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Jones, Makaela

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Enactment of Care, Labor & Devotion: Black Women Teaching for Liberation

By

Makaela Elizabeth Jones

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requirements for the degree of

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in

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University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Travis J. Bristol, Chair

Professor Tolani A. Britton

Professor Erin M. Kerrison

Spring 2026

Enactment of Care, Labor & Devotion: Black Women Teaching for Liberation

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By

Makaela Elizabeth Jones

Abstract

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Since the desegregation of schools, Black children have been punished for not assimilating to White supremacist, heteropatriarchy in their traditional U.S. school context. For those Black children who grow up to become teachers, there is a synergy between their teaching experiences and (mis)treatment of Black children. This qualitative study utilizes semi-structured interview data to explore the beliefs and standpoints of Black women teachers (BWT) as they seek to dignify BIPOC children. Through a frame of anti-Blackness and Black feminist liberation, many Black women conceptualize a loving gaze and politicized praxis as they prioritize racial healing. Some BWT embody radicalism and collective love in their pedagogy, which creates spatial havens for youth empowerment amongst constant threats of pathologization and exclusion. Not only do these actions manifest what the literature calls Black educational fugitive space, but also, they orient Black children towards an Afrocentric empowerment and politicized consciousness. Based on interviews with seven BWT working in the Bay Area, California, I question how they conceptualize their teaching practices and positionality as ways of enacting freedom and resisting anti-Blackness.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	i
Acknowledgments	ii
Chapter 1. Why Black Women Teachers?	5
1.1 The Importance of Black Teachers	8
1.1.1 Black Teachers' Impact on Black Students.	10
1.2 Theoretical Framework: Dillard's endarkened feminist epistemology	14
1.2.1. Intersectionality Theory	16
1.2.2 Intersection of Education and Radical Black Feminism	16
Chapter 2. Review of Black Women's Pedagogy, Black Educational Fugitive Space, and Politicized Care.	18
2.1 The Peculiarities of Black Women Teachers	18
2.1.1 A Dilemma of Enacting Afrocentric and Feminist Practices.	19
2.2 Black Feminist Activism as Pedagogy.	21
2.3 Politicized Care	24
2.3.1 Contextualizing Politicized Care.	24
2.3.2 Politicized Care in BWT Literature	26
2.3.2.1 Integration of Critical Consciousness and Ancestral Pride	26
2.3.2.2 Radical Intentions to Humanize.	27
2.3.2.3 Practical Manifestations of Political Care Praxis.	28
2.4 Black Educational Fugitive Space	29
Chapter 3. Methods	31
3.1 Research Design	31
3.2 Data Collection	32
3.2.1 Study Setting	33
3.2.2 Participants.	33
3.2.3 Participant Background	34
3.3 Procedures	36
3.4 Data Analysis	38

3.5 Positionality	37
3.5.1 Limitations	39
Chapter 4. A 2-Pronged Praxis Towards Dignifying BIPOC Students.	41
4.1 “I’m Everyone’s Auntie”: Conceptualizing Politicized Care	43
4.1.1 Reconstructing Appropriateness to Center Nondominant Notions of Success.	46
4.1.1.1 Direct Quarreling with Mainstream Schooling Practices.	48
4.1.2 Prevailing and Complicated Kinship Relations	51
4.1.2.1 Resisting Anti-Black, Racist Stereotyping	54
4.1.3 Generational Ties and Parent-Teachers	56
4.2 “Y’all Stick Together”: Constructing Black Educational Fugitive Space	58
4.2.1 “Not Just My Responsibility”: Devotion and Care are Laborious	61
4.3 Lessons for Teacher Practice.	64
Chapter 5. A Black Feminist Call to Humanize BIPOC Children	67
5.1 Summary of Dissertation Arc	67
5.2 Empirical Implications: Decolonizing Assumptions Underlying Race Congruency.	70
5.2.1 The Disappearing Line: Negotiating Professional and Personal Identities	71
5.3 Policy Implications: Centering Relationality as Best Practice	74
5.4 Practical Implications: Holding Our Water, Sharing the Labor of BWT.	75
5.4.1 Politicized Care to Politicized Rage	78
5.5 Concluding Remarks	79
5.5.1 Personal Testimony.	81
References	82
Appendices.	91

Chapter One: Why Black Women Teachers?

I turn to Black women educators because of my personal connection to my first Black teacher, Ms. Ayanna Carter, and the historical relics that Black women teachers have put forth since the Reconstruction Era (Neal-Stanley, 2023a). This study is inspired by the essence of political activism in their roles as teachers and school leaders in women such as Mary McLeod Bethune, Fannie Lou Hamer, Sojourner Truth, and countless others. The work of Black women teachers (BWT) has complicated the structures of traditional schooling through political and radical acts to support the self-actualization of Black youth (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Watson, 2018). These approaches are critical given the current context of U.S. legal and school policy landscape, which is known to mistreat and pathologize non-dominant (e.g., non-White, neurodiverse, multi-lingual, etc.) students. However, it should not be assumed that the praxis of BWT is fortuitous or simply because of their shared racial background. Scholars have identified a deep devotion to combine experiential knowledge with their pedagogy that is, at times, unique to their positionality as Black women (Dillard, 2020; Duncan, 2022; Obaizamomwan-Hamilton, 2023; Stanley, 2022). From bell hooks (1994) to Bettina Love (2023), Black feminist agendas in education have called for a shift away from traditional teacher approaches and towards a decolonized, emotional teaching praxis. The scope of my dissertation includes the humanistic work of Black women teachers that integrate a feminist consciousness in their approaches to teaching.

BWT's work can be traced from before *Brown v. Board of Education*, when Black teachers taught from a position of self- and collective-definition in resource-deprived, but, culturally-rich learning space (D'Amico et al., 2022). Moreover, scholars have pointed out that Black teachers had their greatest representation in the workforce before desegregation, which

was theorized as an unintended consequence of *Brown* (Neal-Stanley, 2023b). The remanence of these civil rights violations and anti-Black racism can be attributed to the current demographic trends in the U.S. teacher workforce, pointing to an underrepresentation of Black people. In the last 30 years, Black teachers have only increased by 29% of their overall representation, compared to a 373% and 263% increase for Latinx and Asian teachers, respectively (Ingersoll et al., 2022). Currently, Black teachers represent about 6% of the K-12 teacher workforce and this is a decrease from their proportion of the workforce in 1990, which was 8.6% (Bristol & Carver-Thomas, 2024). The foreground of this study assumes that BWT were crucial to education for Black children historically (Neal-Stanley, 2023b) and, thus, they provide reparations and mitigate children's suffering presently (Damas, 2014). Though, the state of the workforce for Black teachers and the personal and professional impact of their practices are often siloed. I seek to learn about the rationale behind BWT approaches to teaching Black children and how this resonates with their pursuit of educational justice.

Black women, in the context of this study, are being located through the same intersectional lens that inspired Kimberle Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality theory. In education, I theorize that Black women face particular tensions that are unacknowledged in mainstream conversations about reformatory pedagogy. This is often missed in literature on Black teachers, which sometimes appears more preoccupied with the plight of Black men. Scholars describe Black men teachers as being forced to conform to heteronormative patriarchy, which reinforces expectations to take on emotional tolls of being an other-father or disciplinarian (Brockenbrough, 2015; Sandles, 2018;). In fact, a meta-analysis on Black men teachers revealed that there is a growing sense of ambivalence towards taking these additional roles (Young & Young, 2020). There is an assumption that BWT are included in the construction of a

female-dominant workforce that this line of literature often critiques. In actuality, when considering the deeply webbed and intricate nature of Black women's positionalities, there are endless possibilities. To unearth and explore what is known about Black women who have a salient approach to working with Black children, there is a focus on the affective and interpersonal aspects of Black women as empirical evidence.

In chapter 1, I will outline background information that grounds my rationale for examining Black teachers as a reformatory intervention and a method of liberation. It is necessary to specify the influence of Black teachers, given that most literature examines the benefits of teachers of color, broadly, as well as, Black teachers. Then, I will discuss how Black teachers have a pronounced and racialized impact on the schooling experiences of Black children. In chapter 2, I will introduce the two constructs used to organize the liberative practices of BWT, which are politicized care (McKinney de Royston & Vakil, 2017) and Black educational fugitive space (ross, 2021). Along with this, I will summarize the Black feminist scholarship on the experiences and praxis of BWT and align these findings with overlapping tenants of politicized care and Black educational fugitive space. In chapter three, I will explain my methodological steps to collect interview data with pre-, in-, and out-of-service BWT with experience teaching in the Bay Area, California. I will review my data analysis plan, using MAXQDA qualitative software program, and steps I took to minimize researcher bias. In chapter 4, I will organize my findings using testimony from participants to triangulate certain themes in the praxis of BWT in this study. Using previous literature, I will extrapolate on how participants agree or diverge on their stances towards resisting anti-Blackness and embodying tenants of politicized care and Black educational fugitive space. In chapter five, I will conclude this

dissertation with recommendations for research, policy, and practice in the context of teacher preparation program reform and broadening the awareness of teachers' of color lives.

The Importance of Black Teachers

Recent literature points to teachers of color having salient and statistically significant impacts on BIPOC students, compared to White teachers (Redding, 2019; Scott et al., 2022; Young & Easton-Brooks, 2022). There are three themes that capture the specific impacts that are seen from student-teacher racial matching (sometimes referred to race congruence): (a) outcomes related to achievement and evaluation of student performance, (b) buffering of disciplinary disproportionality, and (c) use of culturally-responsive pedagogy and other dimensions of CC to improve student engagement (Gist, 2018; Ingersoll et al. 2022) . As it pertains to Black teachers, Redding (2019) found that Black teachers rate Black students higher in their reading and science performance when compared to White teachers. Black teachers have a less punitive gaze on Black children that is often consistent in comparative analyses of racial congruence and disciplinary action (Hayes et al., 2023; Shirrell et al., 2021). Still, D'Amico and colleagues (2017) have identified barriers that start during the hiring process which explain a reason for the prevalence of Black people being stymied in the teacher pipeline . Given that it has been empirically established that students of color benefit from racial congruence with demographically-matched teachers, it is concerning that the representation of Black teachers continues to decline.

In fact, some evidence points to the percentage of Black teachers slightly decreasing from 8% to 6.7% from 1987 to 2018 (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Ingersoll et al. (2022) attributes some of the growth in the gap between minoritized teachers and students to the trend of White students leaving public schools, while students of color continue to increase their representation. Given

the lack of progress in representation of Black teachers, D’Amico and colleagues (2022) offer a historical explanation that makes connections between policy efforts to recruit Black teachers post-*Brown v. Board of Education* and how, theoretically, the same logic persists across time through interest convergence. Before *Brown*, Black teachers provided caring and enriching spaces through high expectations, positive racialized views on education that reflect Afrocentric values, while rejecting anti-Black racist representations and paradigms (D’Amico et al., 2022). Following the implementation of the *Brown* rulings, Black teachers endured “wholesale firing” and many all-Black schools were closed; simultaneously, newly integrated schools prevented them from being hired through discriminatory hiring practices, such as changing requirements for licensure, which led to a significant decline in Black teachers (D’Amico et al., 2022; Neal-Stanley, 2023b). In addition, this Black teacher exodus was a deterrent for Black people to enter into the profession, promoted Black people to stop majoring in education, and other Black teachers were further displaced by new licensure and teacher preparation program requirements (Carver-Thomas, 2018; D’Amico et al., 2022; Young & Easton-Brooks, 2020).

Not only has the state of Black teachers in U.S. (public) K–12 schools been explored through a human management lens, but it also should be explored through a socio historical lens that acknowledges anti-Blackness (Stovall & Mosley, 2023). This requires careful compiling and connecting of race relations and teaching professionalism, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Nevertheless, it should be established that pathways to teaching are impacted by educational and class stratification (e.g., slowed progress of representation compared to other groups of color) and gendered (e.g., in a predominantly female-identifying workforce), so the experiences of BWT are wonderfully complex (Stanley, 2022; Young & Easton-Brooks, 2020). Such as, racial and class stratification that exist in college admissions, cultural differences in the

popularity of the teaching profession, and the deterring factors plague the profession (e.g., low pay, long hours, etc.). Centering the praxis of BWT is also necessary because of their additive influence on the academic and behavioral outcomes of all students, particularly as it relates to disproportionality.

Black Teachers' Impact on Black Students

A rationale for investigating BWT is to illuminate the ways their praxis intensifies protective factors for Black students, which noticeably mitigate educational injustice. Already, Black teachers and other teachers of color tend to teach in predominantly-BIPOC schools and schools serving families in poverty (Bristol & Carver-Thomas, 2024; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Ingersoll et al., 2022; Young & Easton-Brooks, 2020), meaning they are in a pivotal position to support children impacted by systemic oppression. According to Ingersoll and colleagues (2022), 90% of teachers of color are employed in “hard-to-staff schools. For instance, the effect of student-teacher race congruence on suspensions was 3 times larger and only significant in schools serving disenfranchised neighborhoods (Shirrell et al., 2022). Black children and other children who live in the margins (e.g., those who are not centered or prioritized in school reform) are often burdened by traditional schooling, but Black teachers with social justice orientations are devoted to transcending these limits, creatively.

A powerful theme arising from literature on student-teacher, race congruence is about the ways some Black teachers bolster belongingness and relatability. Young and colleagues (2022) offer a framework for understanding the impact of teachers of color on school belongingness, which organizes how they increase self-efficacy, sense of pride and empowerment, and resilience in BIPOC students. Some studies have emphasized role-modeling as a defining practice that alleviates BIPOC students' need to “act White” (Goldhaber et al., 2019), which often is

transmitted through social learning (Scott et al., 2022) and role modeling (Carver-Thomas, 2018). This line of literature expands on the strength of Black and other teachers of color to encourage students to feel secure and seen, beyond the conditions of achievement. In fact, it has been argued that the presence of Black teachers actually facilitates Black students attending school at a higher rate (Scott et al., 2022). Scholars have demonstrated that this relationship occurs because Black teachers are able to use their cultural knowledge, that is sometimes esoteric, to advocate for the specific needs of Black children, sometimes referred to as “cultural synchronicity” (Ingersoll et al., 2022), cultural translators (Carver-Thomas, 2018), or a “Negro whisperer” (Lee & Thomas, 2021).

The positive benefits of race congruence on student-teacher interactions has often been explored in disciplinary outcomes with other academic variables (Hayes et al., 2021; Redding 2019). It seems that, since Black children are overrepresented in disciplinary outcomes, the effects of them being taught by a Black teacher decrease the likelihood for suspensions and other exclusionary measures. Based on administrative data on secondary students from a large, racially diverse urban school district, Black and Latinx students who were taught by Black teachers were less likely to be referred to the office (Shirell et al., 2021). In North Carolina, Black children had a lower likelihood of facing exclusionary discipline if they were taught by a Black teacher and this was consistent across grade levels, gender, and suburban and urban contexts (Lindsey & Hart, 2017). Hayes and colleagues (2021) also found that novice teachers, regardless of race, were more likely to refer students to the office, but this likelihood drastically dropped with each year of teaching for all teachers. Similarly, Black teachers tend to report less disruptive behaviors for Black students, compared to other teachers of color, which is crucial given ratings of Black students can vary the most across non-Black teachers (Redding, 2019).

