Consequently, how I engage in my practice as a leader is greatly influenced by all of it coupled with my lived experiences. Now, I have fully

embraced all my identities, and I self-identify and value my identities. I am also not naïve that others may or may not subscribe to how I identify and value myself, but I no longer allow that to control how I show up. When I engage with people professionally or personally, I am unapologetically myself and decide how much I want to share. This is the most liberating part. I decide! Not my family, lived experiences, society or anyone or anything else.

During this dissertation journey, I have had the privilege to critically examine my life. I have reclaimed my identities, including detailing a history that begins with royalty and beauty in Africa. Fighting and refusing to be captives and enslaved. Being forcefully and brutally sent to a strange land but survived and thrived in unbearable circumstances. While not settling but always learning, teaching, growing, and finding ways out of seemingly no way for the liberation of mind, body, and spirit. My Blackness is a rich history of joy, pain, sorrow, hope, and overcoming. Like my Blackness, I reclaimed my womanhood and my Blackness as a gift to bring more life into my Black heritage, literally and figuratively. With my womanhood, I can birth nations of beautiful and mighty Black people as well as prominent and system-shattering ideas, movements, intellectual property, and culture.

Building a Community of Woman Scholars as A Budding Scholar

Being a Black woman scholar and identifying as such has been empowering as well as liberating. During the dissertation process, I was able to read a myriad of Black women's scholarship that spoke to my soul. Most times if not all the time, when I was reading Black women scholarship like Juanita Simmons, bell hooks, Patricia Collins, Angela Davis, Audra Lorde, Cynthia Dillard, and Abiola Farinde-Wu, to name a few, I

felt like we were having a conversation and that like bell hooks (1993) describes, I experienced healing through reading and listening, through audiobooks, the powerful and meaningful words. Their words empowered me to create my own scholarship, and the dissertation process provided the structure and resources to write and write well.

Along with the access and time to immerse myself in scholarship, I have also met amazing people along the way. Being at a large, predominately white institution, it was critical to find community. Thankfully, an amazing mentor, Dr. Ty-Ron Douglas, recruited me. He connected me with some of the most intelligent and phenomenal people I ever met, beginning with Dr. Dena Lane-Bonds. Dena was a PhD student in the same department as me, and she gave great tips and strategies on reading and understanding theory, scholarship, and higher education. I still remember her breaking down intersectionality to me in the car on the way to campus. She then introduced me to other amazing women of color scholars, who became my doc-sistas, Dr. Stephanie Hernandez-Rivera, Dr. Tricia Joseph, and soon to be Drs. Ekaete Udoh and Adrianna Gonzalez. We are publishing together and presenting working on some other work. Also, the culture of collaboration in the dissertation process was also instrumental in my development as a scholar. During coursework, I was able to learn from some amazing faculty and fellow graduate students. Notably, the Dream Team, as we call each other. Andrea, Robin, Tom, and Heidi supported me and at times pushed me to be in our group research project. One of the projects we published. Another strong support, was my study partner soon-to-be doctor Lucy Douglas. We read numerous research together and discussed it to help us process the information. I would not be the scholar or writer I am today without her support. The dissertation process challenged me mentally, physically, emotionally, and

spiritually but having caring faculty, hardworking friends and colleagues, and access to resources that aided in my success made the process bearable.

Conclusion

The dissertation process has immensely developed me as a leader and scholar. It has provided time, space, resources, and access to explore how being a Black woman, educator, and authentic leader has shaped me and others. I had the privilege of studying myself and healing and growing, and now flourish in my identity, purpose, and joy. I recognize this is a privilege to be able to write a Black feminist critical autoethnography about my life and the intersections of being a Black woman in K-12 education. Naturally, I want to gift this to other Black women educators by adding my work to the list of scholarship that provides them the time, space, and resource to self-recover and heal.

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Table 1

My Teaching Experience (Teaching Year Experience by Year)

Reign Year	School Name	Leader Names	Leadership Ethnicity	Grade Levels	Teacher Tenure	Work environment
1st **(2011-2013)**	Midwest Parochial School (MPS)	MPS Principal	Black female	K-8	2 years	Poor work conditions, white-centered curriculum
		MPS Superintendent	Black female			
2nd **(2013-2014)**	Urban Early Childhood Development Center(UECDC)	UECDC Director	Black female	Birth-Age 5; K-12	1 year	Poor work conditions, antiblackness, internalized racism
		UECDC Assistant Director	Black female			
3rd **(2014-2018)**	Welch Elementary School	Principal Queen (2014-2015)	Black female	K-6	4 years	White-centered curriculum, institutionalized racism, internalized racism
		Assistant Principal Laizze (2014; 2015)	Black female			
		Dr. Smooth (2014-2015)	White male			
		Dr. Bugsby (2015-2018)	White woman			
		Dr. Lois (2016-2018)	Black female			
		Mrs. Chitown (2017-2018)	Black female			
	Caboose Elementary	Dr. Bey (2017-2018)	Black female	PreK-6th	1 year	White-centered curriculum, institutionalized racism, internalized racism
		Mrs. Chitown (2017-2018)	Black female			
4th **(2018-2019)**	Redway Elementary	Principal Tyson	White male	K-5th	1 year	Hostile racial climate, White-centered curriculum, institutionalized racism, anti-Blackness
		Assistant Principal Rivas	Latina Female			