Across these examples of student empowerment and equitable practices, Black teachers enact practices that result in a range of positive outcomes for BIPOC students. To be clear, I am not arguing White teachers are unable to incorporate culturally-specific practices or intentionally act in a discriminatory manner towards BIPOC students. There is a body of research that draws attention to the ways in which White teachers enact culturally responsive teaching, even through the challenges of privilege negotiation and institutional racism (Goldenberg, 2014). Generally, traditional teacher education programs are working against interest convergence and misappropriation of culturally relevant pedagogy, which requires critical, emotional, and other challenging reflection (Evans et al., 2020). All people hold positionalities that elicit a willpower to dismantle White supremacy and I recognize commonalities in what this willpower could manifest. Rather, I am a witness to the compassionate gaze that influences how Black teachers approach their work with students, which is not an embodiment of their teacher preparation, but rather, their critical consciousness. As I move to narrow my focus on BWT, I seek to understand what inspires Black women to consider their girl and womanhood and how it was socialized to their Black community in a racist, patriarchal society. This intersectional approach is crucial to organizing this complex and heterogeneous collection of BWT's experiences in teaching Black children.

Theoretical Framework: Dillard's endarkened feminist epistemology

Black women, in the context of this study, are being located through the same intersectional lens that inspired Kimberle Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality theory. In this instance, a car manufacturing company perpetuated discrimination across gender and race lines, concurrently, disallowing Black women to be hired to do male-dominated labor work or White-women dominated, administrative work. In education, I found that Black women face

particular tensions that are unacknowledged in mainstream conversations about reformative pedagogy (Farinde-Wu et al., 2023). There may be limits to the generalizability or sweeping implications for all Black women or BWT. However, when considering the deeply webbed and intricate nature of Black women's positionalities, there are endless possibilities. To unearth and explore what is known about Black women who have a salient approach to working with Black children, there is a focus on the affective and interpersonal aspects of Black women as empirical evidence. I utilize Dillard's (2000) endarkened feminist epistemology as a frame, to minimize the misrepresentation and stereotypical assumptions that limit the complexity of Black women and girls' social position in U.S. education.

Furthermore, Black feminist intellectual tradition also describes the ways that experiencing patriarchal racism can facilitate empathy and affinity towards other folks living in the margins (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill-Collins; 2000). This relationship with the system of oppressions is psychosomatic and sociohistorical, which formulates a layer of consciousness that BWT are constantly engaging with. Du Bois (2015) referred to the duality between their consciousness towards their social world and their consciousness through a lens of Eurocentric, abled-bodied privilege. As Black women navigate these spaces, their bodies are prone to stereotypical depictions and looming stressors, but their pursuit of justice and healing destabilizes these negative forces (Benjamin et al., 2024). In fact, this awareness of their historical and present subjectivity empowers the Black women I am writing about, to have a plural consciousness (Hawkins & Davis, 2024) that critiques the way domination appears in their personhoods as Black women, in the sociopolitical climate, and in K-12 education.

Intersectionality Theory

Crenshaw (1989; 2015) theorized the term, intersectionality, in reaction to a hiring discrimination lawsuit, in which Black women experienced unequal opportunity to work at a car manufacturing factory. In this instance, a car manufacturing company perpetuated discrimination across gender and race lines, concurrently, disallowing Black women to be hired to do male-dominated labor work or White-women dominated, administrative work. Crenshaw builds upon women of color feminism to assert that oppression functions across dimensions of identity, simultaneously, which moves beyond single-identity politics (Crenshaw, 1989). Instead of centering differences in how various groups are marginalized, intersectionality focuses on the commonalities in forms of dominance and how power struggles are inherently dynamic and layered. The application of this theory promotes the inclusion and grassroots representation of groups that are historically erased from mainstream activism (Crenshaw, 1989). This theory has been used frequently in the field of critical studies because it bridges conscious perspectives of identity-based culture and the construction of hegemonic caste systems in and through U.S. institutions.

Intersection of Education and Radical Black Feminism

A prevalent theory used in the line of literature on BWT, and coined by a prominent, Black feminist scholar, is Dillard's (2000) endarkened feminist epistemology. This framework recognizes BWT's embodied knowledge, what is conveyed through spirituality, emotionality, and other latency factors that illustrate knowing what they know, as evidence. This focus on what is not able to be seen (endarkened) by academic registers and dominant formations of knowledge (enlightenment) is based on the assumption that Black women's stories are misunderstood (Dillard, 2020). Therefore, scholars have moved to use Black feminism to examine BWT's commitment to ancestral ties and Black freedom as they protect Black children through

communal care (Adams, 2023; Dillard, 2000; Obaizamomwan-Hamilton, 2023; Watson, 2018).

In this dissertation, I use endarkened feminist epistemology to challenge and expand on the conclusions about how BWT disrupt systematic oppression and anti-Blackness.

In this current study, BWT vocalize methods of politicized care and intersectionality in their practices, in ways that are salient to their positionality. They navigate a profession that is commonly known as woman-dominated, in a context that is a socializing agent to Eurocentric hegemonies (e.g., history curriculum, academic tracking, discipline disproportionality, etc.), which provides for a complicated space to navigate. These complexities mean that embodied knowledge can include psychological warmth, somatic anxiety, and all the movements on a typical classroom day. While learning from their experiences and philosophies is a way of layering knowledge of their salience in BIPOC students' lives, there will always be endarkened aspects of their teaching experiences. It is important to allow many Truths of BWT to be in contradiction or unclear; for instance, BWT are automatically attached to the potential of institutional harm, but find ways to act reformatory (Neal-Stanley, 2023a). I will explore how BWT navigate these tensions in a manner that appreciates the endless scope of embodied knowledge and liberation.

Chapter Two: Review of Black Women's Pedagogy, Black Educational Fugitive Space, and Politicized Care

Chapter two of this dissertation, reviews literature about the major constructs that elaborate on how BWT enact radicalism and communal love in their approach to working with BIPOC students. These constructs: a) Black feminist pedagogies, b) Black educational fugitive space, and c) politicized care, are themes from the line of research on critical education. Furthermore, there is a core theme across all three constructs that calls for the rejection of a deficit-emphasis on the positionality of Black children in U.S. (public) schools. I recognize the negative effects of anti-Blackness, while also balancing the need to provide a response to perpetuation of educational injustice. There is overlap across these areas that demonstrate the compatibility of these interventions. By highlighting this overlap, it is possible to uncover the nuance of what drives the benefits of student-teacher race congruence. While these constructs are deeply relational in nature, it is important to pivot and affirm perspectives on bolstering Black students that are humanistic, power-conscious, and creative. For BWT, there is a body of evidence that highlights their edge in noticing and acting upon the strengths of Black children.

The Peculiarities of Black Women Teachers

Previous literature has complicated the policy response to the benefits of teachers of color for BIPOC students, in that policy tends to minimize structural barriers that impede on their academic success (Brown et al., 2018). Along the same lines, I do not want to essentialize BWT as the “silver bullet” for school reform, when, in actuality, there are obstacles that BWT must overcome to enact their teaching practices. In fact, teacher professionalism and public school settings have been critiqued for their inadequacy in retaining Black teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). This implies that emboldening the work of BWT should not be

oversimplified to equate increasing their representation with promoting change. It is necessary to expose the problematic conditions that perpetuate gendered racism towards BWT and to normalize their practices within mainstream, educational justice efforts.

A Dilemma of Enacting Afrocentric and Feminist Practices

Using narrative inquiry methodology, four Black secondary teachers found it essential to socialize SoC to the likelihood that they would experience racism, through “real talk”, and empowered their students to verbalize their racialized experience to find solidarity with other students of color (Duncan, 2022). However, their incorporation of emancipatory pedagogy into their practices and curriculum were often condemned by their school administration for going outside what is typical for “direct instruction” (Duncan, 2022; Lee & Thomas, 2022; McKinney de Royston, 2020). This may explain why Black women, out-of-service teachers, emphasized that being marginalized and tokenized by other non-Black school staff was a reason for them leaving the profession (Lee & Thomas, 2022). There is an ethic of risk involved with prioritizing social justice that not only includes the possibility of organizational retaliation, but also takes a toll on one’s well-being and emotional stamina (Stanley, 2022).

Thus, Black teachers find themselves in a dilemma in which they must choose to persist in the face of hopelessness for their school’s ability to grapple with anti-Blackness, for the sake of protecting this generation of Black youth with emancipatory pedagogy (Lee & Thomas, 2022). Using the “sista circle method” (SCM), Lee & Thomas (2022) actively participated in authentic storytelling and community-building with 14 mostly secondary Black women who were former teachers. Anxiety and constant fatigue caused them to seek psychotherapy to support with a growing sense of guilt for wanting to leave the profession and resenting the teaching field. Ultimately, this clash between the obligation of servanthood to the educational

futures of Black children and their desperate need for self-care, is what led to their attrition from teaching (Lee & Thomas, 2022). Unfortunately, there are sacrifices that BWT take on when they push the bounds of teaching professionalism, such as valuing nondominant indicators of academic participation and success. This indirectly harms BIPOC students who are deserving of adequately-paid and nourished educators that are able to enact tools of Black educational fugitive space and politicized care. In chapter two, the process of conceptualizing these aspects of pedagogy and teaching ambitions will specify the experiences of BWT that are crucial to considering the nuance of Black feminism and critical education.

In this dissertation, I explore how Black women walk a line of double consciousness with (a) one side holding their role as a teacher and an extension of a problematic institution and (b) the other side painted with their positionality as a Black woman, still connected to their formative years. The enactment of this consciousness has produced a salient practice that is gaining more attention in the field of education and pedagogy (Coles & Stanley, 2021; Dillard, 2020; Dixon & Dingus, 2008; Neal-Stanley, 2023b; Stanley, 2022). My research questions are the following:

- a. First, I ask to what degree do Black women teachers conceptualize their teaching practices and positionality as ways of enacting freedom and resisting anti-Blackness? While continuing this line of research that amplifies the radicalism of BWT, I add a unique contribution that operationally organizes these practices into two interrelated areas, politicized care (McKinney De Royston & Vakil, 2017) and Black educational fugitive space (ross, 2020).
- b. Second, I explore the facilitators and deterrents of politicized care and Black educational fugitive space and what is the affective impact on their teaching experiences?

- c. Third, I question how these freedom practices and enactments align with existing literature and if they can be traced to the schooling experiences and generational ties that BWT have to education?

Black Feminist Activism as Pedagogy

In the iconic realm of canonical Black feminists are beloved teachers and educators, such as Toni Morrison, bell hooks, Lucy Craft Laney, Mary McCleod-Bethune, Fannie Lou Hamer, Sojourner Truth, and countless others, who have worked to reimagine education as social mobility and Black liberation. BWT's call to teaching is political, in that their pedagogy serves to destabilize anti-Black thinking and school designs that refuse to center non-dominant ways of learning (McKinney de Royston, 2020). Some have described BWT as having political clarity on the conditions that produce problematic structures and are committed to socializing BIPOC children to this reality, in a loving way (Duncan, 2022; McKinney de Royston, 2020). In order to integrate their consciousness into their teaching philosophies, BWT are willing to act radically based on their embodied knowledge. McKinney de Royston (2020) describes how Black womanist teaching includes logic that politicizes their role as educator and assumes that Black children should be dignified through non-dominant, Afrocentric ways of knowing. There is agreement in the intentions and execution of praxis behind the work of BWT, which should be continually explored as a source of evidence to inform practice and policy.

It is important to recognize that BWT feel a particular sense of devotion to enact their social justice-oriented pedagogy and employ protective tactics to evade anti-Black racism. This devotion has been described as calling to education that is led by a worldview that sees teaching-as-freedom as an ancestral tool (Adams, 2023; Dixon, 2003; Neal-Stanley 2023b; Stanley, 2022). BWT are inspired by the historical role education has played in the (partial)

abolition of slavery and challenge themselves to enact distinct power against the formation of institutionalized schooling (Neal-Stanley, 2023a). Furthermore, this calling is rooted in spirituality and generational healing, such that BWT are guided by their embodied knowledge to create spaces of imagination and affirmation for Black children (Coles & Stanley, 2021; Dillard, 2020; Dixon & Dingus, 2008; Neal-Stanley, 2023b; Stanley, 2022). It is this specific space that BWT cultivate that I am interested in exploring and to facilitate discussion across scholars who recently advanced this line of literature on radical Black feminism as pedagogy.

As BWT stay connected to the way education has been a pillar for collective power and limitless potential, they strategically construct counter-spaces that are affirming and liberatory (McArthur & Lane, 2019). Specifically, scholars have characterized the pedagogy of BWT as being subversive, meaning their practices are covert to oppressive forces that overwhelm dominant schooling and stymie the holistic well-being of BIPOC children (Neal-Stanley, 2023b; Obaizamomwan-Hamilton, 2023; Stovall, 2023). In recognition of the harboring of anti-Blackness in school structures, BWT often do not conform their pedagogy to center Whiteness and able-bodied normativity (Farinde-Wu et al., 2023). Therefore, it is required that BWT operate through an ethic of risk and servanthood as they go above their socialization to the role of an educator (Dillard, 2020; Stanley, 2022). This refusal to accept the anti-Black conditions of dominant school contexts is an act of liberation and is of dire necessity; although this was often in tension with other expectations imposed by a school's culture around instruction and discipline (Dixon, 2003; McKinney de Royston, 2020; Stanley, 2022).

The remarkable commitment of BWT is multi-dimensional, which enables their pedagogy to work towards racial and intergenerational healing (Farinde-Wu et al., 2023). The complexity in how this occurs in reality and then is conceptualized in empirical research is, in

itself, a commitment to disseminate evidence about teaching practices that are underestimated by teacher education. It should be noted that Black men and gender diverse people also put forth Black feminist praxis in their pedagogy. In the last decade, Black men teachers have been described as mentors and disciplinary agents (Young & Young, 2020). Furthermore, the sociopolitical climate and uncertainty towards LGBTQ+ matters in K-12 public education is a barrier for exploring the experiences of queer teachers of color (Antonelli & Sembiente, 2022).

At the root of my argument, I assume that Black women gain insight, through their positionality or standpoint, on how to resist educational injustice. Black feminists theorize that this positionality, while it is not monolithic, is shaped by resilience tactics against heteropatriarchy and White supremacy (Collins, 2002). Thus, I focus the experiential knowledge of BWT as being empirically significant and make conclusions that are specific to how they may navigate a White, woman-dominated workforce in a public sector that others BIPOC children.. Firstly, I argue that politicized care (McKinney De Royston & Vakil, 2017) is a kind of relational praxis of BWT that is based on Black feminist notions around love and community (hooks, 1994). Secondly, Black educational fugitive space (Givens, 2021; ross, 2020) is a spatial praxis produced by Afrocentric theorizing and actualizing of education as social mobility. These two pillars are starting points for an interpretation of this eclectic line of literature that is anchored in critical education and informed by Black feminism.

Politicized Care

Dumas (2014) has argued that traditional U.S. schools are sites of suffering of Black children because educational injustice can epitomize the psychic-political-psychosocial awareness of the social disadvantage and the transmission of racial trauma. Therefore, adults and school staff could communicate a sense of warm concern for their well-being, which could be a

counter-logical approach to distant, objective approaches to interacting with children in the school context. While a criticism of this approach to care is that educators are already overburdened with obligations, Noddings's (1992; 2012) has argued that these behaviors should underlie pedagogical approaches rather than be layered on top. Based in moral education and feminism, the essence of Noddings' ethic of care is that relational engagement, empathy, and student-centered responsiveness is a core commitment of schooling culture and student-teacher interactions (Noddings, 2012). Noddings' theorizing seemingly introduced care into educational literature, but this was done in a manner that was neutral on how care pertains to BIPOC children. Critical scholars have gone on to expand on care in educational literature to progress it to the definition adapted by McKinney De Royston & Vakil (2019).