Note. My teaching experience is organized in four phases titled reigns. Each reign names the school, the leaders, their ethnicity, the number of years I taught at the school, and a brief description of the work environment.

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Theory: Black Feminist Thought

Epistemology: Transformative/Critical

Research Questions: What was my experience as a Black woman in a K-12 white supremacy culture? What oppressive factors and dynamics ultimately influenced my decision to leave the classroom?

Part 1 Childhood Experiences

1. Describe yourself: background, education, family, upbringing.
2. Describe the culture of growing up in the South.
3. Describe incidences during your childhood of the intersection of power and oppression in school? Neighborhood? Culture?
4. Reflecting, are there implications of white supremacy culture in your life? Pk-12 schooling experience?
5. What are some memories, childhood stories, or childhood experiences, which you believe created a desire to teach,
6. While in preschool, K-5, 6-8, 9-12, how many Black female educators do you recall having? Discuss some of your experiences.

Part 2 Undergraduate and young adult

1. Describe your undergraduate experiences attending an HBCU.
2. Why did you decide to pursue education?
3. Describe the culture of Oakwood University?
4. Where are there any aspects of White supremacy culture? If so, describe them.

5. How did you feel when you encountered your 1st Black female professor in the Education department?
6. Discuss your teacher preparation program. Did you feel prepared to teach in a White supremacy culture?
7. Describe your student teaching experience and preservice observations with Black female educators. Did the schools perpetuate white supremacy culture? If so, how?
8. Describe incidences during your undergraduate of the intersection of power and oppression in the institution's culture.
9. Describe incidences of the intersection of power and oppression in your experiences as a preservice teacher in schools.

Part 3 Teaching experience (5 schools)