Contextualizing Politicized Care

Two theories frequently utilized by previous literature on caring for diverse student populations are Valenzuela's (1999) politics of caring and Antrop-González & De Jesús' (2006) critical care theory. According to these frameworks, there are two dimensions of caring that educators can demonstrate towards students: authentic and aesthetic caring. Authentic care is defined as the deliberate efforts by educators to recognize and affirm students' cultural identities, while also countering aesthetic care or superficial, non-politicized care (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999). At times, educators can overly focus their care on behaviors and outcomes that are favored by curriculum, academic competencies, and other factors related to achievement, reinforcing aesthetic care. By distinguishing aesthetic care, this theorizing complicates this tendency to use care behaviors to mold a students' embodiment of White-dominant schooling values. Antrop-González and De Jesús (2006) expand on Valenzuela's (1999) theory by, firstly, validating the importance of authentic care in a population

of diverse high school students and, secondly, introducing a construct called hard care. They utilize other critical theories, such as McKamey's (2004) 3-pronged care theory and Moll and colleagues (1992) funds of knowledge, to describe the additive effect of learning environments created for the community, by the community. Both frameworks offer shifts in logic and mindset towards relationality in typical school settings that could lead to significant gains in belongingness for BIPOC children.

Recently, scholars have offered the construct of politicized care as an intervention for empowering historically marginalized and resilient youth (McArthur & Lane, 2019; McKinney de Royston & Vakil, 2017; Watson, 2018). There are four dimensions of politicized care that describe the ethics of humanizing and affirming young people. The first dimension, political clarity, is when school adults use their understanding about the nature of oppression and the salient contextual factors that perpetuate oppression in students' context, which is further integrated in their approaches to cultivating student consciousness about the broader society. The second dimension is about the necessity of communal bonds, so that educators can rely on power-ceding, family-oriented, and reciprocative interactions with students. The third dimension is called potential-affirming, meaning school adults are intentional to resist deficit-based stereotyping and bias by using high expectations and cultural wealth. The fourth dimension is developmentally-appropriate, assuming that BIPOC children are often vulnerable to hegemonic schooling expectations. Thus, educators must work to meet students where they are academically and socially-emotionally, relative to how their trajectories may be impacted by educational injustice (McKinney de Royston & Vakil, 2017). When considering the practices and call to teaching that are intrinsic for BWT, I want to bring attention to the overlap of their pedagogy with the conceptualization of politicized care.

Politicized Care in BWT Literature

As the line of research on politicized care continues to be broadened in critical education, I turn to voices and experiences of BWT who enter the profession with the intention to heal and humanize BIPOC children. In fact, there is agreement that there is an essence to the ethics of politicized care that is multi-faceted and translated through communication, behavior, and mindset. BWT use their political clarity about the conditions created by anti-Blackness and deficit ideologies about non-normative children, to disrupt educational injustice. Watson (2018) describes this as politicized womanist care, meaning BWT work fearlessly to establish family-like connections and reciprocity, which are a buffering channel for healing and protection. Not only is this a commitment to the role of a teacher as a protector and socializer (to the plight of racism), but also, part of their collective responsibility to their Black community (Beauboeuf-Lafrontant, 2002; McArthur & Lane, 2019; Watson, 2018). The goal of this section is to distinguish the praxis of BWT as an embodiment of politicized care and an accumulation of their experiential knowledge, as opposed to their training in typical teaching programs.

Integration of Critical Consciousness and Ancestral Pride. BWT acknowledge the sociohistorical antecedents to educational disproportionality and inequality, which compels them to prioritize racial healing (Farinde-Wu et al., 2023). Already, scholars have named the critical consciousness of BWT as being an instrumental part of their pedagogy (Duncan, 2022; McArthur & Lane, 2019). It is used to engage students and families in race-conscious conversations, so that BIPOC children come to understand the adversity their ancestors experienced and how their lives are a tribute to ancestral struggle and freedom. Some described Black teachers as being role models that demonstrate ways to normalize Afrocentrism in learning contexts, which is effective in motivating and affirming Black students (Brown et al., 2018).

Generally, BWT are empowered by their intersectional identities and lived experience as acuity for welcoming the cultural assets of BIPOC students in subtle, yet radical ways (Beneke, 2022; McKinney de Royston, et al., 2021; Starks et al., 2021). It should be noted that, at times, this work is characterized as risky as BWT must expose and critique the roots of heteronormative, White supremacy in traditional U.S. school settings (Beaudoeuf-Lafrontant, 2002). Enacting politicized care can be interpreted as in opposition to Eurocentric and ableist hegemonies in a school's organizational culture (Duncan, 2022; Neal-Stanley, 2023b; Stanley 2022). I argue that this theme is a foundation for BWT's gaze on BIPOC children as being saturated in positive regard, hopefulness, and resilience.

Radical Intentions to Humanize. A frame or perspective that is omnipresent in the approaches and interactions of BWT is described as humanizing and familial. Some scholars have conceptualized this as an orientation towards their role as a teacher to serve as a protector or buffer against racial trauma and a safe outlet (Dixon & Dingus, 2008; McKinney de Royston, et al., 2021). In fact, Howell and colleagues (2021) use Black Gaze Theory to consider the beneficial impact of Black teachers, such that forms of capital that are typically undervalued to academics, such as social, linguistic, and familial capital, are deemed essential to dismantling racist and sexist paradigms about Black girls. Using their double-consciousness, Black teachers can navigate traditional teaching professionalism (e.g., reliance on race-evasive curriculum, low prioritization of relationality, overfocus on academic skill-building, etc.) and their pursuit of Black liberation to remain connected to the realities of BIPOC students. This counters expectations for BIPOC students to assimilate to Eurocentric, ableist schooling norms and establishes new standards of developmental-appropriateness (Howell et al., 2021; McKinney de Royston & Vakil, 2017; McKinney de Royston, 2020). It is not that BWT excessively

sympathize with the unjust social position of Black students, but rather, they reimagine academic success as including cultural capital (McKinney de Royston et al, 2021; Watson, 2018). BWT approach their work through a kinship gaze that refuses to normalize objective and distal ways of interacting with students through traditional teaching and communal love.

Practical Manifestations of Political Care Praxis. In this dissertation, I explored politicized care in the work of BWT through intentions, attitudes, and beliefs, but there are also relational practices key to translating their work into reformatory action. Firstly, BWT co-construct their notions of caring with students by noticing how students like to be acknowledged (e.g., affectionately referring to students as babies), students' interests and adversities, and dignifying methods of maintaining behavioral expectations (Duncan, 2022; Farinde-Wu et al, 2023; Watson, 2018). Secondly, scholars have named other-mothering as a common practice for building familial relationality and fortifying authenticity amongst rigid and cold student-adult dynamics (Dixon, 2003; Brown et al., 2018). By enacting kinship relations, BWT are able to remain accountable to their commitment to Black liberation and promote reciprocity in their power differentials with children and families (Dillard, 2020; Dixon & Dingus, 2008; Howell et al., 2021). Thirdly, there have been many inquiries into the use of high expectations as a counter to deficit ideologies about BIPOC children (McKinney de Royston & Vakil, 2017). For BWT, they verbalize and embody high expectations through their cultural empathy and by providing alternative opportunities to demonstrate mastery knowledge (Watson, 2018). This has also been described as “warm-demander pedagogy” (Ware, 2006), in that BWT challenge Black students as an extension of their hope and confidence in their potential to overcome educational injustice (Howell et al, 2021; Lee & Thomas, 2022; McKinney de Royston et al., 2021). The enactments of politicized care are multifaceted and steeped in cultural

nuance that I hope to explore further in the context of BWT. While there are many perspectives I could utilize, I am curious how BWT implement culturally-sustaining pedagogy and politicized care to construct safe and inclusive spaces for BIPOC to seek refuge from in their daily schooling experiences.

Black Educational Fugitive Space

I am curious how BWT implement culturally-sustaining pedagogy and politicized care to construct safe and inclusive spaces for BIPOC to seek refuge from in their daily schooling experiences. Black educational fugitive space is defined as a space for radical imagination for people who have been systematically disconnected from their humanity, to practice and explore how Black educators and students may feel dignified (Givens, 2021; Stovall & Mosley, 2023; ross, 2020). This reclamation process recognizes the depth of racial trauma and subjugation that Black children experience in school. It is a place to be and long for, a metaphor for abysmal potential and spatial freedom for youth and generational power (ross, 2020). Using politicized care as a frame for their practice, BWT perform a certain orientation to their role and this produces a space for student authenticity.

Using anti-Blackness as a frame for critiquing the educational injustice perpetrated against Black children, scholars have turned to Black fugitivity to imagine what liberation and freedom in learning and existing in traditional schooling spaces may look like. This is a reclamation process that recognizes the depth of racial trauma and subjugation that Black children have experienced while attending school (ross, 2020). I turn to Black educational fugitive space because of its alignment to the spiritual and political work of BWT, as well as the optimistic essence of Black liberation as being obtainable in dominant U.S. school settings (Neal-Stanley, 2023b; Obaizamomwan-Hamilton, 2023). It provides an empirical and curricular

opportunity to remember the historical trajectory of Black education that has seemed cyclically oppressive, but is actually escapable (Coles & Stanley, 2021). Not only do BWT produce Black educational fugitive space for the sake of protecting BIPOC children, but it also affirms their devotion to social justice and allows them to develop tactics for reimagining their professionalism (Adams, 2023). This may buffer against challenges and fatigue that BWT often experience when they embody radicalism and political clarity (Lee & Thomas, 2022). In my dissertation study, I explore connections between the tension of working towards liberation and battling Eurocentric hegemonies in the pedagogy of BWT.

Another reason I include Black educational fugitive space as a focus in this dissertation is because of the way BWT psychologically and physically make safe spaces for all students, which can be framed as a fugitive action against anti-Blackness (Givens, 2020). Recent literature has demonstrated that BWT create salient spaces where Black girls can be vulnerable without judgment and engage in positive identity exploration (McArthur & Lane, 2019). Another way BWT construct fugitive spaces is by recognizing and advocating for the environmental stressors that Black students may encounter in and out of school. This includes prioritizing school campuses as safe and clean to reduce harm from systemic violence and traumatization (McKinney de Royston et al., 2021). While encouraging harmonious and predictable spaces for Black children is important, it also can be complicated to balance this intention with deficit assumptions about what Black children need to learn (Adams, 2023; McKinney de Royston et al., 2021). Overall, Black educational fugitive space is an interdisciplinary construct that marines adjacent themes across the pedagogy of BWT and politicized care.

Chapter Three: Methods

My research questions are the following:

- a. First, I ask to what degree do Black women teachers conceptualize their teaching practices and positionality as ways of enacting freedom and resisting anti-Blackness? While continuing this line of research that amplifies the radicalism of BWT, I add a unique contribution that operationally organizes these practices into two interrelated areas, politicized care (McKinney De Royston & Vakil, 2017) and Black educational fugitive space (ross, 2020).
- b. Second, I explore the facilitators and deterrents of politicized care and Black educational fugitive space and what is the affective impact on their teaching experiences?
- c. Third, Using these constructs as a frame, I question how these freedom practices and enactments align with existing literature and if they can be traced to the schooling experiences and generational ties that BWT have to education?

Research Design

This dissertation is a phenomenological inquiry to Black women's pedagogy that centers explicit practices or use of traditional curriculum. Rather, I am curious how BWT embody their intersectional, social positions while teaching and what existential stances they share as they seek to affirm BIPOC children. The articulation of their consciousness is based on their socialization as former K-12 students, ancestral knowledge around education and social mobility, and their hopes for liberation. Al-Saji (2017) proposes a re-approach to feminist phenomenological approaches that is described as a critical reconfiguration, due to the drawbacks of translating phenomenology into a method. While this approach allows for sensemaking and affective stances

to be evidence, there is a requirement to organize embodiments in a structured and traditional, empirical frame. The process of translating a standpoint into phenomenological methods reduces the experiences of Black women to be bound by the demand to “make sense” to a certain audience (Al-Saji, 2017). As I move to make complex stances of BWT to be perceivable, I hope to draw upon the multiple orientations that participants in this study have with their matrix of domination. Al Saji (2017) “calls for a thick intersectional approach” (151), which entails locating their experiences in a layered context, such as the public schools in Bay Area and their unique calling to teaching, spiritually and beyond.

Data Collection

I utilized snowball sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and targeted recruitment strategies to engage Black women educators in the Bay Area, in order to hold stronger commonality between the school contexts of participants in a racial diversity and politically liberal hub. Participants were recruited from an online community for Black women called BLACKFEMALEPROJECT, which had a subgroup for educators, called the Teacher Truth Project. Potential participants were emailed a recruitment flyer on behalf of the program manager of the Teacher Truth Project. Interested participants reached out directly and were interviewed virtually through Zoom. A second wave of data collection occurred through professional spaces in K-12 schools, in which BWT were recruited in-person. Semi-structured interviews lasted about 45 minutes and were transcribed and coded with a qualitative analysis software. After each transcription, a memo was added to each transcript, which was a free writeabout initial impressions.

Study Setting

Most participants taught in a certain area of the Bay Area, California that, like many urban school districts, were fighting budget cuts, gentrification, and racial inequalities. Some districts represented in this sample had experienced teacher strikes, waves of school closures, and other looming events. All teachers worked in a context in which Black students were the second majority of all BIPOC students and were overrepresented in areas of special education and, sometimes, in disciplinary actions. They worked in schools where there were “enough” Black staff and in communities with low-income, Black enclaves, facing gentrification, political malaise, and district-related malaise.

Participants

Participants (n = 9) identified as Black and as a woman and are in-training (pre-service) or currently or previously worked as a K-12 teacher. Other inclusion criteria included working in the Bay Area in California and being willing to talk about their teaching practices and how it may or may not connect to working with Black children and enacting social justice. Exclusion factors included working in a school or school district that was majority Black or in a school in which there are less than 3% Black students. This decision is based on pilot study data that pointed to a significant and predictable dichotomy in experiences between BWT teaching in under- and overrepresented Black populations.

There were two pre-service teachers, three elementary, one middle, and one adult school teacher, as well as one middle school principal and one higher education administrator. The average years of teaching (of the seven in- and out-of-service participants) in a certified K-12 school for the sample population is about 14 years with a range of 5 to 22 years. Additionally, five of seven participants were native to the district or neighborhood that they were teaching in.

Table 1. Sample Population Demographics

Pseudonym	Current Role	Years Teaching
Tanya	Elementary teacher	5
Addison	Middle school principal	5
Kendall	Pre-service teacher	0
Denise	Adult education teacher	18
Maxine	Pre-service teacher	0
Robyn	Higher education administrator	15
Wendy	Instructional coach	14
Nina	Elementary teacher	20
Bianca	Middle school teacher	22

Participant Background

Tanya. Tanya is a participant that I identified through word-of-mouth and one of a couple interviews I was able to do in person. She works as an instructional coach and aspires for school leadership, meaning she held intention to leave the teaching profession. Tanya was a child of an educator and she aspired to be in education early in her life. She also had a Black woman teacher in early elementary years who instilled in Tanya that she verbalized to me, verbatim.

Addison. Addison was interviewed virtually and aspired to work as a school leader due to transformative mentorship from Black principals while she was a teacher. She was a native to the exact neighborhood that she was working in and that was a longstanding intention for her professional trajectory.

Kendall. Kendall was in an alternative teaching program and working as a family liaison that I interviewed virtually. Similar to Addison, she worked at a school she attended as a child because of her commitment to her community and self-love.

Denise. Denise was also interviewed virtually and, after many years of substitute teaching in public K-12 schools, found a calling teaching at adult education centers, continuation high schools, and, sometimes, at community college. Denise is *third* generation educator and also contributed to a writing program for college students who had been touched by the juvenile or foster care system. Denise also brought up that her role as a parent was equally impactful to her professionalism as her formal training experiences.

Maxine. Maxine was the second participant I interviewed in-person and she was in an AmeriCorps training program, with plans to matriculate into a formal teacher education program the following year. Maxine also was a native to the area in which she was teaching and, although her position was abruptly terminated due to funding cuts of the horrible 2025 federal administration, she still participated in my study.

Wendy. Wendy is originally from a predominately-White area a few hours outside of California, but she came to the Bay Area seeking affinity and cultural richness. She is a child of an educator, so she did non-profit work before coming to education as if it was a natural calling. Wendy also alluded to coming close to burnout, due to gendered and racial discrimination from the parents of her former students. Wendy was interviewed virtually.

Nina. Nina is a native to the neighborhood that she is teaching in and she was interviewed virtually. Nina has one of the longest teaching careers in the current sample and all of her experience is with upper elementary school students.

Bianca. Bianca was interviewed virtually and aspired to be a teacher since she was a child. Bianca is a native to California and also was part of AmeriCorps early in her teaching career, but later in life, given she identifies as a career changer.

Robyn. Robyn had professional experience across the K-16 age span, from working as an elementary and high school teacher, as a credentialed administrator, and then in higher education as a lecturer and administrator. She had the greatest diversity in the roles that she worked across 22 years. Robyn was interviewed virtually.

Procedures

The principal investigator made contact with the director of the Teacher Truth network, which is a subprogram of the Black Female Project. The director sent a recruitment email to a listserv for members of the network. If potential participants were interested, they were instructed to contact the principal investigator directly about being involved in the study. Along with

After receiving informed consent, participants participated in one 45-minute, semi-structured interview (Merriam et al., 2015), either virtually, using Zoom, or in-person (for participants that were recruited through snowball sampling). Three of 9 participants were interviewed in-person. The principal investigator used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) that contained questions around the themes of their pedagogy, use of politicized care, and fugitive actions to dignify Black students. For example, participants were asked, ‘who has inspired, augmented, and/or transformed your awareness of the deficit and stereotypical depictions of Black children’. For the first 10 participants, a \$50 monetary incentive was offered, upon completion of the interview. Each interview was recorded through Zoom and transcribed with Otto.ai.

Data Analysis

Interview data was analyzed with MAXQDA, a software for coding, analyzing, and visualizing different data types, like text, images, video, and other kinds of media. The first round of coding is based on a deductive codebook, aligned with the interview protocol, and the second round used an inductive approach (Carroll et al., 2013). The deductive codebook is based on the interview protocol and crosswalk table, meaning codes focus on key constructs from the research questions. During the first and deductive approach, the rater coded transcriptions using a codebook (Appendix B). During the second and inductive round of coding, the rater took note of emerging themes that were not directly named in the crosswalk table, through coding memos. The testimony that illustrates an emerging theme was used to make a memo in MAXQDA. During the third round of coding, the rater coded for the emerging themes and compiled a final memo for each transcript that summarizes how each participant speaks on politicized care and Black educational fugitive space. In terms of organizing the findings, I used key constructs to highlight the emerging themes and make sense of differences in participants' standpoints.

Ethical Considerations

This study is approved by the Internal Review Board (IRB) at the University of California at Berkeley.

Positionality

The researcher identifies as a biracial, Black-Latina, woman who has been taught and has worked alongside Black educators. While I have relied on previous literature from Black feminism and critical education, I am also leaning into radicalism and authenticity about the state of public school education in the U.S. and how Black people fare in its institutional violence. I have been exposed to the raw and ugly educational injustice that is particularly harmful toward

neurodivergent, gender-diverse, queer, and other non-conforming identities. This provides access to a complex analysis that makes connections between this perpetuation of injustice that is disallowed by gritty, unapologetic equity work. Again, there is no way to account for the heterogeneity in Black women's experiences, but I recognize that I have a certain gaze on relationality that facilitates a humanizing gaze on the interplay between Black people's struggle and educational mobility in a U.S. context.

As I engaged with my data collection process, I was enthusiastic and exhausted at the same time. The fatigue and time-constraints manifested through my ability to secure participant compensation, so I initially began my recruitment with the Teacher Truth Network somewhat prematurely. I believe educators are underpaid and overworked, so it was against my ethics to ask folks to volunteer their time talking about topics that would evoke their share of despair, alongside joy and hope. I spoke with E'rika (pronounced air-reek-ah), director of the Teacher Truth Project and she was eager to circulate my materials across the network. So many BWT reached out to me to express their excitement for my work, it was beyond affirming at a time when so much was ahead of me. Thus, most participants were from 2 waves of outreach I did via e-mail who agreed to interview either without an incentive substitute because they were dedicated to the overall goal of my research. The decision to narrow my recruitment to BWT who had or were teaching in the Bay Area meant it was only inevitable that I hold affinity with teacher activists and Black feminist thinkers. Thus, my interview protocol may appear as overly targeted to focus on my constructs of interests, while also risky in that my sample may only distally relate to what I theorized. Thus, I intended for participants to give meaning and life to an empirical conviction for the betterment of BIPOC children and their schooling experiences.

Limitations

There are inherent drawbacks to the sample size and use of semi-structured interviews to explore conceptualizations that are largely phenomenological and psychosocial. Participants in this study were providing words that I assumed to be illuminative of their daily practices because Black women are intentional about what hidden knowledge they make available for a mainstream audience, which includes the context of this dissertation. If there were other components that would strengthen this dissertation, it would include a series of classroom observations, interviews with former students, and a comparison-analysis of participants' community and school backgrounds (e.g., student body demographics, major local events, etc.). Additionally, this dissertation is based in endarkened feminist epistemology, which demands bi-directional communication between the researcher and participants as the researcher progresses across the analysis phase. The methodology of this dissertation could also benefit from a formal member review of the findings and other outcomes from the analysis. At this time, future steps to summarize and present findings in academic spaces will include collaboration with participants. This may include an invitation to provide feedback and respond in whatever method speaks to them, on their own timeline.

I attempted to address my study limitations by focusing on two constructs (politicized care and Black educational fugitive space) to organize my interview protocol. This facilitated a triangulation of certain intentions or approaches and naming aligning practices that highlighted this triangulation. By focusing on a certain area of California that is known as a liberal hub and racially diverse, I attempted to highlight the unique practices of participants in a progressive context. Lastly, I recruited participants in different places in their teaching careers to explore a variety of experience and knowledge of navigating K-12 public education. This facilitated a

sample population with an array of years of experience and time teaching at various levels (e.g., secondary, higher education).

Chapter 4: A 2-Pronged Praxis Towards Dignifying BIPOC Students

Firstly, I questioned how the approaches of BWT overlap with previous literature on politicized care (McKinney De Royston & Vakil, 2017) and Black educational fugitive space (ross, 2020). Although participants had unique insights on their approaches to working with Black children, there was tremendous commonality in their narratives that illustrate a Black feminist standpoint on care, freedom, and dignity. Secondly, I inquired about facilitators and barriers to enacting freedom and resisting anti-Blackness. Black Women Teachers (BWT) in this study all provide aligning conceptualizations of politicized care, while stipulating the presence of risk and sexist profiling that they radically accept as part of their devotion to BIPOC children. Participants described having the capacity to shield BIPOC students from a tragedy of being misunderstood and this is a deeply personal pursuit. Thirdly, I questioned how their approaches could be traced to their past schooling experiences or personal ties to education (e.g., being a child of an educator). All participants engaged with the interview protocol with enthusiasm and expansive detail, through their social positions as sage public educators.

There were some notable differences in the demographic backgrounds of the sample population. Of the nine participants, three participants were children of an educator and three were born and raised in the Bay Area. I assert that this facilitated a consciousness of the complexity of educational mobility. For example, a child of a teacher tended to reference this fact when discussing what brought them to the profession and may point out Afrocentric values about education, such as ‘knowledge is power’. While all participants entered the field of education with the hopes of improving the outcomes of BIPOC students, participants with personal connections to the community and/or public education testified to a variety of liberation tactics. Additionally, 7 of 9 participants are parents and 4 of 9 participants mentioned their

identity as a parent is influential in their practice, which is explored as an inductive theme in this chapter. Otherwise, participants came to a consensus about what was necessary to protect BIPOC children, what was at cost to enact this, and how they manifested their care for BIPOC children through their praxis and pedagogy.

The first theme of this section, *“I’m Everyone’s Auntie: Conceptualizing Politicized Care*, reviews the significant overlap between the conception of politicized care (McKinney de Royston & Vakil, 2018) and their endorsement of othermothering and kinship relations. BWT engage in family and holistic engagement that enable Black students to be invited in their school spaces in a transformative manner. BWT elaborate on their deep concern about racist and stereotypical encounters that BIPOC students experience in their daily lives, by providing alternative indicators of academic success, which is discussed in the subsection, *Reconstructing Appropriateness to Center Nondominant Notions of Success*. Although BWT in this study are devoted to enacting politicized care, they are critical of the simplicity of BWT taking up the burden of apolitical, apathetic colleagues, while such colleagues remain complicit in harboring stereotypical conceptions about anti-racism. In the section, *Prevailing and Complicated Kinship Relations*, participants provide counterexamples to their perspectives on othermothering. The first prong of this section concludes with an inductive theme that BWT identifies as a crucial factor to their political clarity about the plight of Black families schooling their children in traditional settings, titled *Generational Ties and Parent-Teachers*.

To provide spatial protection from educational injustice, BWT prioritizes Black educational fugitive space (BEFS; Givens, 2021; ross, 2020) as part of their pedagogy, in the second prong of this section titled *“Y’all Stick Together”: Constructing BEFS*. This theme encompasses an intention, arising from their politically caring acts, of BWT to provide

physical-spiritual spaces of refuge away from anti-Blackness. Nevertheless, participants still navigate tensions and contradictions as they commit to enacting Black educational fugitive space that they must radically accept. In the section, *“Not Just My Responsibility”: Devotion and Care are Laborious*, they add the most nuance to the future directions of dignifying BIPOC children for all educators. Ultimately, BWT are not the “silver bullet” for racial disparities in education, but rather, their positionality offers creative and relational gazes on BIPOC children that often challenge mainstream, reformatory efforts. I conclude with some suggestions about the scope of teaching training, which will be further expanded upon in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

“I’m Everyone’s Auntie”: Conceptualizing Politicized Care

In this study, Tanya, Addison, Wendy, Kendall, Denise, Nina, Bianca, Robyn, and Maxine are inspired by their multidimensional identities and previous success working with BIPOC children, or as Kendall, a pre-service teacher, describes her approach to work with BIPOC children as “it’s 90% relational”. According to Denise, an adult education teacher in her 18th year of teaching, BWT prioritize strong connections with students as a political act that is:

deeply rooted in understanding of being a Black child and and also Black parent, but it's also rooted in an understanding of history and the history of education in this country, and the ways that education has sort of been both a tool for advancement and also a tool for continued oppression.

This usually manifests through “tough love”. Another participant, Addison, a middle school principal with 5 years of teaching experience, agrees: “Sometimes it's [an] affectionate one, but starting from a place of seeing their uniqueness, wanting them to be themselves in a system that is not necessarily set up for them to succeed”. In an institution that was designed to “mold” children who can participate in a neoliberal economy and further the place of the U.S. in global competition (Oakes et al., 2013), the praxis of BWT is non-conforming to normative structures of curriculum and assessment. This has been described by previous scholars as acting in a

subversive effort to buffer against anti-Black racism (Coles & Stanley, 2021; Obaizamomwan-Hamilton, 2023). Additionally, this subversive approach embodies tenants of politicized care, such as empathizing through their consciousness and directly naming systems of oppression as threats against Black children's educational trajectories.

Some scholars have conceptualized this as an orientation towards their role as a teacher to serve as a protector or buffer against racial trauma that is perpetuated by race-evasive exclusionary tactics (Dixon & Dingus, 2008; McKinney de Royston, et al., 2021). BWT are familiar with unjust conditions of K-12 education because, as Maxine, a pre-service teacher, describes, sources of warm concern and political clarity was often missing in their own experiences:

“I know how it is like being a Black child in the school system, and when I was in that moment, I couldn't really understand and identify the things that were happening to me. I could remember how I felt in certain situations. So, I think my approach is more of a compassionate understanding and thinking outside of the box of your traditional [approaches], like, what may be plaguing a child?”

Maxine refers to ‘traditional approaches’ of schooling as mainstream structured in education that assume that the child is the problem, rather than a misalignment between their academic skill set and their learning environment (Annamma, 2017). This can include common disciplinary practices, rigidity around curriculum delivery, and ableist structures around supporting students (e.g., special education). Nina, an elementary school teacher with 20 years of experience, also prescribes to high expectations to counter prejudicial beliefs that other school staff have of Black children in her school. She remembered an instance when she witnessed her colleagues’ blatant racism towards Black students:

“There have been some teachers there that have made some disparaging comments in regards to our Black students because they consider them to be the problem children. I've heard some different comments like ‘they're going to be on the news in the future... but you don't know, all of these kids have stories...’

Here, politicized care (McKinney de Royston & Vakil, 2017) requires an omnipresent sense of doubt about how a Black student's behavior is constructed under the guise of hegemonic, Eurocentric schooling expectations. BWT negotiate an array of sociohistorical and institutional forces when they enact politicized care with tenacity and radicalism. Examples of participants' radicalism is explored in the section, *Reconstructing Appropriateness to Center Nondominant Notions of Success*, where they enact practices that re-envision curriculum and assessment.

All participants endorsed high expectations as a salient tactic to communicate warmth and enthusiasm for Black students' academic success. Some scholars refer to this practice as being a 'warm demander', meaning a teacher provides a structured and disciplined learning environment for students who are often forgotten in the margins of being "unteachable" and "troubled" (Howell et al., 2019; Ware, 2006). For some participants, their own first Black teacher clearly communicated their demand for rigor, like Tanya who had a Black woman teacher who "I knew she cared about me. I knew she's one who looks like me, and engages with my family, and she's telling me this thing ['I can do better']. So I decided I'll rise to this occasion" to dedicate herself to reaching her potential. Previous literature has shown that BWT possess a certain gaze on their students that inspires self-empowerment and self-definition in their trajectories (Dixon & Dingus, 2008; McKinney de Royston, 2020; Watson, 2018) This tendency for Black educators to hope for Black children to "rise" above racist expectations was also communicated by Addison who is a Bay Area native. According to her, some educators think:

let me shelter them and not ask them to do these rigorous things, because I think that they can't, and how it may reflect on their teaching. Sometimes it's just the adults lowering the expectation because they feel like kids can't do anything. And I feel pressured to, I guess, knowing what kids may encounter when they leave this school, or if they don't have staff that look like them, how do they rise above that and like, set their own expectations?

Participants believed that rigor and expectations could still be maintained while altering the way students engage with curriculum. Some participants provided examples of their pedagogical decisions to normalize student-teacher collaboration and envisioning assessment to affirm positive-risk taking in learning.