1. Describe my teaching experience.
2. Explain why you left?

Part 4 Educational Leader outside the classroom and EdD student

1. Describe your graduate school experience.
2. Why did you decide to pursue a doctorate in education?

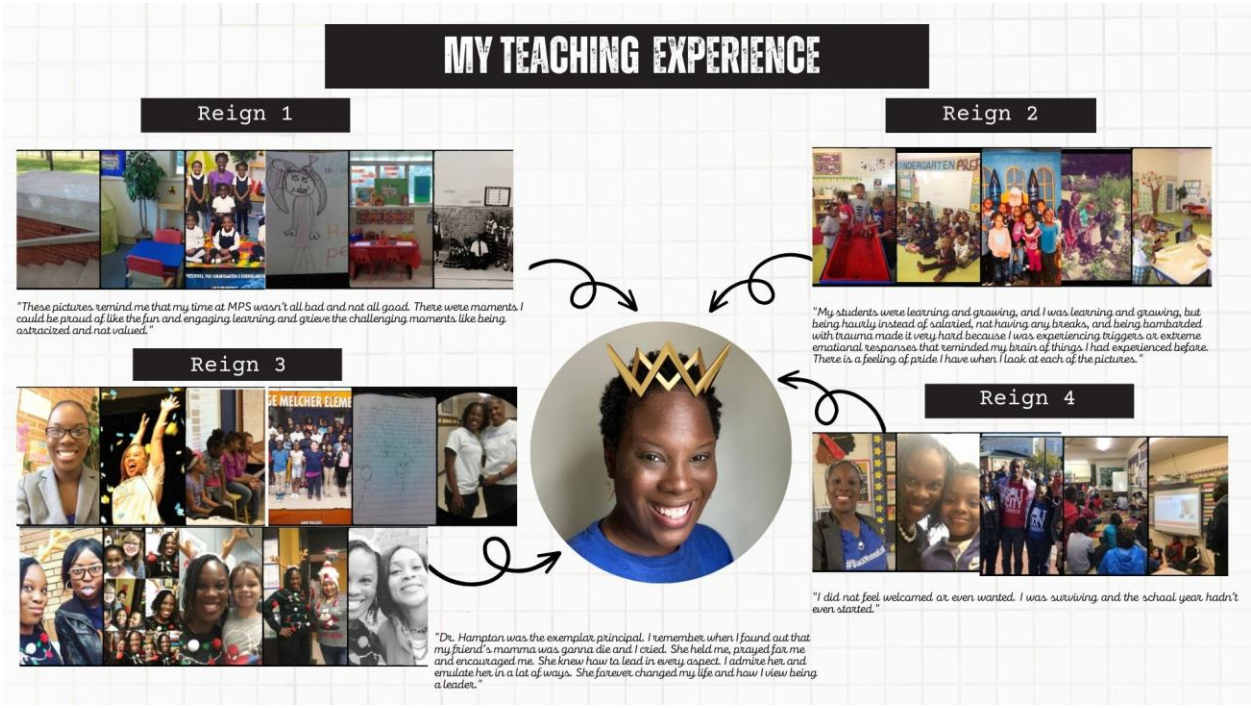
Appendix B

Observation Protocol

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Theory: Black Feminist Thought
Epistemology: Transformative/Critical
Research question: What was my experience as a Black woman in a K-12 white supremacy culture? What oppressive factors and dynamics ultimately influenced my decision to leave the classroom?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Date, Time
Location:
Observer: Brittany Fatoma</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Location Name Layout

Insert photos of the location</td></tr>
<tr><td><u>Descriptive Notes</u>
(Describe all aspects of the space)</td><td><u>Reflective Notes</u>
(Describe thoughts, feelings, beliefs about the space)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Field Notes
(summarize description and reflective notes)</td></tr>
</table>

Appendix C


MY TEACHING EXPERIENCE
Reign 1
"These pictures remind me that my time at MPS wasn't all bad and not all good. There were moments I could be proud of like the fun and engaging learning and grieve the challenging moments like being ostracized and not valued."
Reign 2
"My students were learning and growing, and I was learning and growing, but being hourly instead of salaried, not having any breaks, and being bombarded with trauma made it very hard because I was experiencing triggers or extreme emotional responses that reminded my brain of things I had experienced before. There is a feeling of pride I have when I look at each of the pictures."
Reign 3
"Dr. Hampton was the exemplar principal. I remember when I found out that my friend's mamma was gonna die and I cried. She held me, prayed for me and encouraged me. She knew how to lead in every aspect. I admire her and emulate her in a lot of ways. She forever changed my life and how I view being a leader."
Reign 4
"I did not feel welcomed or even wanted. I was surviving and the school year hadn't even started."

VITA

Brittany Elise Fatoma, formerly Wimberly was born on the lovely later after of October 14, 1987. She identifies as a Black woman and she serves in various roles leader, activist, educator, wife, and mother. She is a proud southern belle from Fayetteville, North Carolina. After attending grade school in North Carolina, Alabama, and Texas, she graduated from South San Antonio High School in San Antonio, Texas. She later attended a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) Oakwood University in Huntsville, Alabama. She received her undergraduate degree in Elementary Education, and later attended La Sierra University, and graduated with a master's degree in educational administration and leadership. She taught for eight years as an Elementary school teacher and Instructional coach in a parochial school in Kansas City, Kansas, as well as Kansas City Public Schools (KCPS) and Columbia Public Schools (CPS) in Missouri. While obtaining her EdD in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri (MU), in 2021, she won MU's College of Education Graduate Student Leader of the Year award; in 2022, she won the Mary Gutherman Award for Community Engagement. In 2023, she was awarded Mizzou 18, one of the highest honors bestowed to MU graduate students for leadership, scholarship, and commitment to involvement on campus and in the local Columbia community. The award she cherishes the most is the "40 under 40" award from Oakwood University, acknowledging the impact of alumni under age 40 that have made remarkable contributions after graduation Oakwood University.

She holds multiple roles both professional and personal. Presently she is a graduate assistant for Academic Access and Leadership development and a perinatal

doula. A perinatal doula is a certified and knowledgeable birth worker that supports and advocates for the pregnant mother from prenatal to postpartum. During 2022, she served as the SALT (So Amazing Life Today) Fellows Director, an organization that supports individuals to seize opportunities to have an extraordinary life physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. The SALT Fellows program is a post-baccalaureate program that provides early career and recent graduates an opportunity to combine their profession and their faith through serving communities in the urban core of Columbia, Missouri. Previously in 2019, she served as the Executive Director of Worley Street Roundtable (WSR) and the founder of the "I See You" Teachers of Color Support Network (TCSN). WSR is a grassroots and nonprofit organization that partners with the local school district, parents, teachers, and community members to address the educational disparities and disproportionalities in the lack of success and access amongst students of color in Columbia, MO. "I See You" TCSN is a WSR initiative that seeks to support and retain Black and Brown educators in Mid-Missouri. Under her leadership, WSR has won two awards: the 2021 MU Celebrates MLK Community Award and the 2020 Missouri National Education Association's Horace Mann Award for Civic Organization Achievement.