Reconstructing Appropriateness to Center Nondominant Notions of Success

A component of politicized care is to acknowledge neurodiversity in learning and reconstructing traditional ways of curriculum design and instruction (McKinney de Royston & Vakil, 2017). These tactics allow academic success, cultural capital, and nonnormative learning styles to work in tandem to minimize racial harm and anti-intellectualism for BIPOC children (Howell et al., 2019; McKinney de Royston et al., 2020). Many BWT have a spiritual and relational connection to teaching, which enables them to translate hegemonic structures of knowledge and rigor into culturally-salient and affirming learning opportunities (McKinney de Royston, 2020; Watson, 2018). Participants in this study did not explicitly label their practices as “developmentally appropriate”; though, 5 of 9 participants indicated the need to support students with “diverse learning needs”. For example, Denise recognizes the pitfalls in the overfocus on preparing children for a certain future, as opposed to self-exploration and affirmation:

High expectations is a loaded term and it's usually like ‘they need to be at grade level...they need to be ready for college’, whatever that means. There's no consensus on what any of those things mean and yet there's this deficit way of talking about how we're not achieving it... we're doing work, we're doing it together, there's not a right way, we revise our thinking. We're in conversation and respectful dialog. We're critical thinkers... That's really important in order to feel yourself in the world, like, understand, like, how you're navigating we went through the world. That's important. But the expectation is, like, more on the experience and the practices that we will do... conceptions, like, ‘what is writing and what counts as writing?’, and there's not a lot of space for creative writing, which in my experience, sometimes are much deeper explorations of students' internal lives. (Denise)

Denise believes that elitist hierarchies that value neoliberalist outcomes over self-exploration and skills to contribute to a collective existence. Previous literature shows the subversive efforts of BIPOC teachers to center cultural capital, sense of belongingness, and self love (Young & Easton-Brooks, 2022). BWT use their political clarity and creativity to encourage their students to see their intrinsic interests as indicators of academic success (Howell et al., 2019; Watson, 2018). Some participants characterized mainstream beliefs about high expectations as controversial, due to the inherent connection to curricular rigor as opposed to developmentally-appropriate instruction. Politicized care may manifest as differential selection of curriculum, disciplinary, and parent consulting approaches for BIPOC students (Beneke, 2022). This means that, based on the social location of their students, teachers should cater their use of instruction and behavioral management for the sake of humanizing BIPOC children, rather than weaponizing hegemonic school structures to punish .

Participants in this study often cited their role as a teacher as a double-edged tool, in that it is integral to students' daily experiences, but also can facilitate students encountering other problematic systems, such as being a mandated reporter. Tasha describes being cognisant of her role as a teacher during parent conferences because "they're seeing me as an institutionalized person with power that could impact their parenting, [such as] filing CPS reports or requesting their kid to get an IEP". Thus, their construction of what is developmentally appropriate for BIPOC children also includes political clarity about what their families may need. Robyn, an administrator in higher education with 15 years of teaching experience, further contextualizes the privilege of being a teacher within her pedagogy:

I think that power starts by recognizing that just by virtue of being the teacher, the adult, the expert in the classroom, if you will, that you have a great deal of it, and that as a teacher and part of your your pedagogy is to not be the sage on the stage, and to not think of teaching as like pouring into these students, but more igniting what's already there and

giving them opportunities to share what they know, to speak before the group, to explain their thinking, to talk to each other you know before they share out and to it put structures in your classroom in place where at the end of the day, every single student has had a chance to speak. Now, it may not be that every single person has had a chance to speak out loud, or like, get the mic, per se, but even by being intentional in in student pairings...[for] a hard question to really think about that you have ensured that we all had a chance to talk about it, so that learning is active and not passive. (Robyn)

While providing various methods of student participation is a common teaching practice, Robyn radically cedes power to students as she aims to “not be the sage on the stage” or to not solely dictate what knowledge is correct or academic. The motive to co-construct a learning space with students is a crucial component of politicized care and a common practice in the pedagogy of BWT (McArthur-Lane, 2019; McKinney de Royston et al., 2020; Watson, 2018). In the context of this dissertation, BWT in this student use politicized care to be fugitives of hegemonic schooling practices. Meaning, they utilize relationality and Black feminist pedagogies to invite Black students to be in a context where knowledge is myriad of Afrocentric ways of being and the student-teacher power dynamic is replaced with a collaborative, freedom work. BWT abolishes a corrective lens on student success, while acting reflexively to dispel the presence of adult supremacy.

Direct Quarreling with Mainstream Schooling Practices. Participants were not directly asked about neoliberal educational reforms like shifting from No Child Left Behind to Common Core or the rise and fall of reading curriculums like Lucy Calkins. However, four participants attested to the constructions of their traditional technologies of a teacher, such as use of a state-mandated curriculum. Often, curriculum reform has dominated teacher education programs with little acknowledgement of the erasure of certain histories, languages, learning styles, etc., negating the potential for social change. It is expected that teachers who are abolitionists are prepared to critique the dysfunctional patterns in the institution of public

education and to refuse to normalize this dysfunction (Adams, 2023; Duncan, 2022; Neal-Stanley, 2023a). For example, Wendy names the hyper fixation on preparing teachers to deliver a certain curriculum:

It's been really fascinating, because I think there's been a really big shift in learning how to become a teacher [towards] teaching [the curriculum] to fidelity, following the script, has really fucked up teachers, because I'm noticing that the ability to know your students and know what they need and know where they need to go, is really the catalyst for you, not the curriculum. (Wendy)

Participants in this study strategically disempower the presence of curriculum standards in order to form authentic connections to students in a way that is on the terms of students' bottomline for the schooling trajectories (McKinney de Royston, 2020; Obaizamomwan-Hamilton, 2023). As Maxine, who describes herself as "anti-curriculum" pre-service teacher suggests, "it doesn't really voice critical thinking, it's more standardized...I'm foreshadowing the ability to adjust the curriculum to still maintain whatever standard is needed, but ensures that there is student voice and ensures that it's critical thinking...". Meaning, students' self-definition can still prevail amongst neoliberal demands to produce global competitors, a radical tactic that has been captured in previous research (Beneke, 2022; Coles & Stanley, 2021; Duncan, 2022). An example from an in-service teacher is Nina who does data conferences with her students after trimester report cards are released because "I felt like as a child, those conversations never took place with me":

Having conversations about, like, what those grades mean, how they you know, follow you. How do you want to make sure that you are improving each time, and are making... a plan for yourself, a goal for yourself...[then this becomes] the goal for me because if I'm seeing that everybody else is not is not doing well in this, then that means that I'm not doing well in teaching it. I choose a different way to approach this in order to see if things are working, and reflect on my practices too, I'm not perfect. (Nina)

For Nina and other participants, their adaptations away from traditional curriculum expectations includes self-reflection and improving their pedagogy through the lens of student affirmation,

rather than the amount of curriculum delivered each year. This is a crucial example of how BWT work within the limiting bounds of schooling structures to better the schooling experiences of BIPOC children. Their approaches not only reside under the instructional realm, but are also responsive to the growing trend for teachers to be socializing agents to emotional regulation (Brown et al., 2018; Howell et al., 2019).

A minority of participants were highly critical of mainstream reform efforts to address disciplinary disproportionality. When working toward educational liberation, some BWT are mistrustful of relying on institutional processes to enact social change (Neal-Stanley, 2023a). It is part of the pedagogy of BWT to criticize race-evasive attempts at socializing BIPOC students to the sociopolitical perils of their lives (Duncan, 2022). Kendall disagrees with her school's focus on social emotional learning, which simplifies emotionality by asking students to do nonverbal gestures and catch phrases to minimize an emotion:

They bring on things like 'Kid Power' and other behavioral management systems and to teach these kids the social, emotional learning aspect of it, but it does not bode well in the communities that they live in, like 'the garbage can tool', they want the kid to [literally] put their hand on the head, catch the problem [negative emotion], and throw it in the garbage [metaphorically]. Well, that's not gonna look good at [nearby] Park. That's a mistake, I can go on and on. (Kendall)

In this instance, Kendall refuses to accept a Eurocentric emphasis on social-emotional learning (SEL) because it minimizes and disregards the complexities of BIPOC's social positions. She names that mainstream school reform, such as SEL, assumes that emotional intelligence is not racialized and is a covert method of assimilating to Eurocentric norms (McKinney de Royston et al., 2020). Kendall touches on the larger context of racial capitalism or the way in which racist structures facilitate profit and economic gain for Black peoples' suffering. Koon (2020) explained that education law and policy is often the product of policy networks that do not prioritize the needs of children in the margins, but rather maintain the status quo. Composed of

high-class contributors, donors, powerful lobbying groups, etc., these policy networks channel social capital away from groups and actors that contest hegemonic power structures, such as school reform masked as expensive, social emotional curricula. Participants in this study tended to supplement these underwhelming reformatory efforts with communal care.

This loving concern about socializing BIPOC students to limitless potential is often interpreted as motherly.

Prevailing and Complicated Kinship Relations

It should not be ignored that docility, caring for children, and the profession of teaching being feminized are a technology of cis-heteronormativity. Meaning, this primes women in all kinds of school roles to present as soft and approachable, but BWT in this study walk a line between endorsing and resisting this logic. Addison note puts forth this assertion about relationality:

“... So there is a different kind of connection. And not just because I'm a black woman, but, looking at the need, specifically at data, then that need is in that community, and [it is important] to figure out what the problem is, and how I'm gonna fix it.”

In return for expressing positive regard, Addison found that “one of my students, he's just, like, tells everybody I'm his auntie. And the kids are like, are you? I'm everybody's auntie”. Similarly, Tanya, an elementary school teacher of 5 years, indicated that her mother “would always call us baby or honey, and then we were always taught to stick together. So I kind of put that onto other black students”. Other mothering has been described as a freedom practice, often used when Black students are feeling unheard and undervalued (McArthur-Lane, 2019). This is a unique contribution that BWT in this study selectively allow BIPOC children to project parental attachments to bolster relationality and, thereby, academic success. Participants prioritize Black students intrinsically engaging in rigor,

...instead of saying ‘everyone needs to be here and here's the bar’, because that’s not helpful or empowering. I don't think dangling the carrot is like a way to get students to feel a sense of urgency or importance around their work in the classroom. (Tanya)

Tanya constructs her understanding of ‘the bar’ as expectations put upon students to perform a certain way. Politicized care is produced by differentiating metrics of success to invite students to intrinsically take ownership of their learning. Furthermore, ‘the carrot’ illustrates a notion that BIPOC students are expected to assimilate to Eurocentric, ableist schooling norms and establishes new standards of developmental-appropriateness (Howell et al., 2021; McKinney de Royston & Vakil, 2017; McKinney de Royston, 2020). BWT approach their work through a kinship gaze that refuses to normalize objective and distal ways of interacting with students perpetuated through traditional teaching.

Though, this enactment of othermothering as a way of protecting Black children is not innate or accomplished through distinctive intuition. As BWT in this study reflected on their praxis, some realized that their socializing intentions can be camouflaged as internalized racism. For example, Wendy, an instructional coach with 14 years of teaching experience, questions her method for having “the talk” with Black students (e.g., racialized messaging about interacting with police):

I think about the year that after Trayvon Martin was murdered, the next year I was teaching fifth grade was in a predominantly Black school and I had these Black boys that were acting a fool and I found myself putting the weight of their safety upon their shoulders instead of who it really belongs to, you know? And after reflecting upon that, I realized I can't do that again, that's not helpful, it's trauma you're putting them through each time you're [reacting to Black boys with] ‘why are you yelling in my class right now?’ (Wendy)

Wendy speaks on a rumination about balancing protection and political convictions in the context of life-changing stakes. As Wendy describes the psychological toll of ‘the weight of their safety’, the theme of obligation and devotion to protecting Black children was also expressed by Maxine:

I experienced that in my first year working in the school because it was so new to me and I didn't understand the dynamics. I took on a lot of the issues that happened with the Black children [because] I knew more about their home life and they opened up to me. It was very consuming in the way that certain things you can't control or you can't do anything about, it's kind of like working within the system. I had a real shock of fatigue, anger, and many different things. My job actually had trainings on how to prevent burnout and understanding. By the time my second year rolled around, I was better equipped and more prepared, but that first year was hard for me. (Maxine)

Wendy and Maxine hold their roles as cultural translators with gravity, though it is a personal and professional journey to learn to cope with racial battle fatigue. Specifically, Black children's access to innocence and joy is simultaneously being threatened by a carceral gaze (Dumas, 2014; Rollo, 2018) that Wendy and other participants want to preserve with a cautionary tone. Bianca, a middle school teacher with 22 years of experience, describes her concern for what happens to Black children if they are not socialized to the reality of anti-Black racism in their social worlds:

I remember when I first was an AmeriCorps tutor, I was with three [middle school] teachers... and there was a group of African American girls in her class, and they would kind of tell the girls stuff like, 'oh, be quiet, sit down, be quiet' or whatever. They were friends, but the way they would talk to each other ...she [a teacher] didn't understand that it was like a form of endearment, as being brothers and sisters, being Black, that they were just doing that. She thought they were fighting, she thought they were having a conflict. I had to tell her, 'no, they're not doing that. That's their hierarchy. That's how they treat the boys, because they're like their brothers' ...I had to educate my friends about the way our children are. (Bianca)

Bianca provides an example of how Black children perform relationality and friendship in a nondominant manner, which can be misinterpreted by non-Black teachers as aggression or a punishable action. Bianca had to "educate my friends about the way our children are" so Black children are not criminalized for embodying youth culture and Afrocentric joy simultaneously. Black teachers (Redding, 2019) and race congruency (Goldhaber et al., 2019) tends to buffer against student referrals and disciplinary rates for BIPOC students. Furthermore, Carver-Thomas (2018) found that Black teachers often felt "pigeonholed" as disciplinarians and other school staff would guilt them into taking on additional responsibilities to support Black students in a

manner that did not support their teaching, but rather lessen the cognitive load for non-Black teachers to practice disrupting their anti-Black bias. Participants in this study were entangled in a personal, pedagogical, and politicized controversy about their protection of Black children. Because the personal is political, BWT galvanize their power from centering the well-being and play of Black children (Lorde, 1981). Though, it is complicated to embody parts of their consciousness within their roles as teachers and as extensions of the K-12 public school system.

Resisting Anti-Black, Racist Stereotyping. At times, the stereotypical depiction of women as caretakers has been problematized; however, BWT have reframed this paradigm (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). For instance, Tanya warns that she does not want her politically caring act to be stereotyped as “the Black Mammy type of thing, where only I can talk to a black kid, or only I can teach a black student”. Bass (2012) noted that the *Black Mammy* stereotype, which symbolizes the glorification of domestic servitude and in-house slavery, influences the work of Black women educators as they seek to resist sexist tropes that their only role is to act maternal, alongside their roles as a teacher. Robyn also cites the *Mammy* trope when she highlights the problematic assumptions placed on all Black women working in schools:

Oftentimes in school communities, you will see black women relegated to particular roles, because we're already navigating a system in which we're often seen as ‘the help’, meaning not the instructional leaders, not a content leader, not a math or English Language Arts specialist, but the assumption that you are the cafeteria worker—nothing's wrong with being the cafeteria worker...those are some of the assumptions that sometimes have to be countered just by virtue of being a Black woman. There's the reality that people see Black women as their comforters, like you're supposed to be there to make sure everyone's comfortable, kind of the Mammy trope... (Robyn)

Addison also finds herself in a predicament in which she is forced into a problematic expectation to embody stereotypes of Black women (Bass, 2012; Lee & Thomas, 2022), saying “I feel pressure to respond in certain ways or code switch and say things differently depending on who I

am interacting with ...just like some of the stereotypical things about Black women being angry or like yelling”. The notion of being labeled as an “angry Black woman” is a complicated and emotionally-charged finding that led participants to acknowledge the contradictions in their approach to working with Black children. There is an additional tension that BWT in this study must navigate as they express their devotion to the betterment of Black children’s schooling experiences. As they enact politicized care and essences of othermothering, BWT find that BIPOC students gravitate towards their pedagogy and physical classroom spaces. Black teachers invite students into a kind of spatial protection from racialized harm, which I am theorizing as Black educational fugitive space (Brown et al., 2018). An unexpected finding of this study was a theme around participants feeling devoted to holding kinship dynamics with their students, due to their own positionality as parents. A limit of the line of testimony is the focus on stereotyping perpetuated by school adults, though participants are not asked directly nor do they extrapolate on tedious interactions with BIPOC students. This is possibly due to the framing of BIPOC students as being victimized by anti-Black educational injustice and such negative interactions are part of the nature of relationality.

Generational Ties and Parent-Teachers

All experiential knowledge is evidence of a carefully curated consciousness on the empowerment of Black children, based on the teaching experiences of BWT in this study. Participants were not directly asked about their parental status, but 4 of 9 participants mentioned that raising a Black child or children added more gravity to their commitment to empowering Black children. Kendall shared that a source of inspiration for her start in the teaching profession was her experience navigating a school as a parent:

For example, I was a parent who did not come in and greet a teacher, I stopped at the curb. I was a parent that did not come into school functions and school activities that just

wasn't my thing..they [her children] did not do those things until the transaction of education became the agency of education. [For example, if I did] not show up like this every day I miss the opportunity...I don't feel pressure to show up the way that I am. I show up fully and completely as myself...I was in the seat of the parents that struggled, that needed to survive, and now I'm in the seat to provide. (Kendall)

Kendall went on to describe the “curb side parent” who “stopped at the curb” on the school building. She holds nonjudgment because parental involvement is often not explicit apathy towards a child’s schooling. From her experience, it can be a myriad of barriers and unintended consequences that disenfranchises parents from marginalized backgrounds from accessing ways of advocating for their child’s learning.

Some BWT in this study have empathy for Black families navigating the peril of anti-Black, educational injustice from parenting their own child. There are instances in the literature when BWT mentioned the additive perspective to a school’s climate (McKinney de Royston et al., 2020) or their pedagogy (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002) as an aside in interview data. Participants in this study approach their children’s schooling with a sense of confidence and efficacy to deter the inter-working of problematic, institutional forces, due to their hyper-awareness and participation in these forces as teachers. Nevertheless, their reckoning with the paradigm of being a powerless agent of their children’s trajectory, while simultaneously facing the reality of spirit death and social malaise (Dumas, 2014). Robyn speaks on her identity as a parent of 3 Black boys:

I would maybe say the raising of my own children have increased my awareness of the deficit thinking and the stereotypes depicted on Black children and Black families. I would lift them up first, I have three sons. They all had to navigate K–12 [public schools] and that was much more insightful than any preparation program or coursework I ever did, to be honest with you. (Robyn)

Although Kendall is a pre-service teacher and Robyn is an educator with 15 years of teaching an array of grades, they align in their softened gaze for Black families facing a colonial logic in

parent involvement (e.g., parents who cannot access typical engagement structures in schools are deserving of negative bias from school stakeholders). Robyn goes on to criticize the way in which this blatant bias pushes families out of opportunities to be contributors, rather than bystanders, of their children's schooling:

It's not a rationalization to treat them [families] any differently or give them any less information because, 'oh, it's [Student A]. I've never seen her family, so I don't even need to reach out'. You still need to reach out. That's why asking [families], what is your preferred method of communication?', because so often schools and educators are run from a place of middle class values. If you don't meet what is deemed as these middle class values, if you're not coming in for back to school night, if you're not coming in for 'coffee with the principal', if you're not coming in for PTA meetings. Then clearly you just can't be bothered when really there are many families that are working multiple jobs trying to stay afloat. So, there could be a lot of reasons why we may not see someone. (Robyn).

Robyn and other participants name the generational lens that she holds on her approach to working with Black students as part of her responsibility to uplift the local Black community and its potential for educational mobility (Dixon & Dingus, 2008). Previous literature has identified the emancipatory drive as part of BWT's roles as teachers as a means of embodying community work, other mothering, and radicalism through their outstretched arms (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Dillard, 2020; Duncan, 2022). BWT in this study form a linkage between their ancestral inspiration to fortify the futurity of Black youth with a fierce sense of tenacity for their betterment.

“Y’all Stick Together”: Constructing Black Educational Fugitive Space

Another research area in this study is the ways in which participants create conditions and spaces for Black children to escape stereotypical and deficit logic that normalizes anti-Blackness. Politicized care is conceptualized in this study as a method for cultivating fugitive spaces, in which Black teachers de-center traditional schooling values to promote authentic, Black liberation (Adams, 2023). Black educational fugitive space (BEFS) emerges from the radical

consciousness of BWT that is still in touch with their ancestral guidance during their schooling years. For instance, Maxine shared:

I was always taught the importance of family. Even kids in the neighborhood, we had an understanding because of—our my parents didn't explicitly say 'you was gonna face all these things and racism and all that', but [I was told] you stick together, like you see a Black child or a Black family member or anything. Y'all stick together, and you know that if you're in trouble or you need a safe space, I was taught to go to the Black person I see.

In this instance, Maxine is speaking to the nature of BEFS being a place of refuge in navigating racist encounters or institutional racism. This translates into their teaching through the intentional efforts BWT make to designate space for empowerment:

I've found myself [inadvertently] switch in how I'm talking to children. I usually feel like the aunt in some ways ... there's a way that I think that even linguistically I might be switching away from the way I talk to some other children, maybe not. I'd have to really think about that, but I do think of students as not just students inside my classroom, but in an entire educational space. I would often have students who are not mine, like not in my classes or I would be leading BSU (Black Student Union) ...and other sort of community spaces that I do feel like much more in a kinship kind of relationship. (Denise)

Denise points to an endarkened epistemology, or a hidden perspective formulated from their identity, (Adams, 2023; Obaizamomwan-Hamilton, 2023) about their calling to enact BEFS as being subtle, innate, unconscious, and, thus unexplainable. BWT with certain positionalities are able to anticipate ways to connect with Black students through code switching or facilitating affinity spaces, alongside their teaching obligations. Nevertheless, it is a clear devotion that fulfills their obligations to Black students beyond what is expected of a typical teacher.

Not only are Black educational fugitive spaces (BEFS) about psychological safety and reframing of power dynamics, but also, it includes the explicit structures and physical spaces that Black educators cultivate alongside BIPOC students (McArthur-Lane, 2019; Neal-Stanley, 2023b). BWT in this study provided examples in which they reclaim their teaching duties to prioritize their practices of politicized care. BEFS can be obtained by tactically modeling brave

conversations and norming around race, which participants in this study tend to fold into class routines and curriculum choices. Many elementary classrooms participate in a morning routine, Nina uses this structure as a way of normalizing racial healing:

I had 27 [students], I would say at least half of them had a lot of trauma. We spend a lot of time in 'circle time', dealing with social emotional issues and I'm always telling them 'I'm not teaching you a fourth grade lesson, I'm teaching you a life lesson. You [student] have to learn how to deal with these things outside of this classroom... there's different ways in which you can deal with those things outside of here...'. That's what I try to do, is create for them a little toolbox that they can utilize...those are different things that you can utilize for yourself in order to help you get through some of the things that they're dealing with. (Nina)

Think back to Kendall, who criticized a mainstream SEL strategy, called “the garbage tool”, that minimized the stressors of children, rather than supporting children with making sense of how their cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds value and express resilience. Kendall and Nina align in their belief that children in their racially diverse classroom encounter more complex adversity that mainstream SEL reforms may not respect (Koon, 2020). Nina employs BEFS by normalizing the use of “circle time” to process large emotions from events that may have occurred outside of the classroom. Participants are deeply committed to humanizing and revolutionizing their praxis, so that their care was obvious and for Black students. They constantly ask “how do I get kids to feel like, ‘I belong here. I enjoy school. The school enjoys having me. My teacher wants me’?” (Tanya), which opens up opportunities for student authenticity. Rather it be within their classroom or the school building, BWT in this study use their pedagogy and power as teachers to show loving concern for the holistic well-being of their students.

Not only are BEFS about psychological safety and reframing of power dynamics, but also, include the explicit structures and physical spaces that Black educators cultivate alongside BIPOC students (McArthur-Lane, 2019; Neal-Stanley, 2023b). Participants are deeply

committed to humanizing and revolutionizing their praxis, so that their care was easily permeated towards Black students and their families. For instance, Nina held radical empathy for a Black boy of a single mother:

“Well, maybe he doesn't have the money to afford [school lunch] so I talked to the lunch lady and we were able to work something out. Then come to find out what he was he was taking the money his mother was giving them and putting it back in her purse because they were having a lot of financial issues. It was, heart wrenching to me to even hear that kind of story for a child... So I started going by and doing home visits, and got to know his mom and... she ended up asking me to be his godmother.”

It should also be noted that participants also aimed their emancipatory efforts towards Black caregivers, in a loving, trauma-sensitive manner. Previous literature points to BWT constantly seeking to know their students' intrinsic needs to provide profound love and joy amongst systemic inequalities (Obaizamomwan-Hamilton, 2023). I draw upon Obaizamomwan-Hamilton's (2023) construction of BWT as 'transformers', in that they manifest educational justice and a way of protecting Black children based on their political clarity of how matrices of domination operate within school contexts . Though these attributes of BWT's praxis are powerful, there is a multi-faceted tax on their psyche and professional experiences.

“Not Just My Responsibility”: Devotion and Care are Laborious

Another thematic finding from exploring BWT's stances on politicized care and BEFS, is the impact of risk and fatigue on enacting their praxis. It is required that BWT operate through an ethic of risk and servanthood as they go above their socialization to the role of an educator (Dillard, 2020; Stanley, 2022). This refusal to accept the anti-Black conditions of dominant school contexts is an act of liberation and is of dire necessity; although this was often in tension with other expectations imposed by a school's culture around instruction and discipline (Dixon, 2003; McKinney de Royston, 2020; Stanley, 2022). BWT in this study found themselves taking

on additional responsibilities to act as a buffer for the inevitable appearance of racial bias, such as Denise:

I think there's an additional layers about what Black women specifically are asked to do. And in my experience, some of that, has been around discipline, and I know that's like, a pretty consistent experience for people like 'we don't know what to do with these Black children. Can you talk to them?' like things like that. And I'm like, of course.

Denise's receptiveness to acting as a cultural translator is shared by other participants who endorse this role, but with the anticipation of fatigue or being overworked. In a way, BWT practice radical acceptance in the reality of their school context or, as Nina describes, "as a Black woman, especially, you have to take care of these things, just deal with them" because of what is at stake. At times, it feels impossible for BWT to fulfill their duties as a teacher and employ BEFS for students at the margins, requiring individualized and non-academic support. Nevertheless, BWT in this study do not hesitate to go beyond their teacher role expectations to identify racial injustice and model liberatory practices for other school adults.

BWT navigate multiple asks??? in the enactment of BEFS that are at odds with the resources and capacity of a typical teacher. Nevertheless, their unwavering devotion is able to hold the strain of labor with students' need to escape from harm put forth by complacent adults in school, as described by Bianca:

...I don't think it should be just my responsibility. I think we also should teach our colleagues ... that they need to be more sensitive to cultural competency of the students that they're working with, and they need to understand ...[how] they [BIPOC students] code switch, the way they dress, or their hair [like how they] wear our hair natural now, and all those things, they need to be more understanding of those things. I think as we should educate all, all people in our within our organization, but as myself, I feel blessed the kids feel affirmed by me and that they see I care about them.

The additional expectation for BWT to do care work for other school adults is connected to the theme of othermothering and balancing this with their role as a teacher (Brown et al., 2018).

Often, Black teachers are positioned as humanizing agents of Black children's needs as their

non-Black colleagues attempt to dissociate from their obligation to grapple with anti-Blackness. While previous literature has framed this tendency as beneficial for Black children, it is also problematic that Black teachers are in a double-bind of protecting Black children from a racist, sociopolitical climate and supporting their colleagues with their fragility (McKinney de Royston et al., 2020; Stanley, 2022; Starks et al., 2021).

Not all participants in this study were able to cope with radical acceptance while persisting in their teaching role. Tanya was transitioning into an administrative role because the impact of teaching “took an emotional or now I was experiencing because I was so heavily invested...I want students who look like me to be successful and education is the foundation to that. So, I took everything with such a sense of life and death”. Tanya was forced to dull her radicalism due to the imbalance with compassion fatigue and a sense of burnout towards her teacher-activism role. There is an ethic of risk involved with prioritizing social justice that not only includes professional stakes, but also takes a toll on one’s well-being and emotional stamina (Stanley, 2022). There is an unintended consequence that arises from this deep devotion to liberation of Black children from educational inequity and Tanya adjusted by seeking a role (as a school leader) that facilitated her vision for change. Previous research found that Black teachers face microaggressions from school staff, even hostility at times, as they act as shields against anti-Blackness (Dixon, 2003; Duncan, 2022). Addison was hypervigilant about how she is perceived as a Black woman by her non-Black colleagues:

I've gotten that [organizational resistance] before when I know darn well. I've been in education for long enough to know that I have to show up a certain way and what's at risk is me losing my job if I don't. I have to be very careful about what I say and how I say it. I think that it is more of a risk as a Black woman and with there being few, few black leaders in education and in [my school district].

All participants cited situations when they were weary of other staff, from their predominantly White workforce, to support BIPOC children or times when they did not feel supported by their organizational culture. Robyn summarizes how she experiences gendered racism in her past teaching experiences:

“Because I am a marginalized person who comes from a marginalized background and community, the risk [to enacting politicized care] has to do with racism, sexism, classism and all of the assumptions that come with that, because racism really is largely about the distraction of needing to prove yourself or demonstrate that you're competent, demonstrate that you can teach and [there's] all of this time that is spent where you have to go above and beyond, or do a whole set of gymnastics that my non-Black woman colleague would not need to do, would not be asked to do, or wouldn't be expected to, but because of who I am and what I look like, there's a whole nother layer of assumptions that are made.” (Robyn)

Robyn specifies a sense of persecution connected to being woman-identifying and Black, illuminating a Black feminist standpoint in how Black women navigate a profession that is underpaid and underappreciated as women's work and a place in which their historic contributions have been diminished (Neal-Stanley, 2023b). For example, Wendy, with well over 10 years of teaching, shared that she “had the experience, which I'm realizing is not normal, that every year I have parents either question my teaching and or request for their child to be removed out of my class”. While Wendy was working in a predominately White district not in the Bay area for some years of her teaching, over half of participants mentioned or alluded to being undermined by stakeholders (e.g., parents, administrators, instructional coaches) in their school communities. Though, this did not deter their intentions to create fugitive spaces for Black children to flee anti-Black racism. BWT work in conditions that often minimize the complexity in Black children's lives, but with “sweat”, they deliberately choose to affirm Black children at all costs (Stanley, 2022). Overall, participants aligned with the recent and growing literature on politicized care (McKinney de Royston & Vakil, 2017) and this was intertwined with a devotion

to enact BEFS. There is heterogeneity in how resourced each participant felt as they pursued radicalism and Black liberation in their teaching practices. By gaining more nuance to the experiential differences of BWT, this may provide ways to support their well-being and sustain their practices as normalized in teaching professionalism.

Lessons for Teacher Practice

Using multiple-consciousness gained from professional and experiential knowledge, Black teachers can navigate traditional teaching professionalism and their pursuit of Black liberation to remain connected to the realities of BIPOC students. Participants in this study pointed out pitfalls to enacting these practices that could be mitigated by emboldening teacher education programs to reform and integrate relics?? from this study and its cited body of literature. Ultimately, this clash between the obligation of servanthood to the educational futures of Black children and their desperate need for self-care, is what led to their attrition from teaching (Lee & Thomas, 2022). Unfortunately, there are sacrifices that BWT take on when they push the bounds of traditional teaching professionalism. This indirectly harms BIPOC students who are deserving of adequately-paid and nourished educators that are able to enact tools of Black educational fugitive space and politicized care. So, the need for non-Black teachers to champion the culturally-relevant practices from the BWT in this study and beyond is desperately needed. A key takeaway from this study is that, while participants were encouraged to use their praxis to empower students, Black women are generally overworked and underpaid, so are K-12 public school teachers. This is a conundrum that is unsustainable and replicates decades long trends of Black women's labor going underappreciated.

It is norm in teacher education programs to not address racial bias or acknowledge the role of teaching training in the persistence of educational disproportionality and many BWT gain this

insight from their own consciousness or experiential knowledge (Farinde-Wu et al., 2023). As Maxine points out, there is also an “it-factor” to creating BEFS that may not be accessible to all educators because “if you haven’t lived it, or have an actual was they say dog in the fight, then you can’t truly teach it to someone else or expect someone to truly understand”. Meaning, there is informal and subjective personal growth that is often missed in educational equity. BWT in this study often named their own schooling experiences or being taught by a Black teacher as a grounding factor for integrating their personhood with their pedagogy. Their access to such experiences emboldened their empathy and there was heterogeneity in how this manifested in their approaches to working with Black children. Thus, all folks must engage in reflective work and personal growth in order to reach common ground with the experiences of Black children and other children from historically marginalized groups. It is important for teacher education programs to prioritize reflexivity and cultural humility to support teachers with negotiating their privilege or ignorance (Neal-Stanley, 2023; Lee & Thomas, 2022).

Chapter 5: A Black Feminist Call to Humanize BIPOC Children

In the final chapter of this dissertation, I conclude with ways that this qualitative inquiry provides powerful examples for all educators, future research on teacher education, and policies towards diversifying the teacher workforce. Black women teachers (BWT) in this study taught me how to mindfully conspire and use tempered radicalism as a sword against the tumultuous conditions of K-12 school contexts. This a radical assault on all threats against the freedom and dreaming of public school students that has perpetuated spiritual violence against minoritized children since the creation of Indian boarding schools. Meaning, they integrate their political clarity with a devotion to humanize BIPOC children in a manner that is situated in their intersectional knowledge. Their decision to use this praxis in their pedagogy and interactions

with students and families is an assertive stand against the convergence of dysfunctional school systems and anti-Blackness (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Dumas, 2014; Love, 2016). This chapter situates the testimony of BWT in this study in the broad conversation on educational liberation, which demonstrates empirical ties to politicized care and Black educational fugitive space.

Summary of Dissertation Arc

In the first and second chapters, Black women's imprint on liberation in K-12 education is positioned as an exemplar for reform, often through hidden knowledge that became palpable in the context of this dissertation. It has been theorized, using that participants' spiritual connection to their reflective growth as a teacher-activist and animosity towards the disarray of institutional and interpersonal barriers to embodying their praxis (Dillard, 2000). In the representation of this data, I deduced an artful and layered discourse about BWT in an unstable and underfunded institution. The literature review is a mapping of the praxis of BWT as being "transformers" (Obaizamomwan-Hamilton, 2023), othermothers (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002), and exploited by the apathy or denial of participation in anti-Black racism by various school stakeholders (Brown et al., 2018; Starks et al., 2018). Amongst the richness of this literature, 2 constructs were chosen as anchors to connect the praxis and pedagogy of BWT to a growing body of literature on humanizing children.

In my first research question, I explored how BWT articulated their attitudes and beliefs around politicized care (McKinney de Royston & Vakil, 2017). There is no absolute or uniform way of employing politicized care because each participant in this study taught in a distinct context and there were powerful commonalities in their social positions. Politicized care can be shown through the re-use of their adult power and pedagogical decisions to produce physical and/or psychic spaces of refuge. Some participants discussed ways that their efforts were

directed towards students and families. Whether it be going above and beyond to reach, as Kendall described it, “curb side parent” or being enthusiastic in the creation of the Black Student Union that Denise employed, fugitive spaces that BWT in this study co-constructed with their BIPOC students are the essence of hidden knowledge. Other participants described ways that other (non-Black) teachers may influence their enactment of fugitive space, such as Bianca who stated “we also should teach our colleagues...to be more sensitive to cultural competency of the students” so BIPOC children have less of a need to escape. Though, many participants felt that the “we” should be a shared commitment with many school stakeholders (e.g., policymakers, principals, etc.), but is often delegated to the emotional workload of BWT.

In my second research question, I highlight the caveats and confounding factors that self-validate a Black feminist argument that Black women are pushed into hierarchies in order to exploit their labor. This particular way of providing a labor of love, while negotiating stereotypical projections as the *Black Mammy* or always angry by other school staff or parents, is a rich resistance tactic. Simultaneously, BWT provided testimony from a praxis that is largely muted in a line of scholarship that examines single-identity politics and K-12 education reform (Obaizamomwan-Hamilton, 2023). This theme was an expected outcome of this dissertation given the use of Black feminism and the depth of participants’ consciousness. BWT in this study are aware of the injustice that flourishes in the presence of race-evasive school policies and practices, as well as refusal from other teachers to address bias. Specifically, BWT pointed out in Chapter 4, the section, “*Y’all Stick Together*”: *Constructing Black Educational Fugitive Space*, that it is not their responsibility to take on the labor that all educators should be doing. The implications of this dissertation aim to lessen the burden placed on BWT and Black teachers, as it pertains to the betterment of Black children in K-12 public schools.

In my third research question, I looked for instances when participants would reflect on their own schooling history or personal connection to the field of education because the personal is political (Lorde, 1979). This line of inquiry was partially inspired by my practitioner's philosophy that children who relish their schooling years often grow up to be supporters of schools, in different capacities. This kind of agape love improves school systems and educators who possess this intrinsic motivation have a consciousness that appears in their role, as seen in this study. Participants in my study noted their ties to education as being a child of a teacher who instilled Afrocentric beliefs about educational mobility. Furthermore, some participants identified their role as a parent as influential in their approach to using politicized care or their vision for BEFS. As Robyn described, parenting 3 Black boys through their public schools “was much more insightful than any preparation program or coursework I ever did”, which was an unexpected finding in this dissertation. Overall, Chapter 4 is a starting point to exploring the gap between empirical trends about school reform and the practical experiences of educators who witness and contribute to the improvement of BIPOC children in urban school districts.

Empirical Implications: Decolonizing Assumptions Underlying Race Congruency

The first implication for future research addresses a simplified notion in mainstream school reform, which assumes that diversifying the teacher workforce will truncate the effect of racial bias or interpersonal racism (Cherry-McDaniel, 2019; Goldhaber et al., 2019; Young & Easton-Brooks, 2022). There is a plethora of evidence that speaks to the additive value of student-teacher racial matching, in context of a predominantly White-woman teacher workforce (Castro & Calzada, 2021; Ingersoll et al., 2022; Redding, 2019; Scott et al., 2022). It is essential to assume that race congruency is a dominating factor for BIPOC students to be humanized. As Nina noted, “I've seen that happen even with teachers that look like them ... this student has

behavior issues, so they might need to be put in special ed[ucation] and it's like, 'wait, hold on a minute' ...", when discussing disproportionality. Three of 10 participants noted that other Black staff are also culpable of internalizing stereotypical depictions of Black children. BWT in this study have modeled ways in which multiple truths can be held in tension with each other, so this is not a contradiction. Rather, it is a clarification of a Black feminist stance that challenges all people to recognize their inherent participation in systems of oppression (Dillard, 2020).

A small body of research explores how teachers of color may harbor internalized racism, with most of it being centered on pre-service teachers (Jackson et al. 2021; Wilson & McMillan, 2024). This may be possibly due to the tedious and unfavorable task of untangling the implications for the future of schooling for BIPOC children (Garrett et al., 2024; Pabon, 2016). When offered an opportunity to tackle internalized racism, teachers of color recognized that the webbed nature of language, hair texture, and other racialized characteristics permeated their pedagogy and molded their practice away from their cultural capital and personhood (Kohli, 2014). Preservice teachers of color, who were training in predominantly White institutions (PWI), often do not have an opportunity to engage in a dimension of self-exploration that includes gaining heritage knowledge (Jackson et al., 2021). Pre-service teachers of colors already are negotiating negative messaging from their predominantly Black institution (PWI) about their positionality and this way of schooling complicates the significance of social mobility and educational attainment (Wilson & McMillan, 2024). Future research should aim to make interdisciplinary connections with the construction of the subjugated and oppressed dichotomy, that is explored by Black scholars like Franz Fanon and W.E.B. Du Bois. It should be normalized that internalized racism is covert and evasive and this part of an endarkened epistemological demand to widen the spectrum of teacher diversity research. Future research should seek to

answer: how do historically marginalized teachers harbor internalized oppression and, to what extent can teacher professionalism incorporate consciousness-raising supports as part of training pre-service teachers?

The Disappearing Line: Negotiating Professional and Personal Identities

All teachers can embody harmful practices, including teachers of color who have not reflected on their own biases; thus, walking different lines of identity consciousnesses (e.g., teacher, Black person, cis-woman, etc) . Then, the term, settler teacher syndrome, is defined as the tendency for teachers to (un)intentionally maintain White-supremacist hegemony as part of their pedagogy and classroom management practices. This occurs through the marginalizing of students that present outside of developmental normativity and are, thus, pushed out and denied equal opportunity in their learning trajectories. Teachers uphold pathologizing school systems, such as disciplinary referrals or mandating reporting, unless they creatively sidestep around its pitfalls (Cherry-McDaniel, 2019; Garrett et al., 2024). This framing places teachers in the matrix of domination as a participant and/or target of educational injustice, based on their ability to interrogate the system they are part of. There were participants that specified their role as a teacher as being a barrier to forming trust and authenticity with Black families who had been traumatized by previous school encounters. Cherry-McDaniel (2019) challenges mainstream assumptions that BIPOC teachers are prepared, without explicit training, to grow a multi-dimensional consciousness that grapples with the delicate balance of empowering and exceptionalizing marginalized students.

Another consequence of assuming that race congruency is the solution to educational disproportionality, is amplified for Black children who encounter anti-Blackness from other Black school staff. This has been described as a way of abandoning Black children at the nexus

of carceral systems, adultification, and pushing out through exclusion from the general education setting (Garrett et al., 2024). For instance, participants in this study saw themselves as needing to socialize Black children to the potential of being adultified when encountering law enforcement or other shared experience in racial and gender profiling. However, scholars have questioned to what extent Black educators replicate anti-Black harm and school malaise (Dumas, 2014; Garrett et al., 2024). As Wendy noted, she “found myself putting the weight of their safety upon their [Black boys] shoulders instead of who it really belongs to”, which is damaging to the spirits and access to childhood for Black children. Garrett and colleagues (2024) refers to the tendency for Black educators to perpetuate neglect, under the guise of preparation or protection against deficit-based gazes, as a form of abandonment. While Black educators may intend to communicate their consciousness through warning signals (e.g., having “the talk” or lowering their tolerance for certain behaviors), there is a blurred line between socializing and dooming Black children to the anti-Black conditions that are institutional and interpersonal (Garrett et al., 2024). BWT in this study model ways to contend with where the metaphorical line should be drawn and hope to improve their praxis to embolden, rather than demoralize Black students’ futurity.

It is problematic to assume that student-teacher race congruency will counteract longstanding inequities and disproportionality in public education. This is why participants in this study, and BIPOC teachers in scholarship (Watson, 2018; Young & Easton-Brooks, 2022), call for educators with privileged identities to join them in racial healing. Nina and other participants often attributed their praxis to how “I choose a different way to approach this in order to see if things are working, and reflect on my practices too, I’m not perfect”; thus, self-reflection and ceding power to children to inform self-growth is a liberative act. Future

research may address the need for the humanizing of BIPOC children, to ameliorate the ways in which Black teachers may deny Black children their right to innocence. BWT in this study recognized that they were susceptible to replicating stereotypical paradigms endorsed by their Black community. Participants constantly questioned their intentions in their work with Black children, such as Wendy, or their access to supremacist power as a teacher, which Robyn mentions in her testimony, “...part of your your pedagogy is to not be the sage on the stage, and to not think of teaching as like pouring into these students, but igniting what's already there and giving them opportunities to share what they know...”. BWT model ways of ceding power to students and practicing omniscient reflexivity through uncertainty and fatigue. Future research should address how teacher education programs can grapple with training pre-service teachers to be socializing agents. This entails confronting diverging ideas about how personal ideologies, belief systems, etc., may influence pedagogy and teaching practices.

Policy Implications: Centering Relationality as Best Practice

Across my dissertation, I offer relationality and belongingness as alternatives to school reform efforts, such as Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems (PBIS), professional development aimed at cultural sensitivity, and social-emotional learning curricula (Koon, 2020). Furthermore, I have demanded specificity in mainstream efforts to diversify the teacher workforce, by fortifying preparation programs to engage in difficult topics around internalized racism. Policies that recruit Black teachers into an institutional and organizational setting that assumes they are a solution for decades of injustice, while perpetuating microaggressions and racial trauma against them are doomed to failure (Brown et al., 2018; Stovall & Mosley, 2023). Ultimately, what has been constructed as “best practice” in teaching serves Eurocentric purposes

of schooling and hegemonizes an objective and apolitical gaze on children (McKinney de Royston, 2020).

In contrast, Beneke (2022) offers a leadership framework as an example for how enforcers of school policy can integrate politicized care. To lessen policy-to-practice gaps, Beneke (2022) argues that policy enactment theory should be used to make sense of how various popular interventions for discipline reform work to offset exclusionary school practices. This allows for qualitative evidence and subjectivity to drive policy change, which opens space for grounding and radical questioning about the objective and beneficiaries in policymaking (Watson, 2018). In Table 2, I provide examples of how politicized care and BEFS can be implemented in mainstream policy trends. Beneke (2022) offers a rich framework that applies a care feminist analysis to mainstream disciplinary reform, which is paired with examples of policy barriers to envisioning a school context that is warm, critical, and dynamic.

Table 2. Policy Enactment Examples

Dimension of Politicized Care	Political Clarity	Necessity of Communal Bonds	Potential-Affirming , Anti-Deficit Mindset	Critical Developmental-Appropriateness
Example of Policy Trend	Low and intermittent commitment from teacher education programs, teacher credential entities, and other teacher professional stakeholders towards improving standards for cultural competency.	Little change on federal and state-level towards improving school conditions and compensation for school staff.	There are tremendous barriers to learning about the social worlds of children, which includes mandating reporting and the nonexistence of structures to confidentially support families experiencing toxic stress.	Previous research rebukes interventions like Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems (PBIS) are anti-solutions to underpinnings of the school-prison nexus (Koon, 2020).
	While school staff	Beneke (2022)	Challenging	Beneke (2022)

from marginalized backgrounds may approach their role with skills to support BIPOC students, it is not solely their responsibility to contribute to transformative disciplinary reform (Beneke, 2022).	asserts that strengthening disciplinary reform relies on authentic connections between students and teachers through care that is co-constructed and community-specific.	disciplinary systems to shift away from pathological labeling and towards a trauma-informed analysis of systemic antecedents of certain behaviors (Beneke, 2022)	critiques mainstream disciplinary reform efforts, such as social emotional learning (SEL) and restorative justice, due to their reliance on a perpetrator's logic or that bad behavior should be labeled and rationalized away.
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Practical Implications: Holding Our Water, Sharing the Labor of BWT

There is a great deal at stake for BWT and other marginalized groups in a tradition of delegating relational work as a pseudo-compliment from White counterparts. Black teachers find themselves in a dilemma in which they often persist in the face of hopelessness in their school's ability to grapple with anti-Blackness, to protect this generation of Black youth (Lee & Thomas, 2022; Stanley, 2022; Starks et al., 2021). It is relevant to expand upon Denise's testimony in Chapter 4 when she discusses her decision to take the students into her advisory, was a way of negotiating additional labor that her non-Black counterpart diabolically delegated to her:

"I think teachers are, there's a lot of labor and invisible labor that's expected of teachers. Period, doesn't matter what, who you are, or what grade you teach. There's a normalized, invisible labor that's often expected. It's expected that you would do it for the love, not the compensation and then there's all these layers. I think there's an additional layers about what women teachers are often asked to do, there's a lot a lot more about what Black women, specifically, are asked to do. In my experience, some of that has been around discipline. A pretty consistent experience for people [to say] 'well, we don't know what to do with these black children. Can you talk to them?' things like that. And I'm like, of course, if we need to get in line, we'll get in line, and we'll have some conversations. I'm happy to talk to parents and I have a different kind of relationship with parents, usually."

In some ways, Denise and other participants were both reluctant and open to serve the unmet needs of Black children, though their non-Black co-workers also benefitted from the relief they

provided. Often, care is normed in Western societies as a feminized gender expectation that women, particularly Black women, have been expected to do, even at the cost of being self-sacrificial, overburdened, and underappreciated (Beneke, 2022). However, when Black teachers incorporated emancipatory pedagogy into their practices or curriculum, they were often condemned by their school administration for going outside what is typical for “direct instruction” (Duncan, 2022; Lee & Thomas, 2022). The interplay of these findings is why it is diabolical to demand BWT to act radically to dignify Black children, while neglecting their capacity to take on this demand.

Participants in this study were resilient and determined, but often expressed feelings of burnout or left the teaching profession for another role in education, such as Addison who became a principal or Robyn who transitioned into a higher education administration role. Tanya was enrolled in a school leadership program because “I was so heavily invested [in my students]” and wanted to facilitate change at a larger scale. These participants described their attrition as a pathway to expanding their praxis and their next role allowed them to enact their professional visions. BWT women in an affinity group shared how they experienced new mental health difficulties, like anxiety and constant fatigue, that caused them to seek psychotherapy to address a sense of guilt for wanting to leave the profession and resenting the teaching field (Lee & Thomas, 2022). Ultimately, this tension between the obligation of servanthood to the educational futures of Black children and their desperate need for self-care, led to their attrition (Lee & Thomas, 2022). Thus, not only is the absence of Black educators’ politicized care a barrier for transformational change in schools, but also, increase their attrition, which severs relationships and continuity for BIPOC children. Young & Easton-Brooks (2020) highlighted the problematic data pattern of BWT working in “hard-to-staff” schools, which inevitably increases

their likelihood of burnout. Additionally, Cherry-McDaniel (2019) problematizes the higher attrition rates of teachers of color as indicative of their difficulty with navigating the field and asserts that longevity in the profession is needed to make social change. Thus, the teaching profession must become more welcoming and empowering of BWT with strong care ethics, if there is a hope to sustain racial healing and decrease racial disproportionality.

For Wendy, she left a teaching position in a predominately White area with hopes that the Bay Area would alleviate her sense of racial battle fatigue. However, she continued to feel unsupported by colleagues from privileged backgrounds when she embodied radicalism. It has been suggested that communities of practice (Cherry-McDaniels, 2019) and affinity spaces (Kohli, 2014; Stovall-Mosley; 2023) were instrumental in countering isolation, burnout, and other extensions of internalized racism. It is not that BWT are solely capable of enacting the praxis articulated by participants in this dissertation, rather, it is a calling for all to honor and ground their visions for educational justice in a discourse of dignity and love. It is not the obligation of BWT to pioneer a future in which Black children are eradicated from deep marginalization, but they will break as many chains as their capacity allows. All the while, benevolent, misogynoir manifests as pseudo-one-downsmanship, combined with toxic organizational experiences pushes against their liberatory educational approach (Lee & Thomas, 2022). I am left with fierce willpower and appreciation of BWT's tenacity, which I have witnessed through literature reviews, interviewing, and public engagement.

Politicized Care to Politicized Rage

Many Black women are socialized, by misogynoir society, to the stereotypical paradigm that Black women are angry or bitter, but BWT in this study were anxious to provide counter narratives for the need to express animosity. As Lorde (1997) wrote in her essay, *the Uses of*

Anger, “Black women are expected to use our anger only in the service of other people's salvation, other people's learning. But that time is over”. Continuing Denise’s monologue, she shifts her tone from content to frustrated or agitated when she says:

“But that's not necessarily like my responsibility either, always, I do feel like there is a tension there...[for example,]in one of them [schools], where we've had a very strong advisory system, which also felt like another like model of kinship in a way that it was very clear that the advisor was a liaison with families and with the community. Not all my students were Black... but there is an understanding that there was a closer kind of relationship with families, so sometimes, like there was a really strategic placement of certain kids in my class...being a Black woman teacher has shown up [in a way] like, ‘oh, we don't have anything for Black History Month. Do you want to lead some things or organize some events?’ sure, because everybody needs to learn about Black history, but also, that's a lot of extra work on me...I'll say is to how it has felt when I'm like, the last Black teacher in a place... being sort of the last person, and sometimes the added responsibility of being solely on me to disrupt some of the things that are happening. Then it's solely on me to say ‘oh, actually, we don't say that. We don't talk like that. Or here's why ...’”

Denise eloquently summarizes the existentialism of being a teacher-activist and radical Black feminist. Lorde (1997) also refuses to accept White guilt as reparations for racist and sexist oppression, but rather, asserts a will to be angry at her circumstances. BWT in this study recognize that embodying anger and refusal are necessary to compel their non-Black colleagues to not settle in their guilt or avoidance. It should not be misconstrued that BWT plead] from a place of accusation, but their anger towards the labor of politicized care “is fury , not suffering” (Lorde, 1997). Although participants in this study were interviewed separately, previous literature points to the need to allow fugitive spaces for Black teachers to express authentic anger that is balmed with affinity and healing (Stovall & Mosley, 2023). There is beauty in being unsettled and bothered by the anti-Black conditions that force Black children to constantly feel that they must conform to Eurocentric behavioral standards (Goldhaber et al., 2019; Winn & Winn, 2016). BWT were empowered by their anger to persevere against perceived resistance from co-workers and unwavering in their commitment to share labor with non-Black co-workers.

Concluding Remarks

To end this chapter, I proposed next steps for the areas of research, policy, and practice for teacher education and professionalism (e.g., best practices, constructing high quality pedagogy), which is crucial for a sector under attack by the 2024 Trump Administration. Future research should continue to take a multidisciplinary stance on the impact of power relations in traditional K-12 spaces and emphasize relationality as a method for youth empowerment. This line of research should embolden the trend of teacher and school reform policy to move towards the use of policy enactment frameworks (such as Beneke, 2022), widening the scope for teacher diversity, and improving pay and workplace conditions for all teachers. Specifically, efforts to diversify the teacher workforce should prioritize training opportunities for self-reflexivity and consciousness-raising, while moving towards an assumption that all teacher candidates can grow their knowledge about systemic oppression. My hope is that this shift in research will produce a new awareness of unjust realities of Black teachers, who were once Black students in an anti-Black institution and are often seeking to disrupt this harm. Again, the commitment of all K-12 teachers to embody anti-racist attitudes and nourish their consciousness, allows BWT to share labor and resist burnout. I recommend a synchronized change in multiple sectors that influence the lives of BWT, so their willpower and grace is not continually attacked by harm-avoidance and race-evasive efforts of mainstream reform.

Across this dissertation, the analysis on gender remained limited to the circumstances facing cis-gender, Black women and what implications could play a role in their experiences. In an ideal world, there would be a stratum of this dissertation that explored the pedagogy and organizational experiences of Black queer and trans teachers (BQTT). Previous literature has shown that teacher training is largely silent on supporting LGBTQ+ youth and delivering

curriculum with positive representation of queer people and topics (Antonelli & Sembiente, 2022). This research also highlighted that even existing as an openly non-heterosexual and/or non-conforming to heteronormative gender roles is a radical statement. Thus, honesty and self-authenticity were significant themes in the daily experiences of LGBTQ+ educators (Antonelli & Sembiente, 2022). Turning towards queer Black teachers, Brockenbrough (2012) authored a paper on a small cohort of Black male teachers who were closetted, demonstrating how precarious it can be to conduct research on this population. Over a decade ago, Black male teachers in this study concealed their queerness both openly with their students and within the context of the data collection, referring to themselves as “not heterosexual” and “also not gay” (Brockenbrough, 2012). However, participants still were forced to navigate having their sexuality questioned by students and ignoring blatant homophobia. Research focusing on BQTT is crucial to the body of research on Black teachers and it is careful and socially dangerous work. In the midst of the 2024 Trump Administration’s white supremacist agenda to police and persecute LGBTQ+ affirming sources in K-12 schools, queer educators deserve protection and peace more than ever.

Personal Testimony

I am in deep gratitude to Tanya, Addison, Wendy, Kendall, Denise, Nina, Bianca, Robyn, and Maxine for their willingness to reflect with authenticity and vulnerability about their teaching experiences. My line of questioning throughout this dissertation does not reveal a tangible solution for abolishing anti-Black racism that is perpetuated between school stakeholders and BIPOC children. BWT in this study and I were not seeking closure or self-gratification, but instead, we sought to honor the dedication of BWT in our lives and how that has transformed our praxis. I am inspired by my first Black teacher, Ms. Ayanna Carter, and

the first Black teacher I worked with as a doctoral student in school psychology, Ms. Shamika Pratt. As participants in this study named, it is not always their formal training or professional development that propels their praxis towards an anti-racist, fugitive vision. It is often the lessons learned through relationality, racial trauma, and ancestral ties to education as a source of social mobility. I hope that all educators increase their capacity for reflexivity in their pedagogy and devotion to humanizing children, in the way that BWT have modeled for me.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Protocol and Crosswalk Table

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about my dissertation! I am interested in two highly-related topics: politicized care and Black fugitivity.

Politicized care is defined as an ideological orientation that often manifests through pedagogy. It is a response to the deficit and unjust, social position of Black children in U.S. K-12 education. This response is not only an ideological intention, but also, an embodiment of humanization through pedagogical actions. Overall, it aims to bolster Black teachers' critical consciousness and radical empathy in order to provide potentially-affirming, kinship relations that counteract stereotypical messaging from Black children's school context. Though it does not align with traditional teaching professionalism, there is an overwhelming commitment to lessening power differentials for the sake of unleashing the benefit of vulnerability, positive regard, and enthusiasm for the futurity of Black youth.

Background questions:

- a. How long have you been teaching or how many years did you teach?
- b. Where did you complete your undergraduate degree and how were you trained to be a teacher?
- c. What led to you entering the teaching profession? (What led to you exiting the profession? What is your current role?)
- d. Can you describe how you identify your (a) ethnicity/race, (b) gender, (c) socioeconomic status during childhood, (d) hometown, locations of importance, and (e) any other identities you would like to verbalize.

Work and care

1. How would you describe your approach to working with Black children?
2. Are there ways you would describe these approaches as family-oriented or a kinship relation?
3. Do you feel a sense of obligation, risk, or pressure to teach a certain way because of your identity (as a Black woman and person)?
4. Based on your knowledge, is there something that is often misrepresented about the experiences of Black women educators?
5. In what ways, if at all, are you in disagreement with what is expected of you as a Black person and/or woman in terms of your work with Black children?

Freedom and choice

6. Who has inspired, augmented, and/or transformed your awareness of the deficit and stereotypical depictions of Black children?
7. Much of the scholarship on politicized care has emphasized the power of holding students to "high expectations". How do you communicate your expectations and/or standards to the students you work with?

Authority and power

8. What is the role of power (e.g., power differentials, student voice, autonomy) in your

- pedagogy?
9. Would you describe these approaches as residing within the bounds of traditional teaching professionalism?
- 9a. How would you feel about your practices being institutionalized or being integrated in mainstream teacher education?

Research Question	Concepts	Data Collection
How, if at all, do Black women teachers define and use politicized care? a. What features or characteristics of politicized care are most prevalent in their daily practices? b. What are alternative definitions and praxes of “care”?	Politicized Care	Q. 1 Q. 2
	Othermothering, kinship relations	Q. 2 Q. 5
	High expectations	Q. 7
To what degree do Black women teachers conceptualize their teaching practices and positionality as ways of enacting freedom and resisting anti-Blackness?	Black fugitivity	Q. 8 Q. 6
	Knowledge as power, education as an Afrocentric, anti-slavery value	Q. 5 Q. 6
How do Black women teachers reimagine teaching as a tool for building authentic and radical connections with BIPOC students?	Barriers to enacting radicalism	Q. 4 Q. 9
	Healing, liberation	Q. 3 Q. 6

Appendix B

Interview protocol used for pilot study.

Code	Memo
Politicized care	Participants describe showing positive regard, a critical gaze, and/or admiration towards BIPOC students in order to counter educational injustice based in systemic oppression, racial trauma, and/or White supremacy.
Politicized care > Labor act	Participants describe showing politicized care towards students as an obligation, commitment, devotion, and/or an action that is above and beyond the traditional role of a teacher.
Politicized care > Intersectionality	Participants connect their own identity, socialization, past experiences, etc., to how they perceive students' needs and realities. Sometimes described as a gaze or tendency to frame BIPOC children in an optimistic way.
Politicized care > Develop. Appropriate	Participants make adjustments to curriculum, make specific considerations around discipline and learning, and/or name their awareness of inequalities in education as rationale for modifying their professionalism.
Politicized care > Co-construction	Participants enact practices that increase student contribution, voice, input, etc., in a manner that cedes power from traditional adult-student power dynamics.
Politicized care > Intersectionality > Cultural translator	Participants use their critical consciousness to interpret students' (learning) needs and behavior and consider racialized and gendered factors that are susceptible to deficit-lens assumptions or stereotyping.
Kinship relations > unprompted	Participants identify her/themselves as another mother or having a family-like connection with Black students.
Politicized care > High expectations	Participants have a belief or expectation for Black students to succeed, Black students should be provided with rigor, counter to deficit expectations, and/or highly emphasize their role in supporting BIPOC students in success in academics, identity, and other dimensions.
Black fugitivity > Radicalism	Participant has a strong, almost zealous, intention to make BIPOC children feel safe, affirmed, and/or protected to resist spatial manifestations of othering.
Black fugitivity > Ancestral connection	Participants cite family members or generational trends that encouraged them to seek the profession of teaching. Participants have an optimistic gaze towards education because of its beneficial power for their

Black fugitivity > Education as liberation	Participants cite their socialization or upbringing to education as social mobility for Black people as a rationale for why they approach teaching from a politicized, critical manner.
Black fugitivity > Radicalism > Barriers	Participants describe barriers, reluctance, fear, risk, and (un)intended consequences that prevent or discourage them from enacting radical practices. This could be perpetuated from the organizational climate, sociopolitical climate of the district or community, from families, etc.
Black liberation	Participants use language around healing, wellness, holistic nourishment, and/or liberation from educational injustice and anti-Blackness in education